Rhapsodic Inquiry and the Methodological Imaginal

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Abstract

This paper reflects on, and examines some issues sidelined during the writing of a doctoral dissertation that was completed at the end of 2011. The study investigated the potential of the mobile phone as a pedagogic tool in a senior secondary technical school. While the methods employed for data collection and analysis were conventional and uncontentious, a certain boldness and imaginative engagement with the empirical findings was deemed necessary in order generate a thesis that was both sufficiently substantial and original. However, an underlying tension operated wherein fundamentally philosophical impulses of the researcher had to be balanced against simultaneously present institutional expectations and practical imperatives. In particular, some key remarks of Heidegger concerning technology and thinking, vied for attention and prominence within the research project agenda. An articulation and elaboration of this underlying tension between the philosophical and the practical only became possible after the work was completed. The return and manifestation of these marginalised and latent issues are here given closer attention.

Opening Remarks

This article explores some of the methodological gaps and aporia that formed while writing a doctoral dissertation between 2009 and 2011. One of the under-articulated themes of the written work concerned the way in which questions of methodology, viz philosophy, are often inadequately considered in educational research. At the time, discussion of these concerns was limited to some passing references. For example, writing as an educational researcher with a belief in the intrinsically moral nature of teaching and learning, I nominated the value of a philosophical lens to help analyse and illuminate the empirical findings. Without the pressure of time, or the same demands of convention, the space now opens up for me to explore some latent, unaddressed, and hence unresolved issues. These issues concern how I undertook to extract meaning from/find meaning in/develop an understanding of, the research material, both empirical and theoretical. In what follows, I attempt to reveal some of the methodological underground and backwash that remained largely unarticulated and hence, unexplored. I attempt to do here, what I was unable to do in the dissertation namely, to engage with some methodological matters critically and (dare I say?) imaginatively, if not also imaginally. The speculative mode in which I present this material also attempts to evoke the qualities and processes of thinking and writing that underpinned work on the dissertation. It would, however, be both premature and somewhat contradictory to propose that such an approach be systematised or standardised.

Some Background

The research project was initially established to investigate the potential of the mobile phone as a pedagogical tool in the context of a senior secondary technical school, the Australian Technical College (ATC), Bendigo. The school had been established in 2006 on a platform that included both mobile and self-directed learning. It was one of more than 20 such schools established around the country by the conservative Coalition government under Prime Minister John Howard. The schools sought to address skills shortages in designated regional and rural areas while simultaneously capturing disengaged students by offering them two final years of flexible, vocationally oriented schooling. This was coupled with commencement of an apprenticeship in a technical trade (for example, painting and decorating, motor mechanics, hairdressing, cooking, carpentry).

New mobile phones were issued to all incoming students for purposes of pedagogy and communication. The Faculty of Education, La Trobe University (Melbourne) secured funding from the school for a doctoral research scholar to track and develop the use of the mobile phone in this context. Thus, the research project had been loosely sketched out before my involvement. Nevertheless, I arrived with a certain suspicion that the mobile phone, like various other technologies before it (for example, calculators, computers), had been infiltrating classrooms and driving certain kinds of educational change before much convincing research had been carried out as to its merits (Livingston, 2011; Postman, 1992; Selwyn, 2011a, 2011b; Sofia, 1998; Somekh, 2006). I was therefore alert to "the danger of putting the ICT cart before the learning horse" (de Freitas & Yapp, 2005, p.xi).

The project evolved with a two-phase structure. The first phase utilised a series of individual semi-structured interviews to ascertain the existing practices and attitudes to the mobile phone amongst a representative sample of teachers/support staff (*n*=18) and students (*n*=23). The second phase was originally intended as a small-scale participatory exploration of how the mobile phone could be used to support teaching and learning. At the mid-point of the project (18 months after its inception) however, changes in policy, funding, and management personnel at the school necessitated a new direction for the project. A change of government at the federal level also saw the new Labour government under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd honour its election promise to reduce the amount of money allocated to the ATCs, requiring them to rationalise some of their operations by partnering with other vocational education and training institutions in their vicinity.

From 2009, the ATC Bendigo came under the administrative control and governance wing of the well-established Bendigo Regional Institute of Technical and Further Education (BRIT). BRIT permitted the renamed Bendigo Technical Educational College (BTEC) to maintain autonomy over its core business and daily operations of teaching and learning. However the budget and accountabilities were tightened. New mobile phones would no longer be issued to incoming students, and their utilisation would be more at the discretion of individual teachers, rather than in response to any firm pedagogical principles or policy commitments adopted across the school. In addition, the founding principal, whose vision included a central place for mobile learning, resigned and left the school. In order to continue working as a research scholar, I agreed to shift my focus to the potential of the mobile phone as an aid to communication and administration in the school setting.

