

Thought in Motion: Erin Manning's Imperatives for Educational Research and Qualitative Inquiry

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Introduction: Thought in Motion

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Introduction: Thought in Motion

Edit from within! Become world! Value, don't evaluate! Lure the feeling! Know not what a body can do! Create with concepts! Make multiple sense! Affirm all that appears! Play the differential! Speculate! Engage relations of tension! Make the relations felt! Create degrees of intimacy! Propose! Transduce! Create affinities of purpose! Forget what you feel! Return the return! Transvaluate! Pay attention! Go to the limit! (Manning, 2008).

What does a philosophy produce? How might philosophy and methodology entangle, blur, respond, engage, interact, contradict, argue, provoke? Erin Manning's process philosophy attunes researchers to the potential of difference. Manning grounds her philosophy in the notion that doing is thinking, that there is thought in the act, and that philosophy is an experimental practice that coexists with art; it is "pathfinding in the making" (Manning & Massumi, 2013, n.p.). Further, Manning posits that research and creation come together in their product, and the product is always ongoing, always becoming, always in process. Thought with qualitative inquiry, "the conjunction between research and creation [...] make[s] apparent how modes of knowledge are always at cross-currents with one another" (Manning, 2016, p. 41).

Erin Manning's provocations have inspired and informed the field of qualitative inquiry over the

past decade in myriad ways. Etching, knotting, and tethering onto and into our thoughts. Provoking new and unexpected trajectories. In particular, her concepts of the minor gesture (Flint & Guyotte, 2019; Myers et al, 2017; Nordstrom, 2018), research-creation and the event (Colmenares & Morvay, 2019; Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Nordstrom, 2020; Nordstrom & Plascencia, 2017; Powell, 2015; Springgay & Truman, 2017; Sweet et al., 2020), fielding and attunement (Bridges-Rhoads, 2018; Cannon, 2020), bodying (Otterstad, 2017), and thought-in-the-act (Truman & Springgay, 2015; Ulmer, 2018; Van Cleave, 2018) have been taken up in methodological articles across a range of journals in the field.

Building from these forays, the aim of this special issue is to create a dedicated space for a sustained and focused engagement with Erin Manning's philosophical project in relation to educational research methodology. As editors, in this commentary we consider the resonances and movements of Manning's work across the manuscripts that only a special issue allows. We also see this special issue building on previous collections and scholarship within the space of *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, "a site for critical academic work around contemporary research methodology... connect[ing] to concepts and discourses linked to poststructural, feminist, critical, postcolonial and posthuman/newmaterial and affective approaches to social science" (*RERM*, n.d.). This includes previous scholarship in this journal which has taken up questions of research-creation, and creative research practices (Bergstedt, 2021; Nordstrom et al., 2020; Shelton et al, 2019; Van Borek, 2021), as well as conversations spurred by Nordstrom and Ulmer (2017) in their special issue on "Postqualitative Curations and Creations;" Strom, Ringold, Osgood, and Renolds (2019) in their special issue on "PhEmaterialism: Responsible Research & Pedagogy;" and Nordstrom's (2020) curation of experimentations from a graduate student course in "Makers-Philosophers-Researchers: Experimentations with (Dis)placements."

During a 2013 TEDx talk, Manning discussed the need to maintain the hyphen in research-creation (Manning & Massumi, 2013). She attests that the hyphen highlights the interactions between art and philosophy and that these interactions may reach toward a politics to come. "Research-creation animates the strangeness in the everyday by reminding us of a lived reality of relation too often obscured by a retroactive distancing between mind/body, self/other, subject/object, artist/artwork, discovery/invention" (Thain, 2008, p. 2). The hyphens between art-research-creation move inquiry away from research as the production of an artifact to a process that "reaches toward" (Manning, 2013). This process highlights the always already interconnectedness of philosophy, art, and research; the hyphen bridges research with creation to produce something seeking, ongoing and always incomplete. Manning's philosophies offer entry points for thinking-doing qualitative inquiry and pedagogy differently while supporting action and community change. Manning's philosophy expands the potential for qualitative research to "invent open problems that bring us together in the mode of active inquiry" (Manning, 2016, p. 10). Our engagements in research carry ethical and political resonances that extend beyond the boundaries of concretized ideas about data, methods, analysis, and gold standard findings. Beginning in the midst of these resonances, we highlight the potential of difference in this special issue.

