

Research, Practice, Emergence; or, Emergent Methodologies in Cultural Inquiry and Educational Research

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“Last night, I had a near-life experience writing this...” (Graffiti)

I want to present here a way of thinking about research – about the practice of research, and about research itself as practice ¹. In doing so, I draw on what has been called practice theory and philosophy, a body of work that I have been interested in for some time now. This has been described, evocatively, as the practice turn in contemporary theory (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina & Savigny [Eds.], 2001), and it is best understood as a broad family of theoretical and philosophical work for which the notion of practice has become something of an organising principle – practice as *concept*. I come at this topic from a particular perspective, albeit congruent with my own interests and passions, and my long-time, deep and enduring fascination with poststructuralism, or more generally Continental theory and philosophy, about which I sometimes despair of knowing anything, in any significant sense.

What *is* research? Or, as the question might also be posed: What *counts* as research? This is something of marked importance in the contemporary moment, in which there is a renewed struggle over the nature and role of research – educational research in particular – in terms of policy and government. Especially vulnerable at this time is so-called qualitative research, or research that (self-)identifies as Other with regard to mainstream, normative educational science. (Of particular interest here, further, and perhaps even more problematical, is what is called arts-based research.) And within qualitative inquiry as a field are further divisions and assignments of value, as scholarly work emerges that clearly seeks to think research differently, and to practise it accordingly. Such work risks even further marginalisation, of course. Research is what happens in universities (although by no means exclusively so), and takes its place alongside teaching and administration, and various forms of ‘service’. That economy in itself is increasingly complex, and contested – the Academy as we know only too well is riven with contradiction and paranoia, marked as it is by hothouse mixes of performativity and intensification. Research is what counts, however – or so we are told, repeatedly.

But are we indeed confident that we know what research is, or what is named thus? I wonder. Are there other terms that might be mobilised here, which might better serve us in our various undertakings in this regard? It’s not so long ago, in Australia, when research was not the preferred term – quite the contrary, in fact, at least from the point of view of what might be called the human sciences, or the ‘Arts’, which we nowadays know as the humanities and social sciences. It is rather unsettling to be reminded that the first PhD was only granted in 1946 in Australia, and indeed that in Britain the PhD arrived as recently as 1923. It has a longer history in North America, of course, and before that in Europe. The PhD remains a key register of the (post)modern research university, even though it is important now to refer to doctoral research education more generally, to account for new developments in the doctorate and in (post)graduate studies (Boud & Lee [Eds.], 2009). The history of doctoral education indicates a growing professionalisation and heightened forms of specialisation. Research itself becomes a professional practice. In Australia, early on, it would seem that the preferred term was *scholarship*. The ‘scholar’ was valued over the ‘researcher’, with the latter being identified with the new award of the PhD. Gradually, however, the values were reversed. Research stepped forward, to take up its rightful place – but of course this was always a particular version or construction of research.

I was struck, then, by a relatively recent resurgence of this very debate. Boote and Belle (2005: 11) have argued that

“[d]octoral students must be scholars before they are researchers”. In their view, scholarship takes precedence over research, certainly in terms of graduate studies and research training. Although they are not explicit in this regard, their argument suggests that this is the case more generally. Interestingly, while their focus is on the literature review as something needing to be re-valued and re-positioned, they relate this to the current emphasis on, and arguably undue emphasis on, methodology. As they write: “Methodological training cannot occur in a vacuum, and increasing training in research methods alone will not lead to better research” (Boote & Belle, 2004: 4). What is it that contextualises and informs methodology, or “methodological training”? This is a question worth considering in the new emphasis on research training in contemporary research policy, and on what might be described as the increasingly prescriptive, front-end loading of methodology in doctoral curriculum. As Boote and Belle (2005: 12) observe: “Imagine if we were to devote one tenth as much energy, care, and thought to being better scholars as we do to developing our methods of data collection and analysis”.

