

Becoming Scholars with Data: Exploring Imaginative Methodological Practices

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Abstract

Our intention in this inquiry was to imaginatively engage with data to see what may be made possible. Informed by the ontological turn (Zembylas, 2017) and a call for creative engagement with data (Wolgemuth et al., 2025), we leveraged cognitive tools (Egan, 1997, 2005), to playfully engage with interview transcripts. Despite approaching the inquiry from a relational, more-than-human ontology, we found ourselves continually constrained by humanist understandings. Our inquiry highlights how implicit and deeply-entrenched our assumptions about research are; we illuminate these assumptions by exploring iterative problematics that arose in our playful engagement. Our engagement in this inquiry allowed the data to work on us, as we worked on the data, producing us differently as researchers and as scholars. Our experience with imaginative methodology opened up possibility and proliferated the ‘what if?’ required to move beyond dominant ways of knowing. However, our experience demonstrates the tensions we continue to navigate as becoming-researchers.

Keywords: imagination; post-human; relational ontology; entanglement

Our Intention¹

This project started with our desire to play with different methodological practices. We sought to employ our imaginations to engage with conventional humanist data (i.e., interview transcripts) to see what might be possible for understanding data and ourselves as researchers. Inspired by others who are engaging in data analysis differently (Pears-Scown, 2024; Ringrose et al., 2019; Safron, 2019; Wolgemuth et al., 2025), we sought to intra-act with the data in imaginative and creative ways. We jumped into this playful inquiry—experimenting, creating, reflecting—within a post-humanist ontology. We embraced imagination as an organizing and disorganizing process. Imagination allows sense-making and sense-breaking; imagination allows us to see “both what it actually is in the here and now, and the possibilities the imagination allows us to see in it” (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018, p. 36). Where research often involves sense-making and using data to understand a phenomenon, we were curious how imagination might allow us to break through accepted understandings and see new possibilities. We were particularly interested in exploring the ways in which imagination expands possibilities. Seeking to play with this opening-onto-the-new and not-yet feature of imagination, we wondered: What does engaging with data imaginatively teach us about research and about ourselves as researchers?

Who We Are

First, before we introduce ourselves, a note on our language. We use a first-person plural tense to discuss this inquiry process and our becoming-with the inquiry. We (there it is again) recognize that our experiences within the inquiry are both shared and unique, and that ‘we’ encapsulates much more than just us, as authors. We recognize the multiplicity of our entanglement and the complexity of agents co-constituting this experience. We chose ‘we’ for our discussion to highlight the plurality of human and non-human agents involved and to demonstrate the sharing of our ideas as a collective enunciation of these entanglements (see Mazzei & Jackson, 2016). Our voice emerges from these intra-actions. Yet we experience tension existing as multiplicities; within the excerpts we share from our research journals, we return to the singular first-person, ‘I’. We note our humanistic tendency to see and express ourselves as individual agents is well engrained and requires effort to continually recognize and deconstruct. We want to highlight this tension throughout our discussion and have included both ‘us/we’ and ‘I’ to demonstrate how we are constantly pulled back into humanist ways of thinking and being. We will discuss these ideas in more detail as we travel together through this research story.

As researchers, we are connected by a shared interest in imagination, leadership, and education. We are all researchers, educators, and leaders in different educational spaces ranging from K-12 through post-secondary. While we have all conducted research exploring imagination in different educational spaces, a joint project seeking to understand imagination’s role in leadership brought us together (see Judson & Dougherty, 2023). After that project, we shared a desire to cultivate imagination explicitly in our research process—to explore the sense-breaking power of imagination to unlearn some of the deeply-rooted humanist concepts of research we are most

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familiar with. That inquiry process is the focus of this paper.

We recognize our privilege as White, able-bodied, cisgendered, heterosexual, settler women from the Global North. We can engage in research because we hold stable employment in education and are not attempting to survive off sessional contracts at numerous institutions. We have the privilege to play with ideas and to reflect on our own position as scholars and what research means to us. Although our institutions may, we don't subscribe to research dissemination as commodity and don't value high-yield publication schedules. Instead, we value relationality and are committed to exploring how the status quo reproduces inequity in education (and beyond). We are invested and hopeful that deconstructing and reconceptualizing taken-for-granted practices can open new possibilities for a more just and responsible way of relating to one another. We are interested in the role of imagination in catalyzing this process of deconstructing and reconstructing our shared world.

As part of our exploration, we kept individual research journals and shared our writing for additional dialogue. Throughout our discussion that follows, we weave excerpts from our reflective research journals to highlight our experiences, challenges, and thinking as we learned together. Below, we introduce ourselves, drawing on these excerpts to articulate our position in relation to this inquiry.

Introductions: Meaghan

"What is the relationship between imagination and hope?" Hot tea on a hot day. Shade from the patio umbrella. The voices of our recent shared conversations playing in our heads and interspersing themselves back into the conversation. The past re-appearing as the present. And future. Re-storying the future. The idea of imagining something different; what is not yet. Imagination as a root – a rhizome? – that springs into play in unexpected ways in varied contexts. How can we cultivate it? Typing fast to capture all of the ideas that connect to one another in tangential ways. Tap tap tap – the sound of keys running to keep up with the jumping, twisting, circling ideas. Writing to make sense of things; writing to make connections clear. Visions of education as stoic, unemotional, unmoving; imagination as a catalyst for movement, emergence, and becoming. Inquiry as fluid, emergent, and becoming. Imagination is an integral part of inquiry. (research journal excerpt)

I have been moved by ideas of hope, of imagining something different. I have been inspired by our work together and want to inquire further into the relations between hope, research, imagination, and justice with my amazing friends. I am interested in the ways that research reproduces itself and how we might engage in knowledge production differently. I am hopeful that there is power in knowledge creation that can disrupt sedimented ideas about education, research, and our relationships with and responsibilities to one another.

Given the real lived impacts of knowledge production, I am curious about the role of imagination in sense-breaking and opening new potentialities for justice. Knowledge is agential in shaping our encounters; what we know shapes how we relate in and to the world. As such, knowledge can also

provide new ways of thinking and doing that promote ethical engagement and equitable encounters. To me, responsible research (Kuntz, 2015) is driven by an ethical imperative to continually remake the world in a more just way (Barad, 2007). That's what I bring into my exploration with Gillian and Sarah.

Introductions: Gillian

I began this work curious and hopeful. Issues of trustworthiness, participant voice, and representation have always been my north stars. However, I acknowledge the reductionist tendencies of the research practices I have been trained to employ. Despite seeking richness in description and inviting participant agency, I know my work distills; it simplifies phenomena to re/present. I also come to this work deeply-invested in studying imagination in the context of teaching, learning, and leadership. I notice the glaring absence of imagination from research conversations and from my own research practices. Up until now, I haven't explicitly employed imagination in my research process; I have been researching *about* tools of imagination, but I haven't situated them in my own methodology. I wonder about the possibilities of imagination-driven research. How might imagination help me not only *make* meaning, but *break* meaning and create new knowledge? (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018)

I hope to *play* in this work; to experiment; to freely engage with data to better understand research and myself as researcher. Nachmanovitch (1990) reminds me of the value of play for my scholarship:

To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility. This is the evolutionary value of play—play makes us flexible. By reinterpreting reality and begetting novelty, we keep from becoming rigid. Play enables us to rearrange our capacities and our very identity so that they can be used in unforeseen ways. (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 43)

However, play, like imagination, often lives in scholarly shadows, misunderstood and delegated to the margins. I wonder: How can we play in/as research? I believe play creates different encounters, involves different investments of time and space, and results in different meaningful research opportunities.