This new focus required some re-thinking and reconfiguring of the research framework. Some of the literature review, especially in relation to mobile learning, had to be jettisoned. New fields, such as educational administration and communication in education, required attention. The project had also initially engaged with the notion of *personalised learning* and

its place within educational discourse, policy and practice (Hartnell-Young & Vetere, 2008; Keamy, Nicholas, Mahar & Herrick, 2007; Leadbeater, 2006). On this basis, the project overseers agreed to the notion of *personalised communication* being incorporated in the research question. This provided me with an opportunity to investigate more critically the discourse of *personalisation* in education (Fielding, 2006, 2008; Hartley, 2007, 2008), as well as some of the ways in which communication is understood and incorporated in educational research and practices.

Methodological Manoeuvres

Against this background and outline of the project, questions surrounding methodology gripped me from the outset. Coming from foundational studies in (mostly western) philosophy, I was surprised by the often loose, general, and simplistic ways in which educational researchers appropriated certain key (and contested) terms from philosophical discourse in order to provide conceptual scaffolding, or paradigm identification, for their research projects. In particular, terms like *epistemology*, *ontology*, *reality*, and *truth* were commonly defined in a sentence or two in ways that attempted to highlight their underlying importance, while failing to acknowledge the complex histories and disputed understandings that such terms have had in the broad discipline of philosophy. Pring (2000) expressed concern over the way educational research appropriated various philosophical positions "without any recognition of the philosophical problems they raise and which often have been well rehearsed by philosophers from Plato onwards" (p. 5-6). While some educational researchers recognised this (for example, Higgs & Trede, 2010; Loftus & Rothwell, 2010; Mertens, 2010) and clearly defined how they were using these borrowed terms, the definitions and uses tended to be static and brief, barely appreciating the subtleties, complexities and uncertainties inherent in the terms. Schwandt (2003), by contrast, began one contribution on epistemological stances with an apology "for leaving the philosophically minded aghast at the incompleteness of the treatment and for encouraging the methodologically inclined to scurry to later chapters on tools" (p.294).

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) provided some reassurance when noting that, especially in relation to conducting qualitative inquiry, many texts "often blur the boundaries between and among epistemologies, theories, approaches, and strategies" (p.21). This quartet of dimensions helps to distinguish the meta-operations of epistemology and theory, from the more concrete and practical suite of tools (approaches and strategies) typically employed in educational research. Kamberelis and Dimitriades (2005) also delineated the value of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the rhizome as a model for conducting research that subverted the "inherent totalizing logic" of conventional approaches based on, or derived from, the "arborescent model" (p.124). The rhizomatic model offers different and multiple possibilities celebrating "proliferative modes of thinking, acting, and being rather than unitary, binary, and totalizing modes" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p.125-126). Rhizomatic inquiry is thus less hierarchical; less organised around a central trunk with clearly defined branches; more fluid, multi-faceted, and open-ended.

The notion of a fluid, flexible and proliferative mode of thinking provided an important impetus through the various phases of data collection, analysis and interpretation. In actuality, this notion became essential, given that the empirical findings generated from the two phases of investigation were straightforward and unequivocal. Through the use of mobile phone text messaging, school administrative operations could be more streamlined, specifically in relation to communication with parents/guardians whose children appeared absent from school. Similarly, students and teachers found that maintaining a flow of

informal, non-specific, personalised SMS exchanges created mutually beneficial layers of trust, goodwill, support and care. These findings could have been written up quite succinctly but would then have lacked the substance, breadth, and length to constitute a doctoral dissertation. They therefore required closer scrutiny and my thinking needed to become more proliferative in order to develop a substantial and resonant interpretation of the empirical findings.

Yet the urge to be expansive with my interpretation was bumping up against challenges, both from within my circle of academic support, as well as in the literature to which I was looking for guidance. Even within qualitative modes of inquiry, assumptions about objectivity and establishing certain solid facts appeared to be quite entrenched (for example, Dowling & Brown, 2010; Hammersley, 2007, 2008; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Creativity was permissible in arts-based research in relation to the design, data generation, and presentation of the research findings (for example, Barone & Eisner, 2012; Knowles, Promislow & Cole, 2008) but creative interpretation seemed to be a much riskier proposition, if not even a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, my impulse to pursue a creative interpretation, not so much in form as in mode, was motivated by two ideas from Heidegger calling for closer attention.