Propose!

We begin with a few notes about logistics. We shared our open call widely with the qualitative inquiry community through the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Qualitative Research Special Interest Group listserv, Cultural Studies listservs, our personal networks, and the *RERM* website. We received twenty abstract proposals which were reviewed by the editorial team. Invited authors submitted a full manuscript which underwent internal review by other special issue authors, external review by scholars in the field, and editorial review by a member of the editorial team. The full issue was then reviewed for acceptance by the editors of *RERM*. The twelve manuscripts that appear in this special issue are authored by a diverse international group representing eight countries and a range of fields including education, art, research methods, philosophy, and geography. Three of the contributions were generated through participation or involvement with the SenseLab, which is led by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (Articles 2, 3, and 4 by Ramos, Mark, and Rousell et al. respectively).

We have purposefully grouped the articles in this special issue into three sets guided by Manning's provocations. The first: **Attune to the minor! Dis/orient!**, provides philosophical and physical grounding in Manning's work, shaking the foundations of knowledge production. These articles ask, *What happens when we can't attune or when we attune to the minor?* The second grouping: **Pay Attention! Valuate!** asks, *What happens when we orient to the taken for granted with an ethic of experimentation? How might we think with Manning's concepts to explore the everyday, the particular?* These articles explore a range of educational and methodological problems beginning with a taken for granted idea: masculinities, chairs, the interview, and impact. The authors think these commonplace ideas with and through Manning's philosophical concepts to see what new futures or orientations become possible. The third set: **Create with concepts! Become World!** explores the messiness and knots, the rough edges, the back, the tensions and deviations of research and methodology through creative, artful, and participatory inquiries. These writings linger in the process of doing to ask questions of representation, voice, and agency. In what follows we offer a brief overview of how we are thinking these sections together and apart.

Attune to the minor! Dis/orient!

We begin with philosophical and physical orientations and disorientations. In order to see the potential of difference, we ask, *What happens when we can't attune or when we attune to the minor?* The authors in this grouping demonstrate through their manuscripts the various ways that Manning's concepts, experiments, and provocations create alternative ways of knowing and spaces for other ways of being in and with the world through attunement.

Ana Ramos traces Manning's thoughts on intuition back through Whitehead, James, and Bergson providing an orientation to the process philosophy which trades, in Ramos's words, the question, "What is it?" for "What is happening?" This trade upsets traditional and conventional ideas of knowledge creation and transmission as knowledge being passed from subject to subject or subject to object. Instead, Whitehead proposes modes of activity concerning an object which adds

an affective dimension. Ramos asks, “what are the consequences of reshaping the structure of experience through this idea of concern?” (p. 18). She explores this question through a powerful accounting of fearful-event-The-Ring. She then brings the question to qualitative inquiry, “How does the object of study pull the researcher towards the eventing of knowing? (p. 20) and then how does the researcher, “Tend to the tendencies that emerge” (p. 20).

Elke Mark explores touch and felt experiences with a “bodily reflected view onto research-creation as an instrument for investigations into the field of tangible knowledge” (p. 28). She asks, what might astonishment-led research practices produce? and offers four propositions, “Bring the object into motion, let the object sound, let the object disappear, bring the object under tension” (pp. 43-44). Mark shares several examples of affirmative encounters within and across spaces (lecture halls, galleries, courtyards, public parks) and within and across objects (sculpture, ribbon, the skin of a cuddly toy dog, humans) created to attune to participant involvement in knowledge generation and to exhaust and question spoken word, text, language, and translation. These affirmative encounters allow us to “let go of the handrail of known concepts and enter a field of an unknown terrain of yet unfamiliar, dynamic, relational and sensuous knowledge” (p. 38).

Rousell, Cary, Kik, Robertson, and MacRea’s and Pyyry’s articles each propose interventions for attending to minor movements that suspend time and place. Rousell and colleagues engage with the infrathin and Pyyry considers the pre-individual through the Finnish *olla*. Rousell’s and colleagues work between London and Manchester pushed “the conceit of scholarly inquiry into deformed (dis)articulations” (p. 47, footnote). A series of eight suspensions unfold across two days from public parks and community gardens, to transit stations and depots, to gymnasiums and an anechoic chamber. These events invite the infrathin, “where what is felt, in the briefest interval, is the lived co-composition of difference” (Manning, 2020, p. 19, as cited in Rousell et al., p. 49). Pyyry sought out “surprising encounters” (p. 67) within everyday, domesticated spaces as anything but a waste of time. She tuned her researcher-body to the potentialities of hanging out and dwelling with the everyday landscapes through “actively doing nothing” and noticed how young people managed a “creative appropriation of spaces in an adult dominated world.” In the spirit of these articles, Susan read the manuscript while walking through the Pullman Railyard, noting, stopping and tracing—the line of her shoulder and glasses’ cord flattened into shadow across the page temporarily darkening words, the trace of grass that had been cut earlier, and the hum of a leaf blower blocks away to remove the trace of grass on another. Attuning to shadow, absence of grass, and reading while walking drew her attention to the “time-bending possibilities of artful practices in the everyday” (Rousell et al., p. 47) and brought her into the “collective experiment with how to make felt ‘the uneasiness of time in the making, time in the feeling, where time is at once the here-now and the not-quite-yet’ (Manning, 2020, p. 26)” (Rousell et al., p. 48). Both articles open alternative possibilities through attunement to the unexpected.

Pay attention! Valuate!

Following the concepts laid out in the first grouping of articles, our second set asks, what happens when we orient to the taken for granted with experimentation? How might we think with

Manning's concepts to explore the everyday, the particular? The first two articles in this series, by Vasquez and colleagues and Smithers, take up Manning's concepts through a particular focus on educational contexts as a site of the everyday. Both engage creatively and experimentally with taken for granted sites of schooling to resist the disciplining forces of neoliberal education. For example, opening this movement, Vasquez and colleagues explore the everyday schooling practices afforded by chairs and classroom discipline in K-12 education. They offer Manning's concepts of technique and technicity to explore how chairs emerge in the classroom as more than a stable object, and wonder how chairs become bodied through technique and technicity. They write that they "aimed to think-do across theory and practice, collectively creating knowledge through the process of multiple encounters with the chair... this required thinking the chair as technique, working the chair toward technicity" (p. 98). Similarly, Smithers offers that "Manning helps us redefine value in higher education, revalue the infrathin and the imperceptible, reconceptualize liberal education, and value the useless" (p. 103). Her exploration of the concept of impact with Manning offers a careful attunement to how we can think measurement otherwise. Smithers, similar to Vasquez and colleagues, finds that practices of research-creation offer an affirmative orientation to the excesses, the otherwise, the imperceptibilities of student experience that "involves a radical commitment to experimentation" (p. 113).

The next set of articles in this series take an explicit orientation to Manning's project for qualitative inquiry through a focus on the practices of the interview (Ravindran) and the concept of chaos (Robinson). Both Ravindran and Robinson engage with the field of qualitative inquiry to ask critical questions about time and space. As Ravindran writes, "I shift focus from what the interview is, as discursive object, to what it can do as a processual event-time movement and with the interview-participant-voicerecorder-event-semblage" (p. 130). Or, as Robinson writes, "Qualitative inquiry, I suggest, needs more chaos, and it needs more chaos more than it needs more method. A chaozmatic qualitative inquiry seeks the disequibrial, understanding chaos not only as observed disorder, but also as the processes by which the real, the virtual, and the actual flicker in and out of becoming" (p. 152). Finally, Sweet's article, a coda to the others in this section, continues to experiment with the everyday practices of schooling, and wonder about the implications of philosophical thought for educational research. Fractured masculinities, thought with Manning "attunes to the process of fracturing, not the moment of fracture or pieces of fracture" (p. 169). Working the hyphen between methodology-philosophy, ordinary-particular through a focus on education and inquiry, this section provides the ground for the final grouping of articles, which explore the relationship between art-research.