Robert Bullough (2006) similarly questions the constrained nature of educational research as he sees it, when it is framed more or less exclusively within the social sciences. He argues for the humanities as an alternative or at least complementary reference-point, and relatedly, for “an expanded and generous conception of interdisciplinarity” (Bullough, 2006: 9). He recalls an earlier moment in the history of the field when education was positioned between the humanities and the social sciences, participating in both epistemic communities – a truly hybrid discipline. I find this a generative view. That comes in part from my own location within curriculum inquiry, and more specifically, the (post-)Reconceptualist tradition in curriculum studies (Pinar et al, 1995; Pinar, 2004, 2012). The line of work I am interested in has been described as “the interdisciplinary study of educational experience”, more particularly as influenced by the humanities and the arts (Pinar, 2004: 2). Whether this is to be called *research* remains a matter for debate. It may be that work of this kind is better described as *scholarship*, or perhaps even *inquiry* – though these terms are perhaps more or less interchangeable, to be mobilised strategically and tactically, even opportunistically. Whatever the case, there is something different involved here: a different perspective, and a different practice.

What I want to focus on, here, is the question of *writing*. There are two sides to this. One is to link writing to notions of ‘text’ and ‘theory’, conceived explicitly within a poststructuralist frame. Understood thus, theory (‘Theory’?) is “a heterogeneous genre”, a distinctive form of writing, the texts of which “function not as demonstrations within the parameters of a discipline but as redescrptions that challenge disciplinary boundaries” (Culler, 1983: 8-9). While this line of scholarly work has been around for some time now, its influence on educational research is uneven, though quite marked. Although it may rely on “familiar techniques of demonstration and argument”, Jonathan Culler suggested, the ‘force’ of such writing “comes ... not from the accepted procedures of a discipline but from *the persuasive novelty of their redescrptions*” (Culler, 1983: 9; my emphasis). Once more we encounter interdisciplinarity, as a project. Writing here is at once rhetoric and research. This is consistent with the view that what needs to be drawn explicitly into doctoral education is a curriculum focus on *research literacies*, and hence on ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ research, or consuming and producing research. This is not simply metaphorical, either. Research invariably involves reading and writing, literally, increasingly now in digital-electronic forms.

The other aspect of writing to take into account is the development of new understandings of writing as research, or research-as-writing. Laurel Richardson’s work is exemplary in this regard. She famously describes writing as itself “a method of inquiry” (Richardson, 1994). In this, she builds on innovations and initiatives not just in literary and cultural studies but also in anthropology and ethnography, and to some extent sociology. As she writes: “Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world, writing is not just a mopping up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’ – a method of discovery and analysis” (Richardson, 1994: 32). She links this argument to work on feminism and post-structuralism, and more broadly ‘postmodernism’. All this recalls for me Roland Barthes’ admonition, almost four decades ago now, that it was “time to dispose of a certain fiction: the one maintaining that research is to be reported but not written” (Barthes, 1986: 70) – a reminder that our history might well have been otherwise.

Colyar (2009) takes up the argument, drawing more directly on writing pedagogy. Describing writing as a “space of contradictory possibilities” (p. 422), she asserts “the importance of writing in the research process (p. 423), while

also observing “[f]ew graduate programs require courses specifically related to writing, and few courses ... include discussions of the writing process” (p. 432). Notwithstanding that, properly conceived, writing operates as *invention* (p. 427), a form of making, or production, making anew – worldmaking. She goes on to propose that “[w]riting is qualitative methodology” (p. 433). As she elaborates:

Writing is not methodology in the same way ethnography is methodology, but perhaps it should be. Perhaps qualitative researchers should imagine writing as foundational, as underlying and shaping the research approach and investigative tools (Colyar, 2009: 433).

