CHAPTER 2

Imagination: The Generation of Possibility

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Abstract

The arrival of post-qualitative arts methodologies is unsurprisingly a critique of the metanarratives that have reduced the complexity of methodology to the instrumentalism of the methodical. Locating their work in the theoretically innovative post-qualitative, the authors affirm imagination as method. They detail how in the creative moment(s) of making there is not only a positive entanglement of the researchers’ relational constructions of knowing, knowledge, the self, and the world; but also a recognition of moral obligation. Because the content of what is imagined is both within and beyond shared perceptions, imagination as method can be detailed and precise; it can be coherent, informative, convincing, even compelling action, but it is always imaginative – and this is its promise for post-qualitative research. The authors suggest that a politics of the imagination turns away from the source of contention to generate new networks and systems of social relationships: it is not a resistance but a making. As a political imagination, research is the generative poiesis that emerges through and within specific acts of creation and generation. An example of a collaborative poetry writing practice is used to demonstrate imagination as method and to fractal the notions of value-creation, meaning-making, and imaginative play within the Canadian arts education research context.

Imagination: The Generation of Possibility

As the digital media world continues to flood forward, providing us with news feed headlines and sweeping skims of international and earth-changing events, we too are pressed forward in this fast-paced current of life going by. We are unaffected, or presently deeply affected by headlines, yet quickly submerged by our own over-packed, urgent lives. As we scan our news feeds, we are shocked by the international affairs of the world, intrigued and piqued by no-nonsense lists of the latest and greatest top ten foods for losing weight, the seven tips for starting your own business, or the three critical musts to get a second date. In our day-to-day, the social news style of self-making leaves us
advancing progressively, happy dullards moving prosaically forward, incrementally in our practicalities, progress and success maintained through media feeds algorithmically programmed (Cadwalladr, 2017) to our myriad self-quantifications. Whether we are tweeting, pinning, liking, or swiping right, our list-makings and managings are not a singular personal idealism, but a social one where our value as human beings is built through systematic progressions of ephemeral truths.

Similarly, our research and methodological practices can take on this insidious lock-step procedural instrumentalism. Even critical arts integrated research, positioned as it is toward social change, too readily forwards utopian directives (see Hayes & Marino, 2015) and utilitarian visions dependent on others enacting a particular set of actions or values derived from the researchers’ findings. The arrival of post-qualitative arts methodologies is unsurprisingly a critique of both the instrumental and critical; on the one hand, it is a critique of the metanarratives that have reduced the complexity of methodology to the instrumentalism of the methodical, and on the other, it is a critique of the tendency of even critical work toward the re-entrenchment of idealism. We pause here to theorize our play. Having grown this work from within a methodological practice named poetic inquiry (Butler-Kisber, Guiney Yallop, Stewart, & Wiebe, 2015; Sameshima, Fidyk, James, & Leggo, 2017; Wiebe, 2017), we promote a lingering on a side-road, if you will. In so doing, we believe that in the process of assemblage (Barad, 2007), and the creation of the not yet, we “make” love and hope for the world (Sameshima, Maarhuis, & Wiebe, in press).

Context of Terms

An explanation of the term arts integrated research is important to provide context. Art Education and the field of Fine Arts are related but different from arts integration and arts-based research. Art Education is a field made up of art educators who advance art education, develop leaders and advocates for art, communicate the importance of art, and/or expand access to research about art—these are the art teachers in schools. The Fine Arts Department prepares students to follow careers in the arts fields, that is, professional artists.

Arts integration is the practice of using the arts to deepen learning and engagement in other subjects, phenomenon, or curriculum. For example, using role drama to act out a scene from a history book to better understand the emotions in that context, or making a papier mâché sarcophagus to better understand ancient Egyptian culture, customs, and language.
In higher education, arts integration may be a course of study for an education undergraduate or graduate student. While Canada still has art education programs where art teachers are trained to teach art in schools, in the United States, art educators (teachers in schools who solely teach art) are no longer the norm. In these education programs the arts are often not taught as disciplines in and of themselves but may be integrated as a tool to teach the mandated curriculum. Because pre-service education students seldom have enough background, experience or confidence in all four of the arts disciplines (dance, drama, music, and visual arts), the success of integrative arts in future classrooms rests on the teacher-candidates coming to terms with their creative teaching identities and their notions about the power of the arts to teach. Arts integration instruction can address multi-modal *access* (the teacher presenting the material in multiple ways so different learners have access), *engagement* (the students performing various hands-on learning activities), and *representation* (the students can share their understandings of learning in different ways). These considerations in teaching address variations in learner level, skill, and maturity, and they are key to differentiation or individualized learning for all teachers.

We use the term *arts integrated research* to refer to any research which uses the arts in the research process. Such forms include arts-based educational research (ABER) (Barone & Eisner, 2012) or arts-based research (ABR) for researchers not solely in the educational field, arts informed inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2008), a/r/tography (Irwin, 2004), Creative Artistic Practices (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), Creative arts enquiry (Barrett & Bolt, 2007), and others such as ethnodrama (Saldana, 2005), Integrated Inquiry (Andrews, 2008), and Brief Focused Inquiry (Andrews & Nemoy, 2017).

**Imagination as Method**

We locate this creativity research work in the theoretically post-qualitative, affirming imagination as method (Hayes, Sameshima, & Watson, 2015). Imagination is much more than the creative workings of the mind and includes the ways consciousness, self, and world merge and emerge together. Through imagination we are constantly making and remaking ourselves and the world. This is more than simply developing relationships between ourselves and others or between ourselves and the stuff of our experience. Imagination is the creative impulse through which we co-emerge with the world.

Imagination is also not confined to the minds and actions of humans as they transform the world. Imagination is the creative energy of society.
(Castoriadis, 1975). As we think and imagine, we construct a new social. The creative moments of making are not only a positive entanglement of our relational constructions of knowing, knowledge, the self, and the world; but also a recognition of our moral and political obligations as researchers.

When imagination is the method by which our research is conducted we come to the realization that we are not just constructing research projects in which methods are applied and results generated in some discreet academic context. Research is the generation of life worlds that are nothing less than our contemporary and future society. The researcher, the research participants, documents and artifacts, come together to form a system or network of social relationships, that are similar to other kind of system or network of social relationships we might imagine or experience, such as a community, or a social movement. The social relationships constituted through research activities become one more element in the aggregate we call society. Thus, the purpose for research becomes less about how the research forms an understanding of what society or some particular system or network of social relationships looks like at this particular point in time, and becomes more focused on how the research can become part of our imagination.

The Imagination Is Politics through Making

Imagination is the engine of society and its production acquires a distinct political form (Castoriadis, 2002). Political here takes on a connotation that is more about intentional creation and generation rather than participation in political institutions. As Shukaitis (2009) argues, the radical imagination allows for a collective liberty or self-determination to emerge. He argues for imagination, “as a composite of our capacities to affect and be affected by the world, to develop movements toward new forms of autonomous sociality and self-determination” (p. 10).

Through imagination the political acquires an aesthetic dimension that embraces openness and refuses closure. This is achieved through the multiplicity of psychic, social and aesthetic openings: a flow of constant movement and transformation (Kristeva, 2003). Here imagination is a quotidian politics; the everyday revolution that is lived in the moment. In our everyday lived experience the familiar language of resistance, revolt or revolution should be reimagined for a politics of creativity and generation. We are cognizant of how language shapes our conceptions. These words are usually used with the word “against,” so energies are in opposition. A politics of the imagination turns away from the source of contention to generate new networks and systems of
social relationships: it is not a resistance but a making. As a political imagination, research is the generative poiesis that emerges through and within specific acts of creation and generation.

**Post-Qualitative Ontologies**

Ontologies, not surprisingly, offer ontological orientation. Ontologies set out how knowledge is framed and organized. A person’s ontology, might, for example, set boundaries of inclusion for what is important, lead a researcher to some questions over others, and establish parameters by which understanding will primarily be negotiated. In the larger world of research, there is always an invitation to the reader to reframe, but the initial framing does tend to hold a great deal of sway in how to think about and address a problem. For these reasons, researchers ought to be able to narrate the theoretical underpinnings of their study, its inception, its context, its significance to society, and its relationship to the field at large. Further, researchers ought to be able to narrate their own history of research, how they have positioned themselves and how they have located themselves in place and time. This would include the relationship of the current project to others they have undertaken, with emphasis on the history of the arrival of the research question. We might summarize all of this as the work of situating one’s context, questions, and theories in the history of the longer project of being a researcher. It is ontological work and this kind of work is a mainstay in qualitative theory.

However, and likely owing to a quantitative stronghold surrounding research that informs policy, traditional qualitative methods (such as the 1980s work of Lincoln and Guba) have attempted to adopt and implement quantitative processes to create trustworthy findings in qualitative projects. The ontological mismatch has given rise to post-qualitative methodologies, those that attempt to take seriously post-structural critiques of binary and/or dialectical relationships, seeking to “work the ruins” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000) of critical concepts such as language, self/other, time, and place, illustrating that post-structural theories are incommensurable with modernist forms of data generation. Consider the following descriptions: My *self* is partial, fragmented, and in process. My *language* is slippery, hybrid, and layered. My *place* calls out to me that I might seek its mysteries with all the promise of greater knowledge, not just of myself but of others.

St. Pierre (1997) describes post qualitative methods as the employment of methods that “use post theories” to critique and/or to deconstruct in order to make data *unintelligible* (p. 175, emphasis added). The intent is to “produce
different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175). In this sense, post-qualitative methods are well-positioned historically as a coming after and an important problematizing of part/whole or self/society or subjective/objective dialectics.

The notion of assemblage has been a generative metaphor for post-qualitative methods. It has helped qualitative researchers move from dialectical theorizing to consider the “assemblage of heterogeneous components” (Lee & Denshire, 2013, p. 222). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the idea of assemblage of thoughts while Barad (2007) speaks of entanglements and O’Sullivan (2006) uses the term encounterings. The “emergence of the new” (MacLure, 2013, p. 659) is built on a base foundation that is not sequential unidirectional constructivism but multi-level, multi-planed, dimensional, and contingent on place, time, and histories.

As a phenomenon is studied, a foundational premise we support is that there are always multiple truths that span time horizontally and vertically. So, for example, while we acknowledge parallactic perspectives in the current present – the notion that one cannot see more than one can see and that each person is seeing the same phenomenon or event differently at the same moment – we also note that the truth of an event changes over time. Greene (2006) urges:

There must be an ability to anticipate and accept incompleteness. Even when a controversy appears to be resolved, gaps and spaces remain, and the need for open questions. And where there is a space, a gap, there is the possibility of new choices, renewed reflection. (p. 1)

As post-structuralist theorists have forwarded, the reproduction of education, culture, and society is an automatic process, and “dominator culture” (hooks, 2003, p. 197) encourages sameness and safety. Because education, culture, and society are reproduced in systematic processes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cohen, 2000; Levinson, 2000) where safety and herd behaviours perpetuate the “dominator culture” (hooks, 2003, p. 197), Camus (1956) suggests that one must focus on the details of living and engage with the present as it is, not as hoped for. He offers that “engagement with the world within a situated perspective is key” (p. 58). In a post qualitative understanding, political movement is fundamentally exercised through acts of creation that turn away from the externally imposed dominant ordering and give voice to the social and psychic threads of meaning. In the following section, Wiebe and Sameshima, writing in first person, share their collaborative poetry writing practice as an example to fractal the notion of value-creation, meaning-making, and imaginative play.
“You Look into Sky” Example

Poem: Sean Wiebe & Pauline Sameshima
Artwork: Andrew Baldwin
Etching with wet ground, hard ground, sandpaper aquatint, spit bite, and coffee lift.
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You Look into Sky
You look into sky,
white with stormy purple,
ready to name the alphabet,
alpha through omega, face
and body at the height of longing,
stranded, save the want,
the merely soundless sound
of echo, hold, echo,
inhalation and exultation.
You look into sea,
into the wild mouth mystery
the last leviathan baying,
a low whine ascending
to meet your fears, your courage,
shoulder to shoulder
tête-à-tête
echo, hold, echo
inhalation and exultation.
When you left
home was sunburnt
every fallen petal swept up
in devotion, a dictionary
of black and white, dictums,
like don’t be sweet
lest you be eaten up;
better to sharpen your teeth
than brush them.
I didn’t think you’d be back,
your freedom held tightly
by guy wires, as if letting go
of faith, of land, of love had a history
that needs holding in place.
While you were gone,
I deciphered the runes you left
on the rocks and on me,
sang them into the dark dawn
waning moon and waves, beckoning –
Now you look into me
echo, hold, echo,
inhalation and exultation
breathe in smoke, whiskey
consonants and vowels taking shape
like ghosts remembering their hosts,
bodies they once knew.

**Ekphrastic Poetry**

Sean Wiebe and Pauline Sameshima worked with curators Jennifer Robins and Bill Zuk in writing poetry to a collection of prints exhibited as “Diversity Innovation – International Printmaking: Artistic Vision, Poetic Voice.” The prints and the poetry are exhibited together and provide a pedagogical invitation to incurve viewer perspectives. The poetry does not speak a truth of the artwork. It is simply through placement, as if in a gallery, when in juxtaposition a new truth may be upheld (Sameshima & Vandermause, 2008). Through this juxtaposition, the poem may “‘trouble’ and open out our usual ways of seeing and attending” (Speedy, 2017, p. 1).

Ekphrastic writing involves responding to an artwork through poetry or in other places, used as a translatory mimetic method across media. For example, in Sameshima’s research projects, research data such as interview transcripts, may be translated to poetry, fiction, textile creations, music, or more. The translative process offers researchers new ways to think about the original data (see Sameshima & Vandermause, 2008; Stock, Sameshima, & Slingerland, 2016). In the co-creation of the poems, evidence for the nature of play abounds. In this discussion of the play process, we prioritize the ephemerality of sandbox play, the sign, passage, and eros.

**Writing Processes**

Co-writing poetry can be a risky adventure. Perhaps finding a partner who is just as playful is a kind of prerequisite. For us, attempting to work in the liminal is
made possible through our relationship of mutual respect and trust. It requires confidence and courage to delete a whole stanza written by someone else. We use google docs to write our poems together. While the program allows authors to jointly create synchronously, we tend to work asynchronously, going back and forth or simply working on poem(s) when we each have time. The program offers a suggesting mode and comment section so we can converse with one another in the margins. Since the program saves various versions of work, it is possible to go back to previous copies.

We might use comments to explain some of our major changes, but usually we just add or delete in a spirit of play without thinking about permanence. For us, there is a deep effort to enjoy and experiment with words, a genuine love of wordplay. We liken the process to playing in a sandbox – a metaphor that carries our appreciation of impermanence and ephemerality – which is to play, without the mission to generate a particular outcome. In the sandbox we play off of what is currently in front of us. Without a timeline, we play with the sign and the signifier until we feel a sense of alignment – the play creates a new ordering.

**Sandbox Playing**

The collaborative playbuilding ephemerality of construction is key in our imaginative processes. The slippage between the signifier and the signified offers the possibilities for multiple interpretations not only between us as we’re writing, but even more so for the reader.

Play is conducted in a liminal space constructed through the constant negotiation between the supposed certainty of the real and the ambiguity of the imagination ... In a method of the imaginary, play moves to the foreground in all activities related to the generation and organization of signs. With the sign no longer anchored directly to the signified, an imaginative reworking and re-articulation of signs is encouraged. (Hayes, Sameshima, & Watson, 2015, p. 41)

Similar to the land art of Andy Goldsworthy who creates site-specific artworks using materials found in the place in which the artwork is created and against the perils of wind and rain, there is a focus of love on the making. For us, creation is for the pure joy of wordplay and value creation (Makiguchi, 2002) is simply in its engagement. The value of the work is itself, not what it does. To further explain, contemporary engagements are predominantly based on
economic outcomes, particularly in education (Wiebe, 2016). For example, participation in mindfulness training in schools has the purpose of improving academic standing. It improves attention (Miyakawa & Sameshima, 2017); for example, by writing an article or building a curriculum vitae for career advancement. In ephemeral play, the objective is to simply play – there is an attempt to direct energy toward a pure motivation of building, shaping, and refining.

**Imagining Passages**

To think of imagination, one might think of liminal studio space. Liminality is often described as an edge. Badiou’s (1988) work contends that innovation occurs when an “event,” a break from the status quo, unbounded by time but specific to place (on the edge of what is considered “void”), elicits an individual’s conviction to develop a truth that is born out of the eventual site. This commitment to new truths are ephemeral as they are distinguished through an intensity of differences (Daignault, 1992; DeLanda, 2006; Deleuze, 1995). While we conceive of our poem writing as if it were taking place on unstable ground, we do not think of ourselves standing on the edge of a cliff stepping into ungrounded space. Because of our familiar working relationship and our prior experience in poetry and writing, the liminal is not considered precarious, only unfixed.

As we play in our writing, we are not attempting to merge our ideas or thoughts. As described above in Camus’ (1942) philosophy of the absurd whereby the ability to hold contradiction simultaneously is pivotal, we engage in the assiduous labour of remaining open to new direction or movement. One might liken the composition/poem-making, the art-as-event (Pinar, 2010, p. 2), to “the construction of the Confucian self and the various foci that define its world” (Ames, 1996, p. 223). This author further states:

> This Chinese sense of order in the focal area [poem-making] values the richness of diversity and difference by absorbing into itself all that is around, merging and changing the focus. Instead of defining the center as already whole and closed, the ‘movement from disunity to unity is better expressed in the language of incorporation and accommodation than in terms of suppression and exclusion’. (p. 223)

It is important to note here that incorporation does not mean assimilation. Difference continues to be acknowledged as the [poet] seeks to walk between disparity (Sameshima & Irwin, 2008).
We pause to explain Daignault’s (1983) work on understanding curriculum/currere as passage. Daignault believes thinking is itself the construction of passage. As we construct the poem, we construct a passage or storying. We suggest that thinking and imagining is thus self-creation, and in collaboration, it becomes social as it changes both the poem and the authors. The work is not a perpendicular traverse from the known land to a newfound-land; rather, it is a journey of passages (see Daigault, 1983; Sameshima & Irwin, 2008) – we are attempting to traverse both vertically, horizontally, and rhizomatically. Constructing this perspective creates an invitation to participation for the reader. Sameshima and Irwin (2008) explain that “the liminal itself is eliminated in the process of growth and becomes the evidenced curriculum. Hence, the liminal, once encountered, is curriculum” (p. 2). By this, they mean that as thought is imagined, recorded, and materialized in the poem, the self is “re-assembled” in a new understanding – the encounter has laid new ground to stand on. The reconstruction is thus past and the past is historical ground.

Perpendicular crossing toward the other poet, bridging, or assimilation conflates possibilities to play. The strength of a myriad individual agentic passages creates a network of ground much the way Hawken’s (2007) Blessed unrest describes how millions of people have organized new social and political arrangements that serve the values that surround overlapping movements for ecological sustainability, social justice, civil rights and peace. A social network of experiences develops “ground” for others to explore from and, as described in the politics of imagination, generates new networks and systems of social relationship.

Eros

While valuing a diversity of perspectives has been predominant in curriculum and cultural studies approaches to education for nearly three decades (Hytten, 2011), the tendency has been the attempt to merge multiplicity toward a oneness – a leaning and herding toward the dominant. Here we stress the necessity of maintaining difference to imagine something new and other. There must be an attempt to distinguish intensities of difference in order for movement and sparring to take place.

This type of work requires a particular relational ethic amongst the writers. For us, it’s respect, admiration, patience, intrigue, and sustained interest. There is an investment in trying to understand the other. We are seeking the purposeful construction of counterpoints of independent yet interrelated relations,
playing intentionally within and outside the other’s centres and margins (See Sameshima & Greenwood, 2015).

“Eros creates and performs a playful space that is charged, erotic in its possibilities for awareness in its liminality and being on the edge” (Sameshima & Leggo, 2010, p. 78). The edge here is used to refer to the self’s margins – the places where we wander with wonder-fueled energy. Writing poetry is often coupled with eros because of the mythic connection to creativity. In writing poetry together, we experience an intertextual and intrapersonal space that invites transversive and transgressive thinking. We experience how journeying the boundaries of authorship and form not only have the potential to invigorate conversations around the slip and play of meanings, but also have a way of strengthening the poetry form itself.

Learning the Self to Change the World

Research that creates change has been named transformative research and to date, has tangentially been directed by rubrics and checklists aimed at evaluating strong research within specific methodological practices. For example, in the Educational Researcher, a prominent journal in the field of Education, Hughes, Pennington, and Makris’ (2012) rubric provides important correlative research on how auto-ethnographic scholarship aligns with the American Educational Research Association’s empirical research standards (see p. 216). While this rubric and others present indispensable checklists and tenets for “good” creative research (also see Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cole & Knowles, 2008; Kilbourn, 1999; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Sameshima, 2007), these guiding frames are not directly intended to provide indicators of transformative work. These guides offer pedagogical instruction. Moreover, research rigour in creative works is based on qualities such as complexity, ambiguity, provocation, and emotional challenge (Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001) whereby, a generic rubric cannot be applied. This said, what is the point of playing if not to make forward progress, complete a product, or earn an accolade? The point is to grow ourselves wide, as humans.

Wiebe (2016) describes how the pressures of the social imaginary’s “idealism creates projections and expectations that limit the range of possible human activity” (p. 536). He explains how the focus of realizing objectives instrumentally “marginalizes any activity that is not a function of attaining it, reducing the experience of life to an instrumental do-this-to-achieve-that. Idealism diminishes the value of the present” (p. 536). On the other hand, Denzin (2002) describes symbolic interaction as the process of self-construction and
reconstruction through writing – through “conversations with myself and with memories from my past” in order to dialogue with self toward a “meaningful reality” (p. 255). We seek the personal “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 76). To “not only learn a subject, but to become a subject” (den Heyer, 2015, p. 8), we consider “making” and playing within aesthetic experiences a means of “emancipatory re-aggregation” (Pinar, 2010, p. 3; see also Wiebe, 2014), a way to learn the self in a new way.

Imaging a New Future

Baudrillard (2009) describes “precession of simulacra” as the socially constructed representations that have replaced original meanings and which precede reality (or actual experience) for us. He explains that the hyperreal, the difference between the real and its reference, in many areas of our lives, has no difference. We “see” our Facebook friends more than our neighbours. How might we unhinge ourselves? We understand that:

the struggle arises from the fact that human subjects will construct the possibility of the future based on the empirical reality they see, and this limits them. What they cannot imagine is not just impossible, but outside the limits of their awareness. (Wiebe, 2016, p. 544)

In order to imagine, one needs to play, linger within an ideal that values lying around, thinking, and tinkering. Self-transformation springs from the heart, approaching change as an invitation, uncertainty and ambiguity as pleasure, and the social and historical contingent.

The imaginative is tentative and permissive, importantly permitting one to see the world from multiple points of view. Presuming that the only change is self-change, self-transformation – then the aim of making poetry, writing, or research is not to achieve an outcome or produce a finding, for these become fixed and ahistorical, barely (if at all) masking a personal will to power in a desire to have influence, such that others might take up one’s findings, implement them, and offer a reward of academic citation.

Situated, authentic embodied response to the world is existential rebellion. In the present moment of generative poiesis, that “experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally fuses with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form a unified flow of experience"
(Gadamer, 1989, p. 245). It is an educational practice that puts form to Freire’s (1993) “revolutionary futurity” (p. 72) in which we become beings that transcend our(selves). Imagination as method encourages play for the purpose of imagining, creating, generating the world we are about to inhabit. We eagerly support an everyday rebellion of the social moment and promote Gadamer’s truth – “The only way to grasp life is ... to become inwardly aware of it” (p. 253) – by way of aesthetic imaginaries in order to reconstitute the self and thus the world. “History may perhaps have an end; but our task is not to terminate it but to create it, in the image of what we henceforth know to be true” (Camus, 1956, p. 276).

References