Creative Interpretation

The first idea from Heidegger concerned the claim he made for technology as "a way of revealing" (Heidegger, 1977a, p.12). Heidegger proposed that if we "give heed" to this notion, then the essence of a technology "will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e. of truth" (p.12). Without knowing exactly what Heidegger meant by this, the prospect of arriving at some truth(s) through and/or about mobile phone communication became a motivating factor. In particular, I was drawn to Heidegger's notion of truth as something that "happens", coming through a process of "unconcealment" (p.13), rather than being defined by new and irrefutable fact (s). Just as this truth happened through a process of "opening up" (p.13) created by the technology, I remained open to the emergence of something new and meaningful, generated by and through the research process.

Heidegger also made the intriguing claim that the essence of technology was something other than the mere instrument of technology itself, paradoxically, "nothing technological" (p.35). This essence related to what, in translation, Heidegger referred to as the process of *enframing*. Such a process encapsulated the way in which the essential "mystery", and even "danger", of a technology was simultaneously and ambiguously both revealed and concealed (p.35). Without wanting, or needing, to tease out the finer points of Heidegger's terminology, we are left with a notion of technology derived from Plato that invites us to inhabit, or dwell in a "realm" (p.35) in which the higher qualities of art and poetry reveal themselves.

While the aesthetic dimensions of the mobile phone were not the major focus, I did account for many of the superficially significant aspects of the mobile phone in my survey of the literature. These included its prominence as a socio-cultural icon (Glotz, Bertschi & Locke, 2005); as a tool for receiving, storing and relaying information (Goggin & Hjorth, 2009); as a fashion item (Goggin 2006; Katz & Sugiyama, 2005); as a source of personal identity (Katz, 2004; Vincent, 2005); and even as a symbolic prosthetic device (Caron & Caronia, 2007). Myerson (2001) was one of the first theorists to draw on Heidegger (and Habermas) in order to probe the deeper, philosophical implications of the mobile phone for human being and

communication. Myerson was skeptical about the potential of the mobile phone to advance the quality of understanding between people, given that the phones basically performed an exchange of messages with each other. Yet Heidegger (1977a), in his work concerning technology, was not only offering the alluring prospect of discovering a provisional, if not essential truth about technology itself, which might then be applicable to our understanding of the mobile phone. He was also suggesting a means whereby the unconcealing could be made possible. This means relates to Heidegger's implicitly hermeneutic path to understanding, where interpretations "emerge from a shadowy backstage instead of lying in lucid conscious awareness" (Harman, 2007, p.160-1). This phenomenologically-inflected hermeneutics argues that direct access to reality is elusive, as interpretations assume "a special way" and "specific standpoint" (Harman, 2007, p.32). It is not possible, therefore, to operate (move, see, interpret) from completely outside or separate from the phenomenon one is investigating, nor is it even especially desirable to attempt to do so. Hermeneutics could be useful as "a lesson in humility (we all speak from finite situations) as well as imagination (we fill the gaps between available and ulterior meanings" (Kearney, 2010, p.xv).

Heidegger's hermeneutics are closely connected to his philosophical conceptualisation of *thinking*, which also insinuated itself as I analysed, and attempted to develop an interpretation of the empirical findings. Heidegger (1977a) encouraged excursions into the mystery, danger, and ambiguity that hovered around the essence of technology. He suggested that "the closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways of the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become" (p.35). This questioning, for Heidegger, was synonymous with "the piety of thought" (p.35). Such images and invitations compelled me to critically interrogate the substance of my research findings, supported by Heidegger in the intuition that such questioning would lead to thoughts and insights with an inherent worth. As little as I knew about how this might eventuate, still I was drawn to such a daring and eloquent formulation that regarded questioning as the piety of thought. It seemed to me that, given this formulation, probing questions, doubts, extensive contemplation, and even some daring elaboration were in order. Here, Agamben's (2009) claim that "the genuine philosophical element in every work, whether it be a work of art, of science, or of thought, is its capacity for elaboration" (p.7-8) also resonated loudly. The thinking I was attempting to employ in relation to my empirical findings aligned with the fundamental philosophical impulse underpinning my involvement in the project, thereby making some kind of suitable elaboration imperative.