Such views and arguments are extremely important, and challenging. This is all the more so when they are combined with my previous point about the value and indeed the necessity of scholarship, of richly informed inquiry. Moreover, to refer to writing now, in the early twenty-first century, is necessarily to draw in and on the expanded field of the expressive and communicative arts, the full resources of multimodality, and of digital convergence. It's not *just* 'writing', anymore, in the traditional sense: it is better understood as text production, multimedia composition, or what in my own work I have called 'compos(IT)ing' – composing with 'IT', with computing, with all the functionality of digital-electronic culture and technology (Green, 2000). Here, then, is how research-as-writing – writing as inquiry – is opened up to a new horizon, as a space of possibility.

At this point I want to turn my attention more directly to the concept of practice, and hence resume the account I initiated at the outset. As I indicated, practice as a distinctive concept has become recognizable in recent times as the focus for a body of otherwise disparate work, across a range of fields. It has been variously described as “the primary generic social thing” (Schatzki, 2001: 1) and “the fundamental social phenomenon” (Schatzki, 1996: 11), and reference is made to the primacy of practice thesis or the priority of practice, to practice thinking, or practice theory and philosophy (Green, 2009). Bourdieu, a key practice theorist, speaks rather enigmatically of “this strange thing that practice is” (cited in Wacquant, 1992: 40). Feminist scholar Dorothy Smith, influenced as she is by both Marx and Wittgenstein, is to be identified with this extended family, as is Judith Butler, drawing from Derrida and others. For anthropologist Sherry Ortner, 'practice' emerges from the 1980s on as “a new key symbol of theoretical orientation” (Ortner, 1994: 312), linked to “a bundle of interrelated terms ... praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, performance” (p. 388). She later described practice theory as “a general theory of the production of social subjects through practice in the world, and of the production of the world itself through practice” (Ortner, 2006: 16). Andreas Reckwitz (2002a) points to practice theory, as a particular form (or 'subtype') of cultural theory, as an account of the world in which 'social practices' are foregrounded, and in which “in the most sophisticated form offered by Schatzki stresses the *bodily* basis of all practices on the part of human beings” (Reckwitz, 2002b). Highlighted therefore is the significance and centrality of the body – the body in practice (Green & Hopwood, 2015). Practice emerges thus as embodied, and situated, as purposive, as relational and dialogical, co-productive, and as transformative, as re-working the World ².

I want to take an explicitly poststructuralist perspective here. Schatzki acknowledges 'post'-thinkers such as Foucault and Lyotard within the loose assemblage he identifies as practice theory. However, he doesn't explore or engage such work within his own *oeuvre*, by and large, except to refute it (Schatzki, 1996, 2002)³. Reckwitz (2002a: 248) similarly distances himself from what he calls “culturalist textualism”, or “poststructuralism and semiotics”. Both Reckwitz and Schatzki would appear to be invested in a particular kind of materialism, an originary worldliness, which they feel is missing or at least muted in post-theory. My view is that this is a misreading. Indeed, it seems to me productive to consider the notion of a distinctively poststructuralist, postmodern(ist) theory of practice, one in which language figures significantly. This is to be understood within what I have elsewhere described as the post-Cartesian tradition of practice theory and philosophy, for which the problem of the subject is of fundamental interest (Green, 2009; Green & Hopwood, 2015). Furthermore, it is not a matter of the language of science, or of linguistics, but of *philosophy* – specifically, the philosophy of language. I shall return to this line of thinking in a moment.

What needs to be emphasised here is that research is productively understood as a *practice*, and so too is writing. Research and writing are practices. At a minimum, then, and given the above comments, this means taking account of language and the body. To focus on research, or on research-as-writing, requires that we attend to the manner in which language and the body are implicated in the work we do, inescapably. Moreover, this is always in excess of intention, or cognition. A tension is immediately generated, however, in that research is also to be conceived as a *professional practice* – that is, a matter of practising professionally, which would seem to require that it be at once responsible and authorised. Elsewhere I have suggested that professional practice is to be understood as involving, on the one hand, the notion of *practicing a profession*, and on the other, that of *practicing professionalism*. In the case of educational research, this means being a professional researcher, appropriately trained and licensed, as well as acting properly professional, from the point of view of (at the least) ethics and methodology. The notion of what might be termed professionalism is, of course, contestable, and indeed much contested. In this regard, for instance, I have distinguished between ‘bureaucratic’ and ‘organic’ forms of professionalism (Green, 2009), with the former being especially marked at this current conjuncture.

David Hamilton (2005) has written persuasively of research as practice, from a neo-Aristotelian perspective. Briefly tracing the rise of ‘Method’ and linking it to modernism, he highlights the relationship between modernist science and theoretical reason, and suggests that this has now become problematical. He opposes this to what he calls ‘practical science’ and others ‘practical philosophy’ (eg. Carr, 2009). His interest is in the notion of “practical reasoning”, and he suggests that “[i]n practice ... there is a necessary association between the practical, the ethical and the contextual” (Hamilton, 2005: 287). He points to what he calls “means/end, goal-oriented reasoning”, a distinctive form of (‘scientific’, ‘technical’) rationality, a governing logic pervasive in educational research as it is in scientific *doxa*, and indeed in the theoretical practice(s) of commonsense and everyday life. Focusing on the all-too-familiar notion of ‘the research question’ in research training and methodology – “the good-quality and well-framed research question”, as one manual puts it (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; cited Hamilton, 2005: 288) – he notes the working assumption in such accounts that research is indeed to be seen above all else as a rational, linear undertaking: “that, from the outset, researchers know what they are doing and ... are fully aware of the moral and contextual frames that both steer and disrupt their practical activities” (Hamilton, 2005: 288). That is, it is assumed that research is author(is)ed by the Subject – “the subject as intention, horizon, foundation, or ground” (Grosz, 1999: 126). This may well be the larger, superordinate issue here: the problem of subjectivity, within the philosophy of the Subject. This is what I have in mind in referring to a post-Cartesian perspective.

However, what Hamilton goes on to say is of more immediate interest: “In practice, I suggest research is always a fumbling act of discovery, where researchers only know what they are doing when they have done it; and only know what they are looking for when they have found it” (p. 288). We might want to question that ‘always’, and perhaps soften the point somewhat by using terms such as ‘often’ or ‘mostly’; we might want to ask if this applies to all research, at all times, etc. But the point remains, and is important: Research as practice is much less linear and rational, planned or designed, than it is emergent, exploratory, recursive, an “act of discovery”, of invention. Recent work addressed to avowedly scientific practice, focused on what actually goes on in laboratories, the *practice* of science, would seem to bear this out. What would it do to take such a view as a starting-point for research, or for research education? What would it require of us, as researchers, supervisors, and doctoral scholars? What would we do differently? How *think* differently?

For one thing, it problematises methodology, at least as commonly understood. Bourdieu is an important reference-point here, with his concerns about ‘methodologism’, or “the inclination to separate reflection on methods from their actual use in science work and to cultivate method for its own sake” (Wacquant, 1992: 28; see also St Pierre, 2014). There is little doubt that much research education courts precisely such a risk, and perhaps increasingly so in an age of ‘evidence-based’ policy pressure, in which ‘evidence’ is understood more or less exclusively in scientific, quasi-experimental terms (Biesta, 2007; Cormack, 2011). Moreover, research education in such a context becomes itself increasingly regulated and constrained, and redefined as ‘training’. Of course, methodological inquiry need not be de- or un-contextualised, or arid and abstract, or divorced from either theory or politics, let alone the so-called ‘real world’ of research and policy, the recalcitrance and mystery of the ‘Real’, The risk is ever-present, however.

Understanding research as practice, then, involves focusing on the practice of research, on how research unfolds, how it is done, or gets done, on doing research. This aspect of practice I have described elsewhere in terms of *energeia*, or ‘doing-ness’, by which I want to highlight the primal nature of activity, of movement (Green, 2009). This is as much a matter of ontology as anything else. “[T]here is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; the ‘doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*; cited Colebrook, 1999: 121). Here, it is appropriate to refer to the world as practice, and to the primacy of practice, as something one lives through, one enacts, or realises: “the deed is everything”. More prosaically, it means attending to *experience*. What is it to experience practice, conceived in the most radical sense? Crucially, it is to foreground temporality, and duration. Hamilton (2005: 285-286) observes that “doing ... has its own temporal dimension, its own pace and timing”, as do “all practices, whether they comprise healing, caring, policing, or educating” – or *researching*. The significance of time is indeed of crucial interest in understanding practice, and I shall come back to this.

A central thesis for practice theory and philosophy is that practices exist in history, as history. Thrift (2008: 8) has usefully proposed that practices are “productive concatenations that have been constructed out of all manner of resources and which provide the basic intelligibility of the world”. They persist, they maintain and renew themselves, regenerate. As such, they establish “enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialized devices, to reproduce themselves” (p. 8). They are thereby recognisable, intelligible. Hence a key feature of practice is that it always involves *reproduction*, and this is indeed how it has been understood traditionally – that is, within an overarching logic of ‘reproduction’, or the reproduction thesis. (Bourdieu’s work was framed thus, in its early reception.) Much is made, properly and appropriately so, of the role and significance of tradition. The problem becomes then one of understanding, and providing for, change, production, the production of the new, difference. Certainly practices are structured and organised both retrospectively and prospectively – writing, for example. Derrida (1982: 13) in his notion of ‘Writing’⁴ refers to the play of *différance* in terms of “traces of retentions and protentions” in the unfolding of text, or “the movement of signification”. Nonetheless, the salient point remains that practice is often understood as it were conservatively, and a contentious issue remains how practices change, or are changed. Again, Thrift is useful. As he writes;

[I]n studying practices in detail it became clear to me that what was missing from too many accounts was a sense of mutability; of the moments of inspired improvisation, conflicting but still fertile mimesis, rivalrous desires, creative forms of symbiosis, and simple transcription errors which make each moment a new starting point (Thrift, 2008: 21).

Massumi’s work is pertinent here too. He writes memorably of writing (and thinking) as a practice, and as ‘inventive’, or productive, affirmative – as experimentation, and as discovery: “If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things you didn’t think you thought” (Massumi, 2002: 18). That is, it depends what is focused on, or looked for, in research and in practice. If practice is indeed to a significant degree *improvisational*, as Bourdieu and others argue, what are the openings that present themselves, the opportunities for difference, for novelty? What are the differences, in practice, that make a difference?

Here it is appropriate to take up the issue of the extent to which practice is rule-referenced, if never quite rule-governed. What role do ‘rules’ play in the practice of practice? This is something that Wittgenstein, and Schatzki and others after him, have considered in some detail. It refers not just to explicit formulations, but also to what are more in the way of conventions or customs – a received sense of how things are done. Rather than develop that particular account on this occasion, however, I want to turn to Lyotard, who provides a different perspective on the matter. To do so continues the conceit I have been working with, namely, that writing and artwork might function as a model for practice as such, or rather that practice might usefully be understood in such terms. In proposing that an analogy exists between the “postmodern artist or writer” and the “philosopher”, Lyotard puts forward what might well be considered a distinctively postmodern view of practice:

The text he [sic] writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done (Lyotard, 1984: 81).

That is, 'rules' emerge retrospectively. It is the practice itself that matters – in this case, the production of the artwork, the writing. Or as Charles Taylor puts it: "Practice is, as it were, a continual 'interpretation' and reinterpretation of what the rule really means" (Taylor, 1993: 57). Is this indeed one way to think about practice? Might not practice be seen in this light as a genuine opportunity, an opening? And how does this connect with, or relate to, *research*, research as practice and as writing?

"[T]here is always an emergent quality to research-as-practice", as I argue elsewhere (Green, 2009: 13): "This involves combining discovery with speculation, and approaching the practice of research as a probe into the unknown." Moreover: "what might be the use of engaging in research if one already knew what its outcome was?" I acknowledge now, this may be a very particular claim, even something of a special case. But I am not interested in replication, in repeatability. (We have enough of that, surely.) Becoming-research, and becoming and being a researcher, a writer: it is matters such as these that need to be engaged, and the concept-metaphor of *emergence*, the emergent. Research, writing, emergence: is there possibility here for thinking anew, or for thinking the New? I believe there is.

One way of thinking about all this is by drawing in and on complexity theory, on the one hand, and on the other, what might be called "postmodern emergence" theory. The two are not necessarily or entirely compatible, it needs to be said, which doesn't mean that they cannot be drawn into dialogue. With complexity theory, it is possible to articulate a concept of emergence that emphasises radical novelty, or creativity. Meaning, understanding, knowledge, and indeed reality are produced in and through practice, in interacting with the world. "It is only through experimenting with our environment – interacting with our world – that knowledge emerges" (Osberg, Biesta & Cilliers, 2008: 220). Practices themselves are imbued with complexity. They are dynamic open systems, emergent phenomena *par excellence*, nonlinear and ultimately unpredictable. They are always-already open to the future. "With complexity ... we can understand every meaning that emerges as uniquely new, something that has not been in the world before", as Osberg and Biesta (2008: 313) write. "[W]hat emerges is more than the sum of its parts and therefore not predictable from the 'ground' it emerges from" (p315). Just as curriculum in such a view can be seen as "a space of emergence" (Osberg & Biesta, 2008: 324), so too can research, or writing. What then is the value added when research and writing are alike understood as "probes into the unknown", the future? As moved and compelled by desire? As pleasurable, and affirmative?⁵ We might again recall, from another time, Roland Barthes and his observation that research "must be conceived in desire". If this does not occur, he wrote, "the work is morose, functional, alienated, impelled solely by the necessity of passing an examination, of obtaining a diploma, of ensuring a career promotion" (Barthes, 1986: 69). Some of us have been there...

Margaret Somerville is someone else good to think with. She writes of what she calls "postmodern emergence" (Somerville, 2007), for her a distinctive "research methodology" developed out of her own research and supervisory practice. Her work has featured 'alternative' methodologies and different perspectives, drawing from feminism and poststructuralism, as well as Indigenous studies. Her reflective practice resulted in what she describes as "a methodology of emergence". As she writes:

As soon as I started to think about the quality of emergence it became apparent that it was not only related to those students who wanted to develop alternative methodologies and radical forms for their research but that it was a necessary characteristic of all research (Somerville, 2007: 228).

It is important to note that this focus on emergence arises both from her research practice and from her research pedagogy. It is conceived as “a postmodern reconceptualization” (p. 240) of available resources such as ‘grounded theory’ and the writing-as-research movement, brought together with the realization in both practice and pedagogy that there were no ‘rules’ or even guidelines for the work she was concerned with. “In working with students developing alternative methodologies, I quickly learned that for each one it was a new and individual process and there was little to support their choice to follow an alternative structure” (Somerville, 2007: 227). There was just a desire, a willingness to let go, to attend to what happens, what emerges, a will to ‘undoing’. “[F]or each student who was embarking on an alternative form there was only the diverse productions of others before them but not any way to theorise a more general approach to understanding that form of knowledge generation” (Somerville, 2012: [6]). Text generated text, with little in the way of intermediary commentary, as ‘Method’. Research was *practice-ed* – learning and making, doing and knowing, wrought together.

There are two aspect of this program that I want to highlight here, briefly ⁶. The first is that the objects of these various research undertakings are produced without recourse to ‘rules’ or even ‘models’, although they are always principled and rigorously put together – *composed*. These research *objects* are quite literally so, in what they are, as more often than not hybrid, multimodal compositions, but also with regard to what drives and impels them, their seeking, their yearning. Each is unique, and even idiosyncratic, without however lapsing into solipsism. They form their own company, their own ‘family’, while making various connections with the field more generally. The second aspect is their experimentalism. These are ‘essays’, inquiries, probes, questions. These researchers literally don’t know, and can’t, until the work is completed. And then, of course, another begins: the work of reading, or looking, or writing, making, meaning... “The researching disposition is ... one that encourages attending to what arises in and through practice, or what is emergent, and learning in a very particular way how to go on, and what to do next” (Green, 2009: 13). This is a rather different sensibility than what is evoked in methodology manuals and the like, a distinctive subjectivity, and one attuned to change and open to the future. Thrift’s emphasis on changing practice – change in practice – is apposite here: “Such changes in practice nearly always come about through involved experimentation rather than deliberative thinking” (Thrift, 2008: 123). Not that this always works – though even ‘failure’ is significant and interesting in itself, and productive. The point, rather, is to continuously build upon the program’s capacity to renew itself in generating the New, in new instances of what Paul Carter (2004) has called “material thinking”.

It is time to bring together now some final thoughts on the possibilities of practice and emergence in educational research. In particular, I want to take up the notion of ‘emergent methodologies’, which I increasingly see as an organising principle for the kind of work I am interested in, as both a practitioner and (as it were) a spectator and critic. I hope I have already indicated the extent to which I consider all research – research that really matters – as having an emergent quality, as practice. However I want to focus now on those research practices that are genuinely different, experimental, inventive, creative – *emergent* ⁷. This involves among other things engaging with arts-based forms of inquiry, or research that works directly with arts practice, and with what has been termed “practice-led research” (Barrett, 2010). The latter term refers, in this instance, to arts practice as research, although it seems readily applicable to other forms of practice scholarship. Focusing on art, or art-work, is particularly generative, it seems to me, as a resource for inquiry. This is to understand art as an expressive force, a mode of becoming, but also a form of knowledge, all too easily overlooked or marginalised in the modern(ist) university, and indeed in mainstream educational research. Key concepts here include emergence, invention, and futurity, or a focus on the future. Elizabeth Grosz’s work on time and becoming, and on art ⁸, is of particular interest in this regard (Grosz [Ed.], 1999; Grosz, 2008) ⁹. She points to the challenge of “rais[ing] time as a question, as the question of the promise of the new” (Grosz, 1999a: 6). This has implications for research as practice, for writing as inquiry, and indeed for (re)thinking practice itself. How might such a (re-)orientation change what is looked for, and what is valued? What would it mean to focus on the New? Moreover, as Grosz writes: “If dominant modes of knowledge ... are incapable of envisioning the absolutely new, maybe other modes of knowing, other forms of thinking, need to be proposed” (Grosz, 1999b: 21). What might these be?

Here the concept of *invention* warrants careful attention, precisely as a resource for re-thinking research. For Carter (2010: 16), invention as a “state of being that allows a sense of becoming to emerge” foregrounds creativity, thinking differently and anew, “disclos[ing] other possibilities”. It has its own distinctive ethics, based in performance, in practice, “residing not in the truth of what is found but *in the interest of what is done*” (Carter, 2010: 17). This is usefully linked to Gregory Ulmer’s work on “applied grammatology”, which has been explicitly linked to an “emergentist conception of meaning-making” (Osberg & Biesta, 2008: 317), and described as “fundamentally interventional and creative” (p. 318) – what Ulmer himself calls a “pedagogy of invention”¹⁰. There are rich connections to be made here with the work on emergent methodologies arising from creative arts research (Barrett, 2010: 6). Bringing such ideas and arguments into the purview of educational research is likