Possibilities and the Unintended and Unanticipated Post Qualitative Researcher

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Abstract:

Inspired by Toni Morrison's Sula (2004), this paper thinks through the use (broadly imagined) of literary texts that are experimentally read beside and through theoretical texts in order to prompt unexpected thinking. This approach places literature beside traditional research texts, rather than subordinate to such texts. The thinking and doing that occurs in relation to the tangle of texts, literary and otherwise, is already happening, even though often unrecognized. Differently attending to the jumble created by the multitude of texts that make up our reading lives might snag us in ways that open paths to new ways of thinking, resulting in novel approaches, or tangles of approaches, to post qualitative research. While literary texts are what is of interest here, the argument might extend to film, art, and other cultural texts not usually imagined as directly related to post qualitative inquiry.

Key words: reading as inquiry, literature, post qualitative research, curation, research boundaries

After a very good education in particular kinds of philosophy and particular kinds of research methodology, I had achieved the kind of education that is required to claim scholarship. This did not ever feel sufficient as I undertook a study about race and racism, even after taking as many classes as I could over a decade of a very good education. I wondered why I still did not yet know anything. I return to literature (and film, art, poetry, and music) to re-engage those topics that felt compelling but also distant from my capacity as an emerging researcher and my very good education. This distance is always in relation to the institution that serves to recognize both scholarship and research. This contradictory space of rejecting and requiring recognition has necessitated a stretching of myself across cultural texts to undo some of my very good education and find new ways of thinking, doing, and becoming researcher that did not feel like a betrayal to my embodied knowledge, experience, and travels across and through cultures that sustain and teach me.

We have clear lines to follow from theory to research, a path well worn. As an emerging researcher, the worn path makes the most sense. It is the safest. There are less-clear-lines to follow from art and literature. Even though I am sure that art and literature are often also at work, we are just not used to attempting to make that more visible, particularly in education research. In my own imagining of post qualitative research, art and literature are some of the most affecting. Literature, read and thought along

with challenging theoretical texts, causes both to become ensnared in each other, both in the body of the emerging researcher and the bodies that make up the field in such a way that they become more visible. After reading theory, the relevance of oftentimes disorienting ideas and the implications of such ideas happens through literary texts, arts, a song, or a film. Viscous and layered cultural texts, like Toni Morrison's (2004) *Sula* and others, take up weighty concerns that allow space for theory to work through, making a web or collage of ideas that cannot help but influence the researcher in unexpected ways. I want to be a pig at the trough of knowledge, eating and snorting my way through it all, but I want to be able to begin to name that feast.

At this feast, there is theory and there is not theory. What counts as theory is often a reflection of power of the one theorizing (hooks, 1994). While Deleuze and Guattari's work is broadly understood as theory, the work of Toni Morrison is literary art. But, not simply art. The characterization of Morrison's work as simply art encourages researchers, particularly new and hesitant researchers, to overlook her work in relation to research. But reading theory and art alongside each other flattens the distinction between the two toward imagining the broader potential of both—in relation—for post qualitative research work. Toni Morrison engages the reader in a kind of race thinking that challenges the separation of race, gender, and sexuality. This disrupts binaries between time and space, life and death; it also makes space for us to question subjectivity, experience, representation, and memory. All of these things are relevant to the questions that we ask when we want our inquiry projects to be coherent with justice and revolution.

Bodies and Research Assemblages

There has been much discussion and anxiety regarding diversity and the consequences of diversity in our educational institutions. This shift in demographics creates a problem for those who have made careers (intentionally or otherwise) and produced knowledge on the absence of some in favor of others. It is in this context that newcomers to the academy are produced and reproduced as a problem (Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004). This same anxiety can be observed in our in K-12 schools, undergraduate colleges, and universities—as demographics shift and change, some parents wonder if the quality of the institution can withstand the influx of bodies differently positioned on socially and academic hierarchies and/or bodies that relate differently to the arbitrary norms of educational institutions. These concerns tend to be much better coded in our institutions of higher education, but the effect is much the same. Exclusion and hierarchies continue to be the orienting logic of the academy (Dillard, 2000; Hill-Collins, 1990; hooks, 1994) and act on bodies as they enter and exit academic spaces. While many thinkers have taken these topics up toward much broader and complex understandings of the effect of these norms, here, I am interested in the effect on becoming researcher and how tightly held truths that make up the academy serve to limit what kinds of knowledge is possible and undermines the relevance and potential of education research. On one hand, diversity and multiculturalism is seemingly a taken-for-granted good. Yet, our institutions do not reflect the diversity of thoughts and requires tokens to perform competence in ways that reproduce the same (Massumi, 1992). It is from this place that I am drawn to the potential in post qualitative research, in my somewhat naïve exploration of openings to become differently as an emerging researcher in an entanglement of theory, cultural texts, histories, and embodied trajectories toward doing research and becoming researcher.

This paper hopes to linger on how post qualitative research simultaneously constrains, while also allowing for particular kinds of researcher subjectivity in racialized bodies. I want to think about this piece in terms of confessions, whereby I make *more* visible the difficulty of thinking and doing post qualitative research in a cultural moment that yields to simplicity, certainty, and that which is recognizable, particularly in relation to work that centers issues of race and racism. The urgency of racial

understanding and different practices in schooling and education is in tension with my inclinations toward post qualitative theories and research. Post qualitative research inclines me toward less direct routes, entanglements, and assemblages—toward experimentation and exploration. I am interested in how this kind of research happens in relation to racialized bodies, unarticulated experience, oppressive forces, racialized knowing, and becomings. This kind of research can be simultaneously constraining and expanding, as figuring out how to do research while doing it might produce another kind of research. While this is true for all emergent researchers, histories of domination, oppression, and exclusion from the norms of scholarship can further complicate what becomes possible. Drawing on Scheurich & Young's (1997) concept of "coloring epistemologies," Lather considers the use of 'paradigm mapping' as it "can help us recognize both our longing for and a wariness of an ontological and epistemological home" (2006, p. 40). For those who are new to the institution, this longing makes it hard to simultaneously be at home and make a home in this new place that has been historically hostile to ones' body. I tentatively argue that this absence of at-home-ness makes possible productive and relevant difference in terms of thinking and doing research.

In this paper, I hope to reflect and consider how becoming a post qualitative researcher means immersing myself in the incongruence, in-betweenness, of becoming researcher in this particular body. I am also interested in the simultaneous confusion and tension of accounting for both embodied experience and knowledge, while also finding ways to experiment and explore in resistance to the constructions that have done harm. Using Toni Morrison's (2004) *Sula* as evidence and inspiration*,* I consider what becomes possible by writing in a way that anticipates Blackness. Here, I want to emphasize that *Sula* is a text among many that provides an example of what else is possible if we look beyond established hierarchies of knowledge and loosen our grip on the tightly held truths of research and knowledge. Morrison's novels are revolutionary in a literary context that does not anticipate Black readers, thinkers, and knowers. By thinking through the work of Toni Morrison and others who anticipate different audiences, we might imagine how to anticipate those bodies that are not often imagined or anticipated in scholarship, even as they are written about in journals that may never publish their papers and discussed on panels on which they will never be invited.

The tension in my argument is that I do not succeed in this paper in doing the very thing that I hope to do. In my own work I struggle to write in such a way that imagines a reader and knower beyond those thinkers and knowers already privileged by academic intuitions. But I am hopeful I will learn. It is important to draw inspiration from the spaces of knowing outside of academic institutions, not to supplement or reinforce that which is found in our stuck institutions, but instead, to remember what becomes possible in research if we are able to shrug off that which is imposed and enforced by a tradition that never had so many of us in mind. I wonder what becomes possible in staying with this awkwardness of being both here and not here at all. Defiantly straddling texts, ontologies, and epistemologies that seem as though they do not have much to do with one another might propel us toward a productive confusion.

This paper is a reflection on the process of becoming post qualitative researcher—in the context of race and racism, stuck by doubt, confusion, and fear—to reconsider how these moments can encourage encounters that allow for movement. I have been compelled by post human theories and have become influenced by such work because I appreciate the troubling of tidy binaries (Lather, 2006) and the emphasis on experimentation, invention, and the possibility of different ways of thinking and doing research (Childers, Daza, & Rhee, 2015; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013), rather than fitting into the borders that have been already been defined. This approach to research feels particularly important in research inquiry projects that hope to imagine a radically different future, one that is broadly less brutal and cruel. It also seems important to draw from texts that fall outside of post humanism and read in such a way that does not undermine the complexity, depth, and potential of such

texts (both academic and otherwise) that offer important ideas, provocations, and challenges to our research endeavors.

I am attempting to draw together the fragments of the influences, encounters, and provocations of both theory (foundational and anti-foundational) and literature. I think about these disparate texts alongside each other to help me to consider not only the fluidity of race and gender, but also subjectivity, assemblages, becomings, and memory. This rethinking shifts the research assemblage and guides me toward *better* attempts to do post qualitative research concerned with race, racism, teacher education, and race pedagogy. I also must confess that I am still stuck, even as there is some hesitant and shy movement. While I do not wish to offer a conclusion, instead I suggest that a serious consideration of literary texts in relation to research is helpful, particularly toward thinking and doing research that anticipates peoples previously and broadly unanticipated.

In St. Pierre's (2011) description of all that makes up research, I imagine a cacophony of ideas swirling as we thinking about our topics with all we can muster—with words from theorists, participants, conference audiences, friends and lovers, ghosts who haunt our studies, characters in fiction and film and dreams—and with our bodies and all the other bodies and the earth and all the things and objects in our lives—the entire assemblage that is a life thinking and, and, and… All those data are set to work in our thinking, and we think, and we work our way somewhere in the thinking (p. 622).

I linger and worry about "words from theorists" and "characters in fiction" as those things relate to bodies, particular bodies and lives that think about how to move forward in order to do work. My response to this confusion has been to "think with theory" (hooks, 1994; Jackson & Mazzei, 2011) not only about the research, but also "the entire assemblage that is a life thinking and, and, and…" (St. Pierre, 2011). I cobble together and create enough sense and coherence to move forward in a process that remains constrained by tradition and hierarchies of knowledge, but also my emerging researcher-subjectivity. This constraint is doubled (and re-doubled) by the simultaneity of being both unintended and unimagined.

Reading for Revolution, Resistance and a Re-Imagining

Over the past year, online syllabi[1] made up of collectively curated texts have circulated in response to a variety of events in the U.S.—the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the choking of Eric Garner, the shooting of Mike Brown—and also the far-reaching audio and visual success of Beyoncé's album, *Lemonade*. More recently, there has been a syllabus in response to the election of Donald Trump. As a person who must write syllabi frequently, I am quite certain that none of these would pass as syllabi, as they are essentially just reading lists. Not *just* reading lists, as many things are entangled in these reading lists, but reading lists for the person who wants to think deeper about the socio-political events and socio-cultural happenings. These syllabi are often not attributed to an author but are a "collective enunciation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975)— a document that is fluid (sometimes they are Google documents that can be edited by whomever has a link) and a simultaneous engagement with past, present, and future

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[1] These hashtag syllabi are often crowd sourced digital documents that include contributions from academics, artists, and activists. These documents act as a guide to contextualize current events and encourage deeper engagement of topics that do not find widespread engagement from traditional schooling spaces or dominant discourse spaces. These lists often include texts written by people who have not achieved the status of expert and/or do not have access to the structures that determine one's status as an authority. They are usually named for the particular event or topic that they focus on—#ericgarner, #sandrabland, #aseatatthetable.

mediated through texts. Sometimes there are videos, but mostly they are texts, often informational but also literary.

These syllabi are created but become in relation to the current time and act as a digital artifact and conduit of knowledge meant to affect anxious bodies in a revolutionary movement.
This assemblage of texts, bodies, time and space are in response to the increasingly capitalistic, disciplined, and controlled nature of formal educational networks that create, maintain, and monitor hard lines between disciplines and hard lines between knowers—further stratified by race, class, gender, and sexuality. These #syllabi become maps leading outside of those highly regulated spaces toward a "revolutionary force" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975) entangled in a revolutionary reading. This reading is revolutionary because it makes another world possible in that it disrupts what counts as knowledge and who counts as knowers. Further, it re-imagines who is worthy of being imagined as an intended audience. Depending on the syllabus, readers are asked to engage in ideas that are not part of the common sense of education, disrupting the hierarchy that always puts the knowledge (experiences, bodies, perspectives, and cultures) of marginalized people at the bottom (Hill-Collins, 2000). The kind of education that is effectuated by many of the hashtag syllabi makes marginalized texts central. By making these texts central, dominant notions of expertise and knowledge are undermined by highlighting the insufficiency of such an education. What most counts as knowledge gives us little guidance in understanding the complexity of the world and the many people that inhabit that world. What might a hashtag syllabus for educational research look like?

Post Qualitative Research and the Safety of Boundaries

"There are often multiple levels of vulnerability in the research endeavor" (Dillard, 2000, p. 674).

When I speak to people about my dissertation work, they are confused. This might be because I am often confused about what it is I am doing and *not* doing. Even so, there are approvals that must be gained in order to move forward.[2] The people with the power to say, "no" or "not good enough" wonder if the project will come together, but I know it will, because it always does.[3] Still, I worry if I need more boundaries and limitations. I appreciate the freedom, but does too much freedom disallow progress? For guidance, I worry anxiously over all of the normal things—books, articles, and conversations with those who are more experienced. But I also do many other things. I listen to Kendrick Lamar artfully engage the space of contradictions inherent in a life. I watch YouTube videos of old interviews where Toni Morrison provides the secrets to the world. I also hear Solange tell a Portland audience that she struggled to finish her album, saying that during the process, she got lost and had to find her way back. I wonder how this might be useful and relevant information, how I can take wisdom from the "research" that others are engaged in, even as what they are doing is not thought of as research. Artists and writers do not shy away from the slip ups, mistakes, and lost places. Rather they engage those spaces as central to the completion of the thing, even as it is never completed. The process that artists go through to move forward in spite of uncertainty, doubt, confusion, and fear are where I draw much of my inspiration to continue. These are the successful artists and writers who have navigated boundaries and creative potential in order to offer up something that is a tiny bit of such efforts.

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[2] I am using the term "moving forward" because progress is required to continue to participate. Progress is what is always expected and enforced. Reading, thinking, seeking, and following one's curiosity about the world must always end in a product in late-capitalism.

While I am arguing for resisting boundaries, those boundaries do exist. There are the boundaries of time, approval from committees and Institutional Review Boards, word count and page limits, deadlines, the constraints of (academic) language, and the physical limitations—the need to eat, sleep, and stretch—that impact the inquiry work that can be done. Some of these boundaries are not a choice; much of the work of research seems to be marking boundaries for yourself, given that all that makes up a life can connect to inquiry projects.

My work is at the multiplying intersections of gender, race, pedagogy, digital/visual culture, art, sexuality, and teacher education. And everything in life relates to these topics, so how I articulate my research is fluid. Like an expanding and contracting rubber band, that list grows and shrinks as I get deeper into the work. In short, my dissertation project is on race knowledge (broadly imagined) and teacher education. Because race knowledge is so broad a topic and because race and racism is as much a part of my personal and professional life, there are endless sources of insight and perspective. There is always potential to think and rethink what it is I think I am doing and why, and to what effect or end. Over the course of this project, I have thought and thought myself into circles. These ever-expanding circles form around an emerging researcher struggling to move forward in any way. At the same time, this feels "right" in that it resonates and adds some momentary coherence to what feels familiar: overlapping circles of thought are necessarily disrupted and interrupted by the requirement to *do* something. We might spin and become increasingly tolerant of the dizziness, then stop, momentarily, and only when we must *do* something. This something could be as small as answering a question at an awkward dinner party where only wine is served or something more substantial, such as the need to present a paper, publish something, give a talk, or meet some requirement of beginning and completing a dissertation. I am aware that if I could take 10 more years to do that thinking and then do the research, I likely would. Even though I experience deadlines and graduation requirements as oppressive, in some way I understand that they are currently a necessary component of the process of becoming researcher.

Collecting Clues: Curation as a Momentary Method in Order to Progress

In *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets to the Universe* (Saenz, 2012), a young adult book about queer love between two Mexican American boys, a teenage boy named Ari wonders about his father, who is kind but distant. Ari wants to collect all the clues he can to know a bit more about his father and feel closer to him. Even as Ari wants this very badly, he knows that he will never know everything about his father. Yet, Ari does not want to know everything. Instead, he wants to know enough to be closer to his father, but also to know something more about himself. He senses that all of the things he hates in his father are the very things he hates in himself. In his dreams, he is always searching for father; this is a recurring theme that echoes the feelings in his waking life. In this story about two adolescent boys falling in love, desiring what they did not know could possibly be had, I think about research. The kind of research I am undertaking on shifting (or maybe, exploding) ground as a hesitant and fearful researcher: collecting clues about a topic that I do not know the depths of, nor could ever know, but must necessarily curate texts, writing, and images in order to do something and say something about the topic. This is a kind of method by curation, but the curation is always changing and shifting. New texts replace older ones or are viewed differently; it is a momentary method. What remains stable is the need to continue to collect, to hoard, and then to worry over that hoard (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014).

From a different, but definitely related, view, Holbrook and Pourchier (2014) discuss how they do data analysis. They write: "We explore how our art-making—visual and written—and the questions we pursue interact and impinge on each other, and how their interplay becomes our thinking" (2014, p. 754).

Holbrook and Pourchier think about their research in terms of "multiple selves" that are "in constant relation and mutation" (p. 755). For me, accounting for multiple selves feels like much of the work, but I am not yet certain.

Taking St. Pierre and Holbrook and Pourchier together, I am interested in thinking through my own inclinations, confusion, and practices of post qualitative research. This is an attempt to account for the fragments that make up post qualitative inquiry "in constant relation and mutation" (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014, p. 755). That make up subjectivity, embodiment, thinking, writing, and the ever shifting field of "words from theorists, participants, conference audiences, friends and lovers, ghosts who haunt our studies, characters in fiction and film and dreams—and with our bodies and all the other bodies and the earth and all the things and objects in our lives" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 622). This attempt opens up the boundaries of research and clears an always expanding path for unanticipated insight and knowing, while trying to name more of the things that become part of our research practices, even as they often go unnamed and unacknowledged.

This education (made up of lives, texts, songs, conversations, and...and...and...) has always been a kind of collecting of clues. In my first years of graduate school, I wondered if my incredulity, confusion, and fear were just an indicator of my own unsuitability to be included. With no other clear path, I persisted and after many years have come to realize that incredulity, confusion, and fear are fine for a beginning. When I began teaching undergraduates about race, my own fear, panic, and anxiety guided me to collect as many clues about race as I could—this thing that was present, contradictory, fluid, fragile, and unstable.

Reading As Inquiry

In their discussion of minor literatures, Deleuze and Guattari (1975) explore how particular kinds of literary texts make for other kinds of becomings and futures in relation to revolution. In their view, "a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of that language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (p. 16). One of the key characteristics of a minor literature is "everything in them is political" (p. 17). Morrison (1992) says that she is interested in identifying "those moments when American literature was complicit in the fabrication of racism, but equally important…when literature exploded and undermined it" (p. 16). Morrison speaks of something that has relevance for our imagining of post qualitative research. Reading *Sula* at this time and place, as I am becoming researcher, feels worth substantial consideration. This is not a text that is on research bibliographies, but it has "exploded" the boundaries that serve to make race, subjectivity, space, and time static entities which then constrains how we are able to approach these matters in inquiry projects.

Reading as a key part of academic inquiry is taken-for-granted. Literature reviews are taught and practiced, even if their purpose or how to do one is not always sufficiently explained. What is clear is that literature reviews are not in reference to the kind of literature I read to earn a degree in English literature. Literature reviews are made up of scholarly texts that are scholarly because they have achieved this status through a closed system that legitimates itself. It is somewhat unusual in education research to discuss literary texts because such texts are for scholarship in the humanities. While it is not verboten, in order to be intelligible we have to research in ways that are recognizable. This constrains and discourages any boundary straddling, jumping, or crossing, even as navigating boundaries is always happening. We just do not often name it.

In order to respond to the neoliberal demands of an emerging academic life and produce something, I am told by those with more experience to "stop reading and just write." They have said that I am using

reading as a way to get out of the writing that will get me to finish. I would love to linger on this as a site for inquiry about the "hidden curriculum" (Apple, 2004) of such advice that has become common sense, but I will not. Instead, I will wonder what reading literary texts *does* for thinking and doing post qualitative research. To think about this question, I will focus on the kind of reading that we often do not think of when we are engaged in some stage of doing post qualitative educational research—literature, film, art, and digital media. While my research interests are about race, teachers, and teacher education, I might be making too broad a claim in suggesting that this approach to research would benefit all equally. In my case, the way forward has come from allowing myself to explore texts that are positioned lower on hierarchies of knowledge and/or completely absent.

There is a productive use of reading literary texts, in this case poetry and literature. I engage these practices for pleasure, yes, but I am always looking for clues. This searching happens right alongside (and sometimes, in tension with) the practices that are recognized as doing qualitative research. For me, the opaqueness of academic work (constructed and enforced) is made seeable by the insight of art, literature, film, and music. While clarity is not necessarily desired, shadows and shapes emerge when research comes in contact with art.

As I am thinking and writing about what I am going to do, I read a novel to rest my anxious mind and give myself a break without feeling guilty. The novel references a poem that I look up, a painting, or a song that I have never heard. Taken together, these things already embed in my thinking in ways that are rarely able to be immediately articulated. I curl up with my book, crying or laughing, and underlining what has been made unfamiliar or more familiar by the writer, but entangled with my own life, a conversation, a painting, or a song I have never heard. Graduate school has made me a much better reader than writer, so it is with books that I practice doing inquiry about race, gender, and the implications of those maintained and reproduced constructions on the lives of teachers and students in teacher education programs, classrooms, and schools.

There is much potential in evaluating works of literature by their effects. Literary texts are central to education; yet, we do not often think of their potential to frame and re-frame our thinking in relation to our bodies, research, and research methods. We read for pleasure, not attending to the way that that text may be working against and along with our "research texts"—theory, methodology, data, field notes, song lyrics, memories, visual texts, and photos. While attending to it all is not possible, paying a bit more attention to the texts that we read outside of the boundaries of research might yield unexpected thinking and imagining. The tangle of texts, concepts, bodies, memories and time can stop movement, even as seeming non-movement is still movement (Massumi, 2002), shifting to push against our sense of coherence, truth, time, and space. Becoming open to the excess inherent in the tangle of texts and bodies, present whether we name it or not, complicates post qualitative research. For my purposes here, I am going to highlight the "use" of Toni Morrison's (2004) *Sula* as a textual artifact that has disrupted my thinking, teaching, and doing. While I cannot know exactly how this text did this, I know that something happened to me in reading this novel and I want to think about how this "happening" implicated the way I became able to do, but also think, and then do again.

There has been much written about the whiteness of scholarly work (Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004). These same logics are ever present in how scholarly work is imagined, perceived, and engaged. Citational practices become political when the work of scholars of color are not engaged through mechanisms that appear neutral to those who benefit from them. In my work, I engage theories, texts, cultural artifacts, perspectives, and research possibilities promiscuously (Childers, Rhee, & Daza, 2013), interested in the tensions and conflicts between them. I take what is of use, leaving behind what does not seem to be of use at that time. I do this because I want to and I am lead by my own interests and feelings, but I also do it because race is incoherent—fragile, yet persistent; fictional, but real; of no consequence, but of the

upmost importance. I also find that much of the work that is central to scholarly work erases, minimizes, or dismisses people of color. This space of contradiction makes research work concerned with race particularly challenging. At the same time, engaging rather than avoiding these contradictions allows for a very different way of thinking and doing research that centers race and all that is related to race, without reifying race in unhelpful and unethical ways. Because I am (haltingly) doing scholarly work, I must be led by some tradition, but also open to insights outside of the hierarchies and boundaries of tradition. This often contradictory practice allows me to put texts that may not be obviously related alongside one another to think not only about doing research, but also teaching, learning, and living. This allows me to blur the boundaries regarding what is of "use" in post qualitative research as far as our thinking about what it is I am *doing*, when I am doing research. It also allows me room to look in askance at that which is still very much taken-for-granted in qualitative research and opt-in when I must, and opt-out when I have some choice. This feels necessary because of the absence of Blackness that feels so present in the spaces that I am meant to source for insight to undertake research. This absence is agential (Bennett, 2009) as it has an effect on all aspects of scholarly undertakings. This necessitates a search for insight, clues and guides elsewhere because the heavy feeling of absence encourages me to hoard (Holbrook & Pourchier, 2014), even as I recognize the contradictions and tensions in this hoarding. My response to this incoherence has been to become more comfortable with that incoherence.

In Toni Morrison's (1992) *Playing in the Dark*: *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison explores how the insistence of whiteness and the absenting of Blackness undermines the writing of the American canon. In many ways, that canon has informed the Academy across disciplines. The logic that informed the Western Canon are some of the same logics that orient current academic practices. *Sula* is a text that engages the topic of race in the U.S. Morrison writes for Black readers, centering the lives of Black women and histories that are often obscured and ignored. *Sula* focuses on the life of one Black girl who becomes a Black woman. Morrison highlights the raced worlds of her characters in a way that engages blackness very differently from how blackness is thought, considered, and imagined in many educational research inquiry projects. In Morrison's writings that center Blackness in its complexity, I am able to see what becomes possible with writing, art, literature, and theory, particularly as those are put together, rubbing against each other, chafing and irritating me and the work that I attempt to do. And is what I am hoping or trying to do not actually possible?

An End

Schooling has been one way that I have tried to figure out myself in the world. Literature, film, and art have been much more fruitful in that endeavor—another kind of education that has allowed me to inquire, write, think, and be differently. In many ways, art is in tension with the kind of education required to become a professional researcher, particularly for those of us who were never meant to become researcher in the first place. To undertake such double-destabilization, we must willfully and intentionally be in several places at once—the past and the future, within the institutions that validate the work and outside of that space. We learn how to do the work that is recognizable, to those who must recognize, but we are not given many guides on the other place to be, how to go to outer space. Not outer space in terms of the galaxy (although, maybe) but out of the space that has previously been cordoned off for educational research. For that, there is no guide. There are only clues and hints, a crack to follow, a phrase that echoes, a song that repeats in the background of one's thoughts. I want to follow those hints toward outer space, and beyond the boundaries of education, in route to becoming a researcher that is both seemingly impossible and increasingly essential.

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