There is a central paradox in Heidegger's writings on thinking that has potent implications for alternative approaches to educational methodology. Heidegger (1977b) argued that the question of, and thinking about, thinking had a history of being inadequately addressed for the "thought-provoking thing" (p.358) that it was. The reason for this is that "this most thought-provoking thing turns away from us, in fact has long since turned away from man [sic]" (p.358). Paradoxically, however, when and as this (thinking) thing "withdraws in such a manner", it "keeps and develops its own incomparable nearness" (p.358). Such a withdrawal of that which we are simultaneously drawn to, despite and because of its "mutable nearness", has an "appeal" that is "enigmatic" (p.358). This enigmatic mode of being simultaneously drawn to something that is withdrawing from us, Heidegger classifies as thinking, "even though he [sic] may still be far away from what withdraws, even though the withdrawal may remain as veiled as ever" (p.358). For Heidegger, the purest embodiment of this mode of thinking was Socrates who, throughout his life and "into his death … did nothing else than place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it"

(p.358).

This image of placing oneself in a draft or current of pure thought captivated me as I proceeded to analyse the empirical findings from the research project. Rather than imposing an interpretive framework over and around the findings, I sought to listen for the internal resonances that came and went fleetingly, as I distilled the data and contemplated their implications. Rather than becoming frustrated when some possible meaning withdrew from me, or eluded my reach, I took this as a positive sign that the thinking itself was proving to be the thought-provoking thing which would, in turn, and in time, disclose some tentative meaning, fleeting insight, or partial truth.

In another essay concerned with the task of thinking, Heidegger drew on a fragment of poetry by the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides, who invoked "the untrembling heart of unconcealment" (cited in Heidegger, 1977c, p.387) as the way in which proximity to truth could be gained for the thoughtful inquirer. Heidegger read this *aletheia*, unconcealment, as the disclosure of that which is "most its own", coming through "the place of stillness which gathers in itself what grants unconcealment to begin with" (p.387). Again, a certain paradox is presented; some intentional ambiguity; some provocation towards (and away) from the obvious, the given, the superficial. There are hints here of the subsequent image of Socrates standing, still and quiet, in the draft or current of pure thought. Such a place of, and path for, thinking invites the "speculative and intuitive", because it needs "the traversable opening" (p.387). This "quiet heart of the opening", the "place of stillness", creates the (pre) conditions by "which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being [sic] and thinking, that is, presence and apprehending, can arise at all" (p.387). In this way, unconcealment doesn't necessarily equate with the revelation of truth, so much as that which "first grants the possibility of truth" (p.389).

Poised in the Draft

These ideas thus became part of the background accompaniment to the thematic and interpretive tune I was beginning to compose in response to the empirical data. Nevertheless, as I proceeded, I became more aware of just how fraught it was to even consider composing an interpretation, as opposed to simply substantiating an argument strictly on the available evidence. I'm not sure if the tension came solely from within myself, or if it was also an expression of external institutional and discursive resistance. It was most likely a complicated combination of the two. Nevertheless, I had to struggle to defend and justify my impulses, despite the apparent advances made by various post-structuralist and postmodern approaches to qualitative educational research (for example, Cary, 2006; Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Stronach & MacLure, 1997).

As I continued writing, I needed to reassure myself that my creative impulses were not so far-fetched, and that there might even be a rationale for proceeding in this manner. Heidegger's ideas invited a more creative (yet still, profoundly thoughtful) approach to interpreting the findings. Fortunately, too, I started to discover persuasive and exciting examples that strengthened the legitimacy of my impulses. Kincheloe's (2004, 2005) work on research as *bricolage* appeared at a critical moment, just as I was feeling the pressure to follow a more conventional pathway.

Kincheloe (2004) provided a welcome impetus and rationale for actually embracing the "always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable and, of course, complex" (p.3) aspects of the research process. I could start to let go of the (apparent) imperative for the safe, ordered,

process of the "monological quest" (p.4) and instead seek out "new vistas opened up by the multilogical" (p.4). Importantly, Kincheloe was not dismissing rigour, or coherence, or substance but rather, he was primarily committed to subverting "the finality of the empirical act" (p.6). His interest lay less in certainty and more in ambiguity, unknown possibility, and fluidity. More about movement in Socrates' draft, as it were, rather than setting any new facts in stone.

Elsewhere, Kincheloe (2005) was daring enough to suggest that the *bricolage* assumes "fictive elements" (p.330) within narratives and representations which, when coupled with "researcher creativity", have the potential to produce "concepts and insights about the world that previously did not exist" (p.346). This is integral to the "philosophical consciousness" (Kincheloe, 2004, p.8) presumed and further cultivated by the *bricoleur*. Such claims worked to counter some of the jarring effects of the tendencies common within educational research methodologies to commandeer and oversimplify philosophical concepts that had a long and contentious history.

My philosophical impulses were consistent with Fielding's (2007) statement that:

> We need philosophy now, primarily because we have reached a stage in both our advocacy and our practice of schooling where the optimism, energy and goodwill of contemporary approaches are leading us down a road that, albeit unintentionally, is likely to produce a society that diminishes our humanity, destroys much that is of worth, and denies much we seem to desire (p. 383).

Thus, the philosophical edge was needed to cut through some of the deadening and limiting effects of contemporary, neoliberal educational ideology and to move policy, discourse, and practice in more human-centred, life-affirming directions. Fielding was calling for philosophy with purpose, bite, and some resolve to pursue visions of alternative, just, and egalitarian futures.

In the process of interpreting the empirical findings, this meant continuing to look long and hard at the evidence through a process of thematic distillation (Attride-Stirling 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ryan & Bernard, 2003), while also pursuing concepts that would create wider and deeper inroads into meaning and understanding. Here again was reason to stay poised in the draft of pure thought, allowing myself to sway in the paradox of being simultaneously brought nearer to that which was withdrawing from me. Deleuze (1995) also provided some guiding light, suggesting that:

> One's always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight. The language for doing that can't be a homogeneous system, it's something unstable, always heterogeneous, in which style carves differences of potential between which things can pass, come to pass, a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed (p.141).

Deleuze's comments on writing, philosophically, also resonated in a lively and compelling way with Kincheloe's call for educational research to generate concepts and insights about the world that had previously not existed. Even if I didn't achieve this, to have such an aim became a powerful driving force throughout the research process. "It was not so much something to see as it was a way of seeing, a way of seeing into the depths … " (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.265).

The creative aspect of philosophical work was assumed in Deleuze. This meant that concepts themselves were better characterised as events, or circumstances, rather than essences. This then "allows us to introduce elementary novelistic methods into philosophy" (Deleuze, 1995, p.25). In this way, generating new philosophical concepts is akin to the work of the scientist and artist. As Grosz (2008) noted, both art and philosophy (for Deleuze) seek ways to "divide and organize chaos to create a plane of coherence, a field of consistency, a plane of composition on which to think and create" (p.4-5). Einstein regarded himself as "enough of an artist to draw freely on my imagination, which I think is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world" (cited in Taylor, 2002, np). During the process of research and writing, I sought to honour the entanglement of knowledge and imagination while dancing on the edge of uncertainty.

The Bold and the Beautiful

In brief, as stated earlier, the data findings revealed that a regular, informal flow of SMS exchanges between teachers and students produced benefits for both cohorts. For participating students, the benefits included an increased sense of support, of being cared for, of belonging to the school community, and of being more motivated to attend school and carry out schoolwork. For the teachers, one of the main discoveries was the realisation that they had habitually conceived of their students too narrowly as learners, thereby failing to sufficiently accommodate their developing, yet unstable identities as young adults. Some teachers felt liberated in being able to relate to their students more holistically and personally, while still maintaining due professional boundaries. With these findings freshly minted, I persevered on my quest to interpret these data findings in a way that resonated both personally and intellectually.

Gradually, almost miraculously, I discovered that there was a small, established, albeit marginalised tradition of more "daredevil approaches" (Sandvik, 2010, p.38) to doing educational research. Kincheloe's work on *bricolage* had provided one positive beacon. However, little of this was being referenced in the journal articles and other academic literature I was trawling through in relation to educational research practices and methodology. Denzin (2009) made a convincing case for the politics and ideology that were challenging the credibility and thwarting opportunities for qualitative inquiry in general, and in its various manifestations and orientations. Endorsing the advances and provocations made by Guba and Lincoln (2005), Denzin (2009) identified "the value of multivocal texts, the need to decolonize methodologies, the understanding that there are ever only partial truths, the refusal to see the world in just one color [sic], [and] a shared commitment to social justice and human rights" (p.20). Nevertheless, it became obvious that the safer and more secure ground was in the recognisably positivist projects that received most of the funding and formal policy endorsements. I resisted this mode for political and axiological reasons. The prospect of messiness in social research (Law, 2004) had instinctive appeal compared with approaches prone to (or bound by) risk-aversion and 'methodolatry' (McWilliam, 2006).

Attempts by Kamberelis (2003) to revive and reinscribe the figure of the Trickster into educational discourse and practice were a bold provocation to established (mainstream, evidence-based, positivist) research practices. Kamberelis called for the arousal of this "sleeping partner of the human imagination" (p.692) so that it could better serve the more subversive purposes of methodological manoeuvring. The beauty of this Trickster beast is the way it "reminds us that despite our covering concepts, reality in some ways always eludes us because it is forever being produced and not really always-already-there" (p.694).

Working more around the edges and within hidden folds, Trickster suggests that "marginal human experiences and human experiences of marginality are much more revelatory than we might think" (p.694). Kamberelis claimed that we are, as living creatures, "processes that involve straddling the boundaries between our present realities and what they (and we) might become" (p.698). If we can accept and open ourselves to such an orientation, we can come to recognise Trickster as "the master cultural trope of these processes" (p.698). Trickster supports us to become "the being of passages who is in passage and through whom existence passes" (p.698).

The brilliance of the Trickster is the way s/he "reveals to us the chaotic, dark and silent yet familiar realm from which multiple possibilities may become multiple actualities, though usually in unpredictable, dark and ironic ways" (Kamberelis, 2003, p.698). The brilliance of Kamberelis, in this context, is to recognise and promote the image of the Trickster as "a metaphor (metonym?) for a dialogic ontology/epistemology nexus" (p.698). In so doing, Kamberelis puts two fundamental branches of philosophy in open and dynamic interplay with one another. In a final (Deleuzian) flourish, Kamberelis conjures the verb *kaleide* (from kaleidoscope) to reflect "the complex activity of shifting, colliding, colluding, collaborating, conspiring, refracting, dispersing, and interanimating all at the same time to produce effects that are both real and fictional" (p.700).

Contemporary Baroque

The kaleidoscopic antics of the Trickster can be seen as performing the role of "education's occulted Other" (MacLure, 2006, p.730), awoken from its slumber to stir up opposition to the "state-sponsored intolerance of difference and complexity [that] is now part of education policy and research funding in many countries" (p.730). Such policy and funding arrangements inevitably impact on (i.e. curtail) the prospects for educational research methodologies that attempt to disrupt, *complexify* and challenge dominant modes, or otherwise dwell in the ambiguities and nuances that either lurk around the margins, or are enfolded into the interstices of the research process. In the case of my research findings, I wanted to let some of the subtleties, even the murkiness of human, interpersonal communication assume more prominence in order to then explore their pedagogical and broader educational significance. Without being conscious of it at the time, I was inviting the Trickster to work on the findings and suggest some novel ways to interpret them.

This is the basis on which MacLure (2006) proposed her baroque method, the better to highlight the bankruptcy or brokenness of dominant, (post) positivist methodologies, and to fire some shots that might break into, or break down this dominance, seeking to turn and accelerate the wheels of inquiry, thought, and reflection in a more vital, engaging, open and inclusive direction. This is why, if we are feeling sufficiently bold and up to the dangers, we should welcome the metaphorical lodging of the bone in our throats, so that notwithstanding the irritation, agitation and cogitation, we might better avoid being choked by impulses or imperatives for reiteration, validation, and regurgitation. In our actions and determination to shake the bone loose, we might stimulate some different activity in the throat and digestive tract that, in turn, produces a different flow of gastric juices in and from the gut. The gut itself, and the feelings flowing from it, might help to reshape and reconfigure some of the entrenched agendas binding and constricting (constipating?) educational discourse, policy, research and practices (cf. Barnacle, 2009).

The gut is a useful image in the context of the research process as it invites us into the dim and dark folds of tissue wherein bacteria compete for food and survival, enzymes are set to

work, and movement along the various digestive tracts are generated, out of which both nutrients are extracted and redistributed, while waste is simultaneously accumulated and ultimately excreted. All this happens involuntarily, in response to the foods that are initially ingested, masticated, and sent on their way. In MacLure's vision of a baroque research methodology in education, we have to "make do with things dimly glimpsed or half-heard, knowing them to be tinged with the theatricality of performance and tainted by the guilty pleasures of the spectator" (2006, p.736). Perhaps the analogy breaks down slightly here, as performances of the gut might not resemble the theatre in any of the forms that we have come to know it. Yet, all kinds of dynamic and transformative work are undoubtedly performed by, and in, the gut. Equally, the guilty pleasures associated with this process might not extend beyond the consumption of forbidden foods (or other substances). Nevertheless, we can imagine what these digestive processes look like, and these days, probes with cameras attached to their front ends can reveal the inner spectacle during colonoscopic (bottom-end) and/or gastro-endoscopic (top-end) procedures.

Staying with the metaphor a little longer, we would do well to heed MacLure's (2006) reminder to resist the "closure-seeking appetites of bureaucratic reason, with its punitive mission of transparency, standardization, and certainty" (p. 741-2). All the better then to roam around in the dark or dimly lit, trusting that within such environments, even a little light will appear brighter and therefore have the potential to illuminate much more powerfully and suggestively than one shining in an already over-exposed space. Here, too, if we are beginning to sketch out an elementary (alimentary?) gut theory, MacLure's provocation to make a positive offence of/with theory is apposite. Theory, she argues, is needed, "to interrupt the specious clarity demanded and enforced by audit cultures, whose workings could be summarized as the bureaucratic administration of banality" (MacLure, 2010, p.278). Addressing another dark continent in the Freudian unconscious, Britzman (2012) points out that psychical activity is, paradoxically, "both the transfer point for theory and the obstacle to understanding why we have theory at all" (p.54). For our purposes, we can take the gut, the unconscious, and the need for theory as tentative and suggestive, where suggestions themselves occupy a space "bordering between the not-yet and the yet-to-come" (Pearce, 2010, p.903).

The research project I undertook was constituted primarily by typical and conventional empirical methods, including semi-structured interviews, online surveys and focus groups. Within, around, and behind these process however, I was drawn to ideas and ways of connecting the findings with an interpretive mechanism that together allowed pliability of thought, the pursuit of hunches, dwelling on the less obvious, and listening for resonances, echoes, and even overtones accompanying the main discursive tune. Two further sources provided important impetuses for this trajectory, neither being in any way prescriptive or limiting. The first of these sources was Britzman (2011), based on her reading of Freud and the nature of psychoanalysis as being "constructed from the gut of human learning" (p.7). From this reading, Britzman came to regard learning as "interminable", and the profession of education, therefore, as "an impossible one" (p.51). If the whole profession of education is an impossible one, then presumably the work of educational research is no less impossible. The opening therefore existed to go boldly into the empirical findings and see what could be (tentatively) dis-covered, un-covered, re-covered, and even re-searched. What was most needed for this was "the audacity to interpret" (p.60) which, while not knowing how this would play out at the practical level, I embraced as a guiding mantra. What my data collection instruments and results lacked in audacity could be compensated for in the process of interpreting the findings. This did not mean trying to be different, or

controversial, or contrary for their own sake. Rather, it required some daring and guts in my thinking so as to avoid falling into the tried (tired?) and proven (predictable) grooves of convention.

The second, related impetus for pursuing a more baroque reading (Deleuze, 1993) of the empirical findings came from Berry's call to "keep **rhapsodic intellect** alive" (Berry, 2006, p. 95, emphasis in original). At one level, the findings were straightforward and unsurprising, given the aims and design of the research project. There were certain ways in which the mobile phone could be harnessed usefully for pedagogical, communication, and administrative purposes in a senior secondary school. Having produced the evidence to support such a hypothesis, the challenge became one of probing enough to produce an analysis and discussion that had some freshness and edge. In keeping, then, with the rhapsodic imperative, my discussion needed to have some rhetorical flair, some suggestive and improvisatory elements that, while still anchored in the evidence, were also permitted some freedom to take flight and enter the slipstream of pure thought. Here I sought to dwell in the uncertain and impossible heart of the inquiry, teasing out connections, listening for subtle resonances between concepts and content, accepting the tentative and unstable nature of the emerging thesis.

The audacious turn started when, after discussing three of the key findings (expressed as thematic statements) with close reference to the data, I combined the remaining four thematic statements and explored their interrelatedness and import through a more philosophical lens. I argued that the interpretation would still have legitimacy and value even if the conclusions remained only tentative, suggestive, and fragmentary. My primary interest lay in generating some knowledge that was "threaded through *living* disciplines whose vulnerability to an unanticipated future is not an error that we must guard against. It is only in and through such vulnerability that knowledge *lives* in the human inheritance" (Jardine, 2008, p. xix, italics in original).

What followed was very much the heart of the thesis, with some serious probing into the nature of personhood, human relationship, communication, and education. While always anchored in the data, the discussion also entered and explored more abstract realms of mutuality, communion, fellow feeling, acknowledgement, ethics, care, love, kindness, and the ground of learning.

The details and logic of this emergent discussion would constitute a separate article. None of these dimensions were anticipated at the outset of the project, only finding their place as I drew on certain theoretical and philosophical works to support my arguments (for example, Biesta, 1994/5, 2004; Dewey, 1958; Hyde, 2006; Macmurray, 1935, 1961; Noddings, 2002, 2005, 2006; Todd, 2003, 2008). These theorists and philosophers fuelled my rhapsodic intellect, mitigating the risk of merely revealing "the bleeding obvious" (MacLure, 2010, p.277) about the mobile phone and some of its pedagogical applications.

Looking Back to Move Ahead

It would not have been unusual for someone in my situation to be left with a residue of unanswered questions, unexplored threads, undeveloped or under-developed ideas and possibilities. One might even have expected that such a major project would plant new seeds for further projects, and a desire to investigate and contribute more to the various discourses, bodies of knowledge, and practices to which the original work pertained. Nevertheless, in relation to my methodology, and specifically the way I went about

interpreting the empirical findings, I experienced considerable uncertainty and doubt at the time, which continued to tease, test and (mildly) torment me after I submitted the work for examination. This is what generated the urge to explore the matter further in writing, to retrace some of my steps and seek some clarity, reassurance, and even legitimacy for the methodological, and especially the interpretive routes I chose to navigate and employ.

I have only started to understand the deeper motivation and purpose for my research project during the process of writing this article. Romanyshyn's (2007) appeal and case for research that "would keep soul in mind" (p.11) provided a positive stimulus to reflect not only further, but also differently on the nature of my process, and of research itself. Fundamentally, Romanyshyn invites entry into the imaginal realm that exists in the region between intellect and sense, between reason and emotion. In the dissertation itself, I did not recognise this space as belonging to the imaginal realm, yet I was sensing the need to inhabit such a space, and being called to pay more attention to it.

Romanyshyn (2007) refers to the way in which "the imaginal approach, with its devotion to the unfinished business in the soul of the work, is attuned to those hidden and not readily present possibilities that linger and wait as the weight of history in the work" (p.291). In this way, research itself can better be understood as re-search which, "with soul in mind is the arduous task of differentiating what I bring to the work from what it brings to me" (p.17). I struck gold with Romanyshyn's suggestion that, "there is always a felt gap between what one says and what haunts one as wanting to be said" (p.16). I realised that such a haunting was what was compelling me to probe deeper into the work I had recently completed, how I went about it, and what was still pushing to gain expression. This also helped clarify why I had remained hooked on Heidegger's conception of thinking throughout the process, with its tensions between withdrawing and coming nearer, concealing and revealing, opening and piously questioning.

Importantly, Romanyshyn (2007) makes it clear that the researcher's main role in this process is in helping to "return the work to itself" (p.79). I can now recognise my *post hoc* probing and exploration here as taking a "transformative backward glance" (p.73) that paradoxically, allows the work itself to move further forward than it might otherwise have been able to. By looking back in this (Orphic) way, Eurydice is permitted the opportunity to attend to some of the "unfinished business of the soul of the work" (p.82). In this way too, the work becomes free of any "narcissistic attachment" (p.73) that I may have still had to it, allowing it to become more "freed into itself" (p.73).

(In) Conclusion

At best, the hope for both my dissertation and these reflections is that they stimulate the glands and lubricate the tracts to produce an appetite for some tasty methodological morsels that might otherwise lie buried, or hidden, in the familiar fields of qualitative empirical research in education. This does call for a willingness to move into darker and less familiar imaginative (Davies, 2010) as well as imaginal spaces, to open ourselves to the less likely, the less obvious, the suggestive, and even the speculative folds lying dormant within the guts of the process, as well as the guts of our object of inquiry. Sandvik (2010) encouraged a sense of "experimental dizziness" (p.30) in the research process. I endorse this provocation and note the potential value of maintaining this dizziness during all phases of the process, including the interpretation and discussion. Such an attitude better serves the interests of not just the "empirics" but also the "poetics" of the re-search process (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.11).

The challenge is to trust that what might, seemingly, be compromised in terms of conventional scientific discipline, is more than compensated for by the flickerings and glimpses of the newly (im)possible, the stylishly subversive, the previously elusive or unthought. In this way, our re-search stands to be emboldened and enriched by a process that pays more attention to "the images in the ideas, the fantasies in the facts, the dreams in the reasons, the myths in the meanings, the archetypes in the arguments, and the complexes in the concepts" (Romanyshyn, 2007, p.12). This might not, in the short term, help to secure more research dollars in the next allocation of official funding, nor contribute to the already overladen bank of official knowledge. It might, however, create a new edge, or some fresh friction to quicken our spirits, arouse the Trickster from his/her slumber, stir the gut, enliven our work, or send us spiralling into the slipstream of pure thought and more desirable, unknown futures.

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