Introductions: Sarah

I entered this research entanglement full of wonder and excitement. I'm quite literally a becoming scholar (emerging scholar), having only applied traditional qualitative and quantitative methods to a limited set of research studies. However, I have long been interested in the study of imagination, specifically as a poet and fiction writer, and now as an educational leader. I'm fascinated with historical conceptions of imagination that range from it being fundamental to human understanding (Kant, 1998) to being self-indulgent or frivolous, to, in the case of poetic imagination, morally dangerous (Plato, 1943). As Cocking (1973) wrote, "Imagination is not a concept which sustains art...but a myth which sustains it: a myth rich in possible interpretations"

(p. 267-268). In other words, despite exhaustive attempts to explain and define imagination, individuals and institutions continue to attribute their fears and failures; fantasies and desires; innovations and aspirations to the power of the imagination. I continue to ask myself: *How do I subscribe to or subvert the myths of imagination?*

I'm equally interested in imagination's cultural lore as I am in its applications to the field of leadership and research. I'm curious how poetic imagination (imbued with mythical properties) can disrupt oppressive or antiquated practices in educational leadership, and how it can be exercised in schools to unlock new thinking patterns and prompt innovative solutions to problems of practice.

In the case of this study, we committed to engaging tools of imagination to the research process itself. We discussed bringing our full selves to the experience of thinking about, reading, and playing with these transcripts and allowing things to emerge from the entanglement. We intentionally did not design research questions and instead want to record exactly how we enter this process "in the middle" (Springgay & Truman, 2018). What have we been listening to? Reading? Thinking about? How does jumping into the middle of the research without a script affect where we go next? I'm reminded of being an undergrad student in Sr. Christian Koontz's *The Living Journal* class. She made us begin every diary entry "*In this moment, I...*" How seemingly subtle to begin *in the moment*, not the past, not recounting what already happened, not employing a pre-determined set of research templates, but simply recording what is happening right now.

I'm exhilarated by the idea of approaching my research differently, without a desire for evidence and certainty which "shrinks the world of exceptional and unanticipated capacity to a fraction of its actual infinitude" (Skott-Myhre, 2016, p. 18). *In this moment, I...* am wide open to the infinite possibilities of the imagination and what it can teach me about research.

What Thoughts we are Thinking With

Haraway (2016) reminds us that "it matters what thoughts think thoughts" (p. 35). While these thoughts, concepts, and ideas are always already related to others, here we try to pull on some of these thoughts to highlight the connections. We also recognize that as we discuss these concepts, they are shifting and slipping through our fingers. Our intention is not to try to capture a fixed definition, but to interact with the dynamic and interconnected concepts we continue to think with.

Our inquiry was shaped by/in/with more-than-human, relational ethico-onto-epistemologies. Barad (2007) argues that what we know, how we know, and what is possible to know is inseparable from our understanding of reality and existence. Ethics, knowledge, and being are mutually co-constitutive. Knowing and being are inextricable and have ethical implications; we are of the world. We exist in relation.

This onto-epistemological shift involves a different understanding of existence and relations over

time and space; rather than center a stable, knowing, and knowable human subject who exercises agency over objects and nature over a linear chronology, existence is human and non-human agents becoming in relation or entanglement (Barad, 2007). These agents intra-act, co-constituting as integral aspects of an entanglement; they do not exist independently of one another (Barad, 2007). That is, they are becoming-with one another, bringing one another into existence. We come into existence and knowledge in entanglement with material and discursive forces.

Our inquiry involves various agents in entanglement, including but not limited to, ourselves as multiplicities, learning, leadership, dialogue, Zoom screens, imagination, possibility, collage, teachers, leaders, markers, poetry, participants, highlighters, knowing, questioning, and more. Each agent intra-acting and inextricable. Entanglements are dynamic; each agent reconstitutes into various entanglements. Infinite arrangements of entanglements exist within a phenomenon, such that the phenomenon can be explored in various ways. What is made to matter, as Barad (2007) discusses, is determined through a boundary making process. Agential cuts are the boundaries enacted to define phenomenon; the phenomenon can be reconsidered and recreated through different boundary-enacting agential cuts (Barad, 2007). That is, the phenomenon does not exist independently as something to be studied; it is created through the agential cuts used to define its boundaries. The apparatus used to examine the phenomenon is also producing the phenomenon (not merely explaining it), ‘cutting together-apart’ the entanglement through various agential cuts (Barad, 2014). According to Barad (2007), apparatuses “are macroscopic material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition, to the exclusion of others, and through which particular phenomena with particular determinate physical properties are produced” (p. 142). Apparatuses, then, determine boundaries, producing the phenomenon, while being part of the entangled phenomenon they are defining. As Barad states, “apparatuses are not passive observing instruments; on the contrary, they are productive of (and part of) phenomena” (Barad, 2007, p. 142).

We think with Barad, thinking ourselves as multiplicities, co-constituting various human and non-human agents in dynamic, shifting entanglements, defined and produced through agential cuts. This thinking pulls at strings, connecting to concepts of becoming and becoming-with.

And...²

Entanglements, made up of human and non-human elements, are dynamic, constantly forming and reforming. Each agent within the entanglement is in an ongoing process of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005). Becoming is ongoing transition. Potentiality exists in becoming; it is not important what one was or what one became. According to Deleuze and Guattari (2005),

Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming,

² Here we draw on Deleuze and Parnet’s (1987) concept of “and” as an “extra being, an inter being...(that) gives relations another direction and puts to flights terms and sets, the former and the latter on the line of flight which it actively creates” (p. 57).

not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. (p. 238)

Deleuze and Guattari (2005) go on to explain that “a becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification...To become is not to progress or regress along a series” (p. 237-238). In other words, for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is not a series of steps towards an end point, or a regression away from a finalized identification; it is not a path between two points. Becoming is not an attribute of an individual and it is not a linear process between a start point and an end point. Becoming, as presented by Deleuze and Guattari (2005) defies clear representation; it cannot be encapsulated in an example of individual experience.

Becoming is an unfinalizable process, involving the “replacement of static conceptions of things through the creation of dynamic conceptions of processes in continual transition” (Grosz, 2005, p. 10). This process of continual transition is not distinct to human life but involves all living and non-living elements. All agents within a dynamic entanglement are in a process of continual transition, as are the shifting entanglements themselves; this creates potentiality.

And...

This idea of becoming then connects and pulls at Haraway’s ideas of becoming-with and rendering capable (Haraway, 2016). Haraway plays with story to explore the idea of companion species, connected together, becoming-with one another and rendering one another capable. As she explains, “ontologically heterogeneous partners become who and what they are in relational material-semiotic worlding. Natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings” (p. 13). In relation, these partners become-with, co-constituting one another, and determining what is possible.

For Haraway, creating new potentialities and actualities is not part of a progress narrative; we are not working towards justice or equity or utopia. Instead, we are encouraged to “stay with the trouble.” As Haraway notes, “I am not interested in reconciliation or restoration, but I am deeply-committed to the more modest possibilities of partial recuperation and getting on together (p. 10).

And...

We intend to use these thoughts to think differently so we can do differently and be differently so we can respond in and of the world in ethical and responsible ways. Grounded in ethical response-ability (Barad, 2007, 2012; Haraway, 2016) and responsibility (Kuntz, 2015), more-than-human approaches to research question and deconstruct humanist ideas that constrain knowledge production into reproducing itself and instead, invite researchers to be playful, creative, imaginative, and dynamic in exploring the otherwise.

What Does this Do in our Inquiry?

“It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It

matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 35). These ideas and concepts, are made to matter in how we become-with other agents in our research entanglements.

For us, this meant recognizing ourselves as part of the research entanglement—always already becoming in relation to the human and non-human agents in this entanglement. This ontological shift moved the purpose of our work away from representation or meaning and into producing new thoughts and plugging into new ways of being.

We recognized our explicit intention to be playful and imaginative in exploring the data in different ways, inspired by more-than-human, relational onto-ethico-epistemologies. We were drawn to the concept of work/think/play, discussed by Hughes et al. (2018) and others in their special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry*. It resonated that engaging with data involves work/think/playing with our past, present, and future understandings, experiences, longings, ideas, encounters, and more. As St. Pierre (2011) notes:

I imagine a cacophony of ideas swirling as we think 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 all 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 our thinking. (p. 622)

So, we work/think/play with all we can muster to generate new ideas. We, as researchers, think with all we have, and all we are (St. Pierre, 2011), to catalyze new thoughts and ideas – so we can think differently. And we sought to do this in a slow, playful way (Ulmer, 2017) that emphasizes the “need to keep raising questions rather than finding answers” (Hughes et al., 2018, p. 601). We recognized the need to remain in tension, engaging in intentional and ongoing problematizing in our research process (Springgay & Truman, 2018).

Work/Think/Play

The interview transcripts we work/think/play with/in this inquiry came from a qualitative project Gillian and Meaghan were engaged in. We had interviewed graduate students about their experiences in a unique imagination-focused Masters of Educational Leadership (MEd.) in a large public research institution in British Columbia, Canada. For that project, we engaged in a process of thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2019) and had some important and relevant findings related to educational leadership and the power of imagination (Judson & Dougherty, 2024; Dougherty & Judson, 2025). However, we were left questioning how imagination—such a key concept in our work—was enacted in our methodological process. What might be made possible if we imagined data analysis differently? We sought to engage with the stories of our participants within a more-than-human ontology.

Our intention in this inquiry was to jump into the middle (Springgay & Truman, 2018). Rather than

a pre-determined research design guided by a specific research question, we jumped into playful engagement with the data. Individually and collaboratively, we began work/think/playing with the interview transcripts. Inspired by others (e.g., Davies, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Masny, 2016; Palmer, 2011; Warfield, 2019), we engaged in an emergent process without a standard research question or prescriptive research design.

We sought to engage the power of imagination by putting cognitive tools (Egan, 1997, 2005) to work. Drawing on Lev Vygotsky, Egan (1992, 1997, 2005) describes how the human imagination and meaning-making are shaped by an array of different thinking tools; these cognitive tools are described as socio-cultural and linguistic tools that aid our understanding. Cognitive tools aid in meaning making, allowing us to close the gap between what we understand and what we seek to understand. Story, imagery, extremes and limits, humour, and change of context—to name a few—are powerful tools to think with. They help with meaning-making and engage us affectively. Cognitive tools also allow us to think beyond the ‘what is’ to the ‘what if’; it was this sense-breaking function of cognitive tools that we wanted to engage in data analysis. The power of cognitive tools has been explored in relation to curriculum and pedagogy (Egan & Judson, 2015; Judson et al., 2021) and, more recently, in relation to educational leadership (Judson, 2020, 2022, 2023a, 2023b; Judson & Dougherty, 2024; Dougherty & Judson, 2025). We sought to explore if these tools of imagination could be generative in methodology, specifically in data analysis.

We put different cognitive tools to work. This playful process included writing poetry, drawing, collaging, mindmapping, exploring silence and paraverbals, and putting stories from the transcripts into conversation with one another. We also reflected on this process, individually in writing, and shared these writings with one another to prompt further dialogue.

A self-proclaimed not “artsy” type acknowledges how he realized imagination was within them all along. Imagination is in me, they say. Imagination is in me. I am engaged by a feeling of uncertainty; I’m insecure as I let go of my known re/presentational research practice. Engaged and uneasy. Imagination is in me, too. I am imagination. [research journal excerpt]



Figure 1.

Cognitive tools tug on my sleeve as I engage in the story of the data, vivid mental images fill my head. And so I play, I make meaning through the pattern of random images that pop up on my screen. I feel a sense of mystery and enjoy the fertile incongruity of collage. I play.

I see an evolution of the meaning of imagination—I create unlearning from left to right. It ‘ends’ with someone who can and does see, but does also, not see fully with a cultural, situated backdrop. The digital collage program randomizes a title: “a collage of a person and a zebra” making me laugh. It’s perfectly imperfect. [research journal excerpt]

Together, we interrogated our analytic process, questioning our assumptions about data, analysis, research, and ourselves as researchers. We recognized that our embodied exploratory process engaging with data altered our developing conceptions of research and ourselves as researchers and that these conceptions of research are intertwined with our developing understandings of imagination.

Our Problematics

We explore our journey through this inquiry by illustrating three problematics we experienced (are experiencing?) while work/think/playing with the data. Specifically, we wrestled with (are wrestling with?) the power of representation, the dominance of the human subject, and how an ontological shift promotes world-making and sense-breaking. These problematics are presented sequentially for clarity, yet offer the illusion that the tensions and the dialogue, reflection, and learnings entangled with the problematics were chronological. In fact, we were entangled with these problematics and iteratively explored how and why we were, despite our best intentions, being pulled back into humanist understandings of research that limited what was possible. Perhaps each problematic offered an opportunity to deeply interrogate our engrained assumptions about research and our ideas of what it means to be a researcher. As we questioned

research and what it means to be a researcher, we interrogated the relationship between imagination and research. We recognized tension between our conceptualizations of imagination—what we were attempting to engage and enact in our inquiry—and our experience of a relational, more-than-human ontology. These problematics highlighted the concept of imagination as a relational, dynamic concept; multiplicities of agential forces in our research entanglements. Each problematic invited us to further explore the emergence of varied philosophical conceptualizations of imagination and our understandings of research and knowledge production. Below we discuss our problematics and what imagination does within a relational, more-than-human ontology.

Problematic: The Power of Representation



Figure 2.

As discussed above, we began our exploration by jumping into the middle of our data. More accurately, we *attempted* to jump into the middle by work/think/playing with a shared transcript; each of us individually engaged with the transcript using various cognitive tools.

Although we intended to jump into the middle, we engaged in a humanist approach to thematic analysis. Individually, we played with the stories of the participant through art and collaging (invoking vivid mental imagery), poetry (invoking story, metaphor, and limits and extremes) and an examination of what was not said. The stories of this specific participant were marked with spaces of silence, difficulty finding words to adequately explain, and many statements ended with the question “you know?” or “right?” We interpreted these stories and what was not said in different ways, highlighting different aspects of the transcript in visual, poetic, and story form. Despite our intention to recognize multiplicities and entanglement, we resorted back to representation and us, as humanist agents making meaning from the transcript.

We met regularly to discuss our engagement with the data and what we were noticing ourselves notice throughout the process. Despite our intention to play unfettered with the data in imaginative ways, our imaginative approaches to the data were not distinct from a thematic analysis. We found ourselves seeking out key themes or codes and then determining how to represent these themes within our various forms. So, while our intention was that engaging cognitive tools would expand our engagement with the data—that is, catalyze sense-breaking—we found we returned to our established ways of sense-making. This should have foreshadowed to us how, despite our intentions to do, be, and think differently, we were constantly pulled back into our own internalized expectations of humanist qualitative research.

We were attempting to make sense of the transcript, drawing on a swirling, as St. Pierre (2011) calls it, of past experiences, ideas, and understandings. Our understanding, and later our artistic representations, of the transcript was contextualized in these relationships, experiences, and the connections of these experiences to other memories, from a show we had watched, a book we had a read, a dream we had dreamt.

Disjointed one-liners from John Berger's (2008) Ways of Seeing; I originally jotted the lines down while I was collaging.

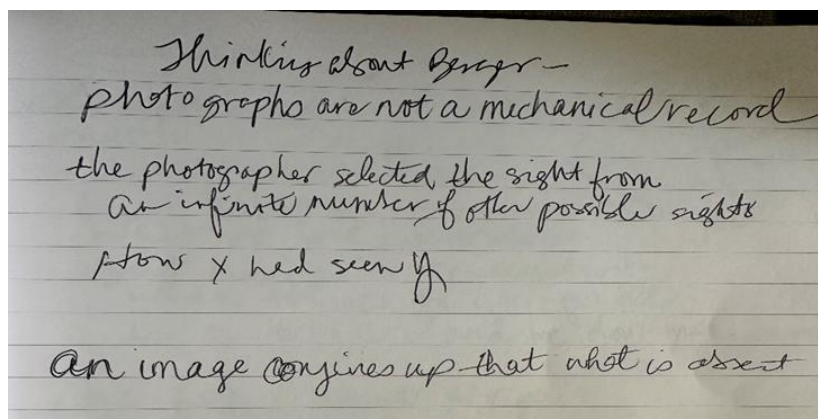


Figure 3.

Meta-journaling: Today I read a book of John Koethe (2022) poems and thought about thinking about collaging:

"Sheltering at Home" an excerpt

We like to think of the imagination

As inexhaustible and transcendent, but it's as earthbound as we are

As we cling to an idea of someplace better than the one we have.

You believe you see it through the window, but it's just your own

Reflection in the mirror (p. 36)

At times during the research process, I/we believed we were eschewing or “transcending” humanist qualitative methodologies for more imaginative ones, but we would be faced with our own reflections in the mirror—imagination as earthbound as we are. [research journal excerpt]

This research excerpt demonstrates how the lines from a book, pieces of a poem, the act of collaging, thinking about collaging, and thinking about thinking about collaging swirl and intra-act. A similar experience, expressed differently, in the following excerpt explores the swirling that occurs and how the data is working on us, while we are working on the data:

I tried to jump into the middle of the transcript. Can I remove myself from my entanglements to read this story without a swirling of past thoughts, ideas, and experiences? Is that possible? Necessary? From the transcript, I kept highlighting the push and pull/tension between what is and what has been and what’s possible. I felt like the participant was caught between the black and white linearity and classification of the school system, where there is little focus on thinking, and the possibility that awaits beyond, outside (both figuratively and literally). In the beyond, framed by nature and place, is possibility. We don’t know what is possible in the beyond. But for me, I wonder if this tension that I’ve highlighted is my own tension. Do I hear this tension because it resonates with me and my experience? This tension—working within and against the status quo—comes up for me in all my work. So, is this my own becoming-with the research? Am I the image in the collage? [research journal excerpt]

Through our reflective writings and collaborative dialogue, we recognized that we strongly related research to representation. Although we used non-traditional or more arts-based cognitive tools to engage our imaginations, our implicit understanding was that we needed to ‘represent’ the participant’s story in an ethical way. Our attempts to write poetry and story were limited by representational language; our attempts to push into drawing and collage were visual representations of the themes we had informally deduced from the transcript. Although the mediums looked different, we were producing the same results as a traditional thematic analysis.

Problematic: The Human Subject

We tried to reorient ourselves by moving away from language and focusing on more arts-based engagement with the data. We explored one transcript through a variety of forms that enacted mental imagery (e.g., drawing, collage with materials, virtual collage, etc.). We found the process of engaging through virtual collaging resonated; we sought to explore this further. A research journal excerpt describes this process of collage-making:

The collage-making process seems to pull me in; I’m engaged. I realize how many cognitive tools are involved in collage-making as an analytic process—I begin with the story of the data, then, with mental imagery evoked from the transcripts I play with different digital

visual forms, employing metaphor that both re/presents and creates the new; my body emotionally responds in delight at the colour, pattern and form; I enjoy the incongruity of images, feeling how juxtapositions and entanglements of image and colour enrich and expand my curiosity. I am curious about how and why collage-making catalyzes so much thinking, feeling and meaning for me as a research process. And so I return to one of our initial guiding questions for this research: "How do I work/think/play with cognitive tools?" [research journal excerpt]

We found ourselves immersed in the collage process. We created collages using a virtual collage app and then met regularly to discuss this process. What did it allow and restrict and what did this process do to us, as researchers? Collaging engaged us affectively, as we were entangled with, among other things, colour, curiosity, juxtaposition, and delight. However, we were still questioning how to represent the stories shared by the participants. This brought up questions about ethics, accuracy, trustworthiness, and responsibility. We were constrained by the idea that we had the responsibility, as researchers, to accurately represent the participant; we had to ensure we were representing what they had intended or meant.

As we explored this tension with representation, we also began to question our use of cognitive tools. Although unsaid, we enacted humanist assumptions about ourselves, as researchers, and of the power of cognitive tools. We sought to employ cognitive tools—tools to think with—as an archaeologist would employ brushes, shovels, and trowels. Despite our relational onto-ethico-epistemology, our deeply-engrained and implicit humanist assumption was that we, as stable human subjects, would navigate the field of study, and through careful digging and excavation, discover new and important understandings. This understanding of the human subject as independently agential, knowing and knowable, using material, objects, and nature over a linear chronology is deconstructed in relational ontologies. We exist in relation, entangled with other human and non-human agents that we co-constitute. It is these entanglements that define existence. Although we recognize our intra-connection and our existence in entanglement, we get pulled back into seeing ourselves—into experiencing ourselves—as human subjects, as the star of the show. Instead of wielding tools for exploration and discovery, we were in a process of becoming-with cognitive tools, rendering our research entanglement capable.

Working with collage and interrogating our use of cognitive tools led to questions about our entanglements. How are we entangled with/through this inquiry? What agents are participating in this research with us? How are we being constituted and brought into existence, through this process?

In the collage, I wanted to show imagination is not only in the stratosphere, mythological, fantasy, play do-dah. It is art (that is refined), it is unlearning, seeking and collaborating, talking, reaching and striving to engage others. I find myself wishing that I had particular images in the bank...feeling like the choices lead me in certain directions. Maybe the choices I am not expecting actually elicit new ideas? What agents are participating in this research with me? [research journal excerpt]

Problematic: Sense-breaking and World-Making

Our creation of collages led to a new set of questions. What now? What do we do with these material productions? Discussion ensued. Are these new data sources to analyze? Or are these collages a material production of our research entanglement? A result? An artifact? A 'voice' emanating from our intra-actions?

We recognize our process as "post-human co-production" (Renolds & Ivinson, 2022, p. 108), where we collaboratively created material "dartaphacts" (Renolds & Ivinson, 2022). Dartaphacts are where data/art are made to matter through a post-human lens (Renolds & Ivinson, 2022). This process of co-production through material dartaphacts allowed us to affectively experience relational, performative, and more-than human ways of being.

While we worked on the collages, poems, and other artifacts, they were working on us. And they continue to work on us. We co-constitute one another and create something new. The imaginative process creates new potentiality; an emergent, processual research experience that allows us to question our conceptualizations of data, representation, meaning, and voice, and our interrelationship with these concepts.



Figure 4.

Throughout these problematics and our iterative discussion, reading, thinking, wondering, and playing with the problematics, we recognize the ongoing tension between becoming relational but being constrained by humanistic ideas that regulate how the world works.

My questions have evolved over the course of the project. At first I wondered, what if we explore a more imagination-driven research process? What if we employ cognitive tools to analyze the transcripts? What if I read the transcripts without a plan? What if I see what happens? I write. What if I draw? I sketch. What if I collage? I create. And then I began to

ask: What if I quiet the qualitative research voices in my head? For example, the belief that our responsibility as researchers is “representation of meaning”, clarity, confirmability? What if re/presentation is an illusion? What if these collages make no sense to anyone else? Does that matter? What if what matters is what is happening in the process and presence of collage-making? What if I consider/acknowledge the human, non-human, more-than-human agents participating in this research process with me? [research journal excerpt]

This experience of moving beyond representation and exploring more-than-human relationality was inextricably linked with understandings of imagination that shape how we see research. Given our focus on enacting imagination in a playful and generative way, we were initially interested in how conceptualizations of imagination influence how we approach research. We recognize that this too, was a blurring of humanist ideas and assumptions. We thought that explicitly identifying various conceptualizations of what imagination is and does would highlight the influence of imagination in shaping research and knowledge creation. In exploring some conceptualizations of imagination (and not others), we recognized that we were seeking a fixed definition that would help us understand how we were constrained by humanist research expectations throughout our inquiry. We are think/work/playing with imagination as a multiplicity; a concept that cannot be fixed and exists only in relation. Below we think/work/play with imagination as a relational agential force.

Re-Imagining Imagination as an Agential Force

Concepts are jellyfish, changing shape and slipping through our grasp. We try to freeze them in time, but even time folds in on itself. ‘Imagination’ takes many bodies...and might be a tree and could be a pencil. And, and, and. We want to see with these concepts of imagination; try them on like different lenses. Which looks clearer? 1 or 2? 2 or 3? But the slippery, shape-shifting concepts are part of our entanglement. Part of us. Inseparable. Co-constituted. Different aspects of the entanglement intensified with different agential cuts. Various concepts of imagination cutting together-apart our entanglement, producing different understandings. Different realities. [research journal excerpt]

As seen throughout our iterative engagement with these problematics, we are continually pulled into enacting humanist concepts, ideas, and practices, despite our intention to recognize and illuminate our relational ontology. We wrestle with the dominant ideas and humanist practices that are actualized in our research process.

Imagination, as a concept or idea, is an agent in our research entanglement, dynamic and becoming. We are becoming-with imagination, and other human and non-human agents, co-constituting and rendering ourselves capable. The varied ideas or conceptualization of what imagination is and what it does act as agents; our exploration of these entanglements, through varied apparatuses enacting different agential cuts, creates boundaries and influences what materializes. Below, we discuss how these varied conceptualizations of imagination act as agential forces within the research entanglements and how agential cuts determine what conceptualizations are made to matter.

We don't intend to offer a comprehensive history of imagination (see Egan, 1992 or Kind, 2016, for a more detail on this) but do want to highlight the importance of different conceptualizations of imagination in relation to research and knowledge production. We see each of these dynamic conceptualizations as agents within our research entanglement. We highlight imagination as conceived by David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Paul Sartre to demonstrate how these varied conceptualizations intra-act in our entanglement. As we examine the entanglement, we are in a boundary-setting process, intensifying or actualizing different agents. Throughout our entangled process, these concepts acted as agential forces, shaping our becoming-with the data.

Hume – Imagination as Re-membering Past Perceptions

David Hume's conceptualization of imagination equates imagination and perception; imagination is fed by perception and represents impressions and/or copies of what has been perceived (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2023). According to Hume, imagination creates a mental image of what is not present but has been perceived. The mimetic (copying) aspects of imagination offers coherence; as a reproductive process, the imagination synthesizes perceptions and experiences into images (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2023). For Hume, this recreative or reproductive role is valuable in scientific research—allowing repetition and understanding a “knowable and predictable” world (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2023). While advocating this recreative and reproductive role and its connection to reason, Hume distrusted imagination, acknowledging how it can also evoke novel creations and spur the irrational—fictions that are fanciful but also possibly dangerous.

Hume's understanding of imagination—as both the re-membering of the past and the synthesis of memories into schema that promotes meaning-making—aligns with traditional qualitative inquiry. In many qualitative methodologies, we rely on perception and empirical data. That is, we engage our senses to collect information, or data. Later, we re-member these sensory perceptions into categories and themes and apply labels to explain what is contained within the category, and what remains outside. This allows us to make meaning of the perceptual information, interpreting the data in light of our research question.

This conceptualization of imagination shaped our research entanglement. We were drawing from the absent past, limited by an understanding of imagination that focused on recalling and remembering, rather than creating. Imagination, from an Enlightenment conceptualization, serves to create order and enable sense-making, produces new images by combining past perceptions into new forms, and evokes emotional response to what is not present, as though it were present (Egan, 1992). For us, we used our imagination to make sense of our past perceptions, integrating these perceptions into new material forms that evoked the same emotional response for us as our initial perception of the data. We sought to recreate and represent, from past memories, meaning from the participants' stories. We found resonances, commonalities, and divergences between stories, and between our experiences and those of the participants. Although we tried not to, we classified these stories into themes or categories and interpreted the stories through our existing understandings and schema. Through this process of labelling, classifying, representing, and interpreting, conventional humanist qualitative research tends to reduce the complexities of experience. Data analysis reduces complex entanglements down to essences, to singularities in

efforts to understand. We tried to move away from this approach—from sense-making to sense-breaking—but were limited by our engrained understanding of imagination as past perception. Even though we intended, through the creation of story, poetry, and imagery, to engage our imagination, these new forms were re-iterations of the same, initial perceptions. We recognized our tendency to default to thematic analysis, while we were dressing up or representing our themes in new ways. Although we, in our scholarship, would not define imagination as perception, we have embodied this idea in our understanding and experience of research, which limits us as researchers and limits what is possible to know.

Kant – Imagination as Reproductive and Productive

Beyond a re-creation or production of previous perceptions, Immanuel Kant views imagination as a complex capacity that integrates all aspects of our lives (Matherne, 2016). Kant argues that “imagination [Einbildungskraft] is a faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition” (cited in Matherne, 2016, p. 55). Imagination allows us to reproduce images and experiences from the absent past, as Hume notes, but also allows us to produce or create images, ideas, and concepts. Imagination allows us to create something new that is not based on sensory perceptions (i.e., non-sensible) nor limited by experience. Imagination, for Kant, allows us to mediate between what is sensible and non-sensible (Matherne, 2016). It is this productive aspect of imagination that we were interested in and see as aligning with ‘sense-breaking’ (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018).

Imagining can involve reproducing memory and combining and altering memories to generate schema that promote understanding (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2023; Warnock, 1976). We intake information in various forms and make sense of it by categorizing and assigning representative language to each categorization. This also allows us to see stability and transience in our perceptions. For example, Warnock (1976) uses the idea of a cat to demonstrate the power of imagination. Without familiarizing ourselves with all cats, we can imagine (based on memory and past perceptions) what a cat is and when we see a cat are able to categorize it as such and apply the label of ‘cat’. We are also able to recognize that this cat continues to exist, unrelated to our ongoing perception of the cat. We can also synthesize varied memories, ideas, and schemas, to imagine beyond our experiences and perceptions; for example, we could imagine a cat riding a bicycle. We understand what animals fit within the classification of ‘cat’, which do not, and why. From a Kantian perspective, imagination is involved in actively perceiving and reproducing experience as well as in synthesizing new ideas, images, and concepts, that produce new experiences. Productive imagination allows us to create new ideas, images, and concepts that are not rooted in sensory perceptions.

Imagining can involve blending concepts to create something new and novel. This productive imagination is transcendental, according to Kant, as it transcends memory, perception, sensibility, and understanding. It reveals the world in a certain way and structures our perception. Gosetti-Ferencei (2023) explains transcendental imagination using the example of a sunset. She explains that we don’t perceive a sunset as the atmosphere scattering molecules but as a beautiful experience (more than what it actually is) that elicits an affective response. It is the imagination

that allows for this aesthetic experience. “Neither understanding alone nor sensation alone can do the work of imagination, nor can they be conceived to come together without imagination” (Warnock, 1976, p. 31).

We had thought that our creation of new materials—poetry, images, collage, story—was actualizing what Kant defines as productive imagination. That is, we could create new thoughts or concepts or ideas, that were not sense-based or based upon previous perceptions. We thought we could use cognitive tools to conjure something new. Something beyond the sum of its parts. To transcend what we know. But Kant also notes that productive imagination is not lawless; it is constrained by knowledge. Therefore, while we might articulate imagination as a powerful force for producing something new, imagination is also lurking behind the scenes, limiting what we can know.

Sartre – Imagination as the Freedom of The Irreal

Jean-Paul Sartre sees imagination as foundational to the construction of the world. Rather than seeing imagination as a force that allows us to perceive and remember the world, Sartre argues imagination allows us to *produce* a coherent world (Hopkins, 2016). This is an important ontological distinction that aligns with our post-human, relational ontology. We, through our imaginations, are not perceiving objects that exist within the world; we are imagining, and thus, bringing into being or consciousness, objects in our world. These objects are marked by their nothingness; imagination allows us to engage with these objects as if they are present, even when they are absent or non-existent (Hopkins, 2016). To Sartre, our consciousness can connect us to numerous diverse imaginary worlds with their own rules, time, and space (Reynolds & Renaudie, 2024).

Sartre argues that imagination provides the freedom to move beyond the real into infinite unrealized possibilities (the irreal). He argues that our engagement with the world activates our imaginary processes, and these engagements allow us to continually constitute the world (Reynolds & Renaudie, 2024). Imagination is the free mind. Sartre (2004, cited in Reynolds & Renaudie, 2024) notes that:

For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free.

By freeing ourselves from the constraints of the world, as it appears, and engaging with the irreal, we expand the realm of the possible—this is the “possibilization of reality” (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2023, p. 85). In other words, by engaging with the nothingness of our perceived reality, we free our mind to imagine and construct other possible realities. In this way, in the realm of the irreal, change is possible.

Sartre’s ontological ideas are congruent with our relational ontology; we become in intra-action with human and non-human agents in dynamic entanglements. Imagination is cultivated in our

entanglements in and of the world. Imagination is not a characteristic or asset held by an individual but an agential expression in an always already entangled becoming. Or as Sartre notes imagination "is not an empirical and superadded power of consciousness, it is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom" (Sartre, 1972, p. 270, cited in Egan, 1992, p. 29). Sartre's conceptualization of imagination, as freedom to bring other realities into consciousness, emphasizes reality as relational intra-actions.

Imagination and Knowledge Production in a Relational World

We chose to start in the middle, to acknowledge how we as researchers are entering an assemblage of agents already inter/intra-acting. And I arrive. With baggage. I bring knowledge of cognitive tools as ways of thinking that mediate meaning and engage/grow imagination. I bring knowledge of imagination, clothed in layers of meaning, much of which limits its acceptance in scholarly work. I feel the tension between my imagination producing/creating newness/novelty through collage and deep-set beliefs that 'research aims to reproduce meaning.' And I question stabilized/ing ontologies/epistemologies in which re/presentation is even a possibility. So what matters in knowledge creation? So what does imagination offer knowledge creation in research? So what is contributing to this knowledge creation?

I wonder about entanglements—how my different engagements/encounters/interactions/intra-actions with the material world are materializing my/the world differently. What does my researching body do/feel in the process of encountering the transcript and collaging?

What connects 'play' and research? Play(ing), like imagination/ing, lives in the shadows, scorned by beliefs/theories. Playing creates new encounters, entanglements, investments.

So what happens to 'research' (researching/research practices) if we embrace a relational, processual understanding of knowledge? So what am I from this relational ontological/epistemological position?

So what about time? I have mulled over 'use of time' with voices of my qualitative researcher self saying: is this a waste of time? what happens next with this collage? why am I enjoying this time spent on research that feels like playing?

So what about the 'boundaries' of collage—the sharp edges of objects laid beside/on top of each other. It feels hard to show interconnection, blending, softening of edges with the hard cuttings of collage. I wonder about the boundaries of research practices, of the ways in which findings are separated from questions, discussion from methodology. If we think about the world as always becoming, and research as a process of exploring entanglements, then what sense comes from these sharp research edges? [research journal excerpt]

As agential forces, conceptualizations of imagination shape how we relate to/in/of the world,

changing our interaction with the world changes our conceptualization of imagination. These varied conceptualizations all exist within our research entanglement as potentialities, actualizing moment to moment and co-constituting us as researchers. Actualizing conceptualizations of imagination remake our world anew in each encounter. Our intra-actions throughout this collaborative, dialogical inquiry process was (is?) a different intra-action with the world. This inquiry then, as something that is ongoing and still swirling, offers new possibilities.

It is not the humanist application of cognitive tools in a qualitative research project that engages imagination—as we and Sartre would conceptualize it—or allows for sense breaking. This is recreating the same knowledge. When we apply cognitive tools in a human-centered meaning-making process, we are being limited by imagination as the absent past and absent present. It's our continued engagement with the world that creates our world and creates new possibilities for engagement. This is world-making sense-breaking.

Our Becoming with the Data

This inquiry has allowed (and continues to allow us) to explore the intra-actions of imagination, research, and ourselves as researchers in an ongoing process of becoming. Rather than a conclusion, we offer some learnings relating to this process of becoming with the data:

Becoming-Gillian

I chose to take the road less travelled. But now, I wonder, where the hell am I? (As stated on a magnet on my mom's fridge)

This work has surprised me. It has surprised me by how powerfully it has led me to question the beliefs about research I began with. I am surprised by how strongly my humanist research priorities spoke and continue to speak to me. I continue to question the purpose and value of a collaging practice. Simultaneously, I explore these wonderings and the ontological and epistemological beliefs these questions reveal. I have experienced how using tools of imagination can *sense-break*; imagination creates generative cracks in dominant ways of thinking. I am surprised by the emotional nature of collaging—the way it which it begins from an emotional reaction in me, how creating it is an emotional process, and how it evokes an emotional response in viewing. I am surprised by the relational feeling of the collaging process—I worked *with* images to create something new. The images too worked on me, shaping what I created. As I create meaning with the metaphorical representations, the juxtapositional colours and patterns of the collage, I wonder what happens next. I feel the limitations of language; how can I express the meaning of the collages I created without constraining and limiting possible sense-meaning of those who view them?

I am left with questions that reveal both humanist and post-humanist priorities: I wonder how collage-making *is* story-telling and how this storytelling *is* inquiry and, ultimately, how this story-telling can *sense-break* in addition to *sense-make*. I wonder how collage and I are co-constituted through the process of making. I wonder what the ethical implications are of this co-existence and this co-emergence. I have lingering feelings that the collages should *re/present*; it should stay

‘true’ to what my participants said. This feeling leads me to wonder who or what the collages are actually for. I wonder: How/do the collages stand on their own as creations? What does collage offer to/in research within a non-representational paradigm? I am curious about my next steps: what becomes of me as researcher if I acknowledge the intra-actions (Barad, 2007) that occur in the process of collage-making? In what other ways can I engage with data to create something new and tap into new and multiple knowings? This play-full scholarly experience leaves me seeking possibility: *What if* I embrace knowing in research not as representation of an objective ‘thing’ (idea/event) but a co-constituted process of creation with human and material agents?

Becoming-Meaghan

Engaging in this relational and embodied research process led to new understandings of imagination, knowledge production, and myself as a becoming-scholar.

Through this embodied process, I’ve recognized that I am co-constituted with humanist understandings. I intended to step away from humanist ideas and embrace the ontological turn; epistemologically, I understand relational and performative ontologies and what they offer in remaking the world. But implicit understandings of imagination and research kept pulling me back. Despite our intentions to jump into the middle and work/think/play in imaginative inquiry, I was challenged by internalized ideas of researcher agency, of representation, of meaning-making, and of what it means to create knowledge. I kept having to pull myself away from thoughts and ideas that centered us, as researchers, as knowing, powerful agents who use imagination as an archaeologist might use a shovel or a brush. Without being active and aware in recognizing and pushing back, I found myself seeking to find something out, to discover something new, by digging deeper with cognitive tools. My written reflections and shared dialogue showed the relational nature of our inquiry – us, as researchers, entangled with imagination, confusion, hope, blank pages, collages, poetry, and so much more, creating our world through our intra-actions.

I’ve experienced new relations with imagination. Imagination is powerful. Hopeful. Imagination involves seeing things differently; not accepting things as inevitable but critically exploring what creates and maintains those arrangements. Thus, imagination is a necessary agent in critical thought and anarchistic inquiry (see Feyerabend, 1975). Imagination involves risk-taking, being willing to question the realities of the day to day, and attempting to understand what is made possible and what is silenced in the dominant discourse. Imagination is recognizing the connection and intra-action among ideas, systems, people, and processes, and determining what may be possible beyond what has been previously thought. Imagination creates potentiality in each intra-action, to make the world anew (Barad, 2007). Imagination is the ‘irreal’, becoming into existence through our entanglements. Imagination fuels knowledge production in the ontological turn.

Inquiry is an inherently political and ethical process. The “politics of knowing” (Denzin, 2013, p. 392) determine what we know to be true, what we accept as inevitable, what we think to be possible, and what we can imagine and generate. As a scholar in a continual process of becoming (see Biehl & Locke, 2017, Deleuze & Guattari, 2005), a becoming-scholar, I have a responsibility and a response-ability (Barad, 2007; 2012) to imagine, with a hopeful spirit, what is possible and

engage critically with what is, in order to make positive changes towards a future imaginary. Working from an affirmative ethics (Braidotti, 2019), I seek to examine the potentiality of what we are, what we were, and what we are becoming; this involves an intra-action of critique and generativity. As a responsible researcher (see Kuntz, 2015), I am always already entangled in the research process and constituted by the intra-actions of past-present-future encounters. I am in tension—working within and against knowledge creation and methodology—to do something, to change something. I work within the oscillation of what van der Tuin and Pekal (2023) term generation. They highlight the necessary and productive tension between what is generated and what is generative. The process of academic knowledge creation has generated hierarchies, othering, suffering, and inequalities; methodology reproduces these generations through its pre-determined solutions for identified problems. Yet, inquiry can be generative, seeking never to reduce but always to depart from existing ideas, concepts, and knowledge. Lines of flight.

I recognize the irony in promoting generativity while also reproducing problematic generations. I seek to deconstruct humanist research but also engage in conventional qualitative inquiry. We attempt to show the dynamic, embodied, and emergent inquiry process we became entangled with, but are constrained by language that immobilizes, captures, and makes stable. We attempt to break down and break through traditional boundaries of knowledge production, but rely on sharing these ideas in an academic journal. We try to capture our research journey in words that make sense, presenting it as if it happened in some sort of order that makes sense. As if knowledge production is about making sense. I seek to continue to grow and be generative in my intra-actions with the world. As a becoming-scholar, I exist in continual tension. And I enact imagination to continue to sense-break dominant ways of being, knowing, and doing.

Becoming-Sarah

Despite the fact that we set out to subvert the conventions of qualitative methodological research using tools of imagination, and therefore did not generate research questions in advance, when I first encountered the interview data, I was compelled to bring order and meaning to the words on the page. My implicit questions seemed to be “What do I know about this person and how they view imagination?” I was tempted to parse out themes and codes, to group and regroup and define, to draw boundaries and extract truths. I hold a unique position in the research group because I was not involved in the data collection process and had no prior knowledge of the interview subjects. While it seemed like an advantage at first—that I could interpret the data free of pre-conceived notions about the subjects—it didn’t ultimately change my interaction with the text. Using what I read, I made imaginative leaps about the individuals—about their gender, their years of experience in education, how open-minded they appeared on the page, how secure/insecure they were about exercising or embracing imagination, their ability to define imagination, how eager they seemed to please the interviewers, etc. I then journaled about the interview data, trying to read the transcript as a text, repeating back a story arch, looking for the character’s capacities and limitations with imagination, identifying patterns. I brought with me the lens of my privilege and positionality (white, cis, female, educated, middle-class, experienced educator) and my inherent biases about class and social order, as well as my ear towards language. Because I have an interest in writing and storytelling, the second time I read a transcript

with the intention of collaging it, I wrote notes about it first to help me construct my collage. I then utilized the collage tool to generate my collage based on those notes. However, something different happened during this trans-mediation process. I felt the collage led me away from the self-consciousness of the page, of finding the correct words, and I started thinking about aesthetics, arrangements and colors. After I collaged, I was moved to write again, but this time I wrote a research-memoir piece that wove in my collage process with memories that emerged as I reflected. The writing came easy to me—almost like a surge where I felt very much in a flow state. This third piece, which blended the original writing and the experience of the collage felt liberating. There was distance from the interview subject's words as I wrote the second piece. Of course, questions about the integrity of the research surfaced for me. Did the output (collage, memoir) hold up as a representation of the interview subject's experience? But more importantly, did it have to? Could these dartaphacts—both the collage and the written response to the collage— have value on their own? Afterall, they would not have been created without the desire to subvert humanist methodologies and engage in a process that resists these traditional methodologies. This made me think about the end goal of qualitative research; generally, it is assumed the purpose is to inquire into the real-world experiences of individuals, gather information about these experiences, and represent the information/data as “results” of the study. But in this new entanglement between researcher and interview data, we set out to engage with it imaginatively and report this experience. The result just always *is* in the moment.

Final Thoughts

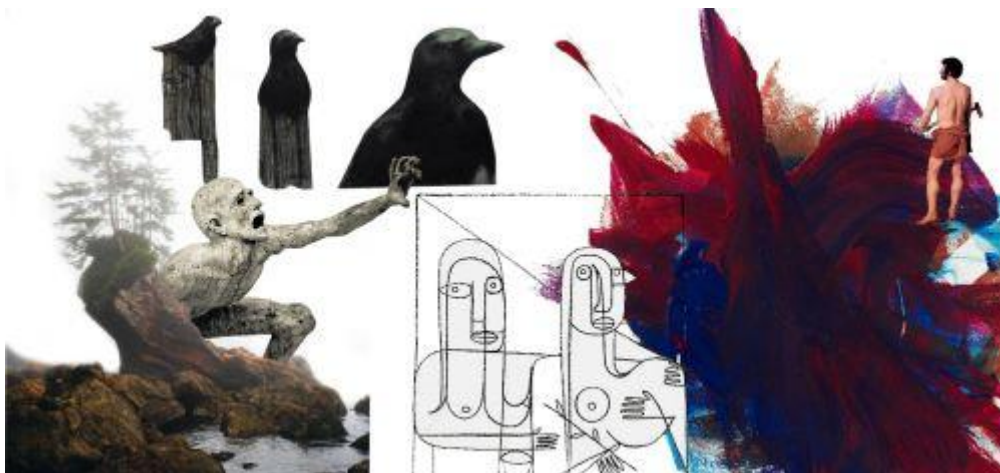


Figure 5.

I stumble on an image of three birds, and remember what Hume and Kant and Sartre wrote about the way imagination conjures three things: absent past, absent present, and absent nonexistent, and I select the image of three birds. And now I feel the images, feel the collage working on me, not me working on it—and I picture the next time I read Hume, I will think about three birds: absent bird, present bird, nonexistent bird. [research journal excerpt]

In Humean and Kantian traditions, imagination is central to human understanding; the possibility of knowledge depends on the synthesizing power of imagination which, as we discussed, orders

and classifies our past experiences/impressions according to rules and dichotomies like absence and presence, existence and non-existence (Cocking, 1973). Unlike Hume and Kant who focused on the role of image and perception in imagination, Sartre describes imagination as a “constitutive structure” of consciousness, emphasizing that it is not a contingent feature of consciousness, but rather pertains to its very essence (Sartre, 2004, p. 179). In this way, Sartre’s conceptualization of imagination more closely aligns with our post-humanist/post-qualitative methodology which places the collage—i.e., the result of this “constitutive” imaginative research entanglement—on the same plane of immanence as the transcript data. In other words, by rejecting our initial inclination to engage in representational coding through the collage process and rejecting the collage as a passive object or product of thought, we were able to recognize the agency the collage held in the research entanglement. This process was iterative, both engaging and complicating our understandings of our three birds (absent past, absent present, and absent non-existent) as we reflected on the role imagination played in the collage-making process. In the same way the conceptual lineage of imagination both subsumes and builds upon previous iterations, so too did our enactment and embodiment of imaginative methodology. We expressed this multiplicity of expressions of imagination as “all the birds, all the time.”

As becoming-researchers we continue to explore our research entanglements as world-making possibility. As Barad explains, “the world and its possibilities for becoming are remade in each meeting.” (p. x). Our engagements with the world activate our imaginary processes, and these engagements constitute the world. That is, our conceptualizations of imagination influence our relations with the world – how we interact, how we see, what is possible. Changing our interaction with the world changes our conceptualization of imagination and vice versa. Imagination is not a tool wielded to discover new meaning; imagination is world-making. And we can imagine new possibilities—more just possibilities—in all intra-actions.

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