Create with concepts! Become world!

The final grouping of articles thinks with the knots, the messiness, the excess of thinking-doing-becoming with research-creation. The authors in this group each explore a space where they (re)orient themselves by thinking/doing/acting qualitative inquiry with Manning in an effort to approach educational research differently. While the articles in the previous section applied or plugged in Manning's philosophy to a research or inquiry site, the authors in this final section

enact, embody, and become with her philosophy to trouble the limits of representation. For example, thinking with Manning and the process of writing her dissertation, Bowstead asserts that thinking less about what the writing is and shifting focus on what the writing could do makes possible “find[ing] joy in the creative intellectual endeavour that is writing a thesis” (p. 189). Likewise, Osgood and colleagues consider the “dance of agency” as they embody the process of virusing-with through an attunement to the minor. They explore how virusing-with methodology puts into focus their many privileges, which has required them to encounter the world differently. They write, “the practice of following vectors takes us to interdisciplinary knowledge-creation processes which emerged in direct response to the lightning speed at which this virus spreads, mutates, and challenges old orthodoxies and certainties” (p. 224). A focus on reimagining, thought with Manning’s concepts and artful practices is carried through Murray’s and Gale’s writing about writing, as they share, “by not finishing the work we learn to live with the question without solution, we keep experimenting, inventing. We get to stay as alive as the problem” (p. 203). Turning and returning the process, Murray and Gale offer that an ethic of experimentation is also an ethics of justice, one that continually questions who is included and excluded, and how we question and practice togetherness. Finally, Coogler and Guyotte close out the contributions of the special issue thinking relationally between backs and fronts with/in mess and process between writing and embroidery techniques. Embodying Manning’s concepts of technique and technicity they “hope that you will experiment with a methodology of the front-and-back, and discover how it opens up the event to the unforeseen and disrupts the routine” (p. 247). Indeed, they close with 10 propositions for messy inquiry inspired by Manning (2016). Guyotte’s and Coogler’s propositions echo the propositions that opened this introduction, propositions that also framed our original call for contributions. We begin and conclude with these provocations in the hope that you, the readers of this special issue, are inspired to experiment, to create, to move, and to act, provoked by the thinkings, writings, and creations of the contributors in this issue.

Return the return!

We are particularly honored to conclude the special issue with two commentaries. The first, by David Lee Carlson, who shepherded this special issue into being, offers implications of Manning’s project for educational research. The second, by Erin Manning, explores the provocations this special issue inspire(d). Both commentaries were written in response to the manuscripts of the special issue and offer provocations for future ways of thinking doing creating qualitative inquiry, a future-yet-to-come.

Affirm all that appears!

We would like to close with appreciations to the bodies, minds, concepts, ideas, and materials that came together in the event-space that produced this special issue. We recognize that there are many sources of inspiration and provocation that we cannot cite. We cannot always know the ways that the cat jumping onto our lap or the sun hitting a particular page at a particular moment might have moved our/their/your writing differently. Yet, we will name what we can. Thanks to all of the authors of manuscripts that came along with us and revised and polished their manuscripts

for this special issue. We appreciate and thank all the reviewers for their caring and constructive feedback on manuscripts that sometimes stretched the boundaries of what knowledge-making looks like. Thanks to Whitney Toledo for her work copy-editing and formatting manuscripts as they were prepared for publication and revision. And finally, thanks to David Lee Carlson who first brought Erin's work to most of us in one way or another, and to Erin Manning for her prolific and lovely and thought-provoking writings/doings/makings. We have only begun to feel the resonances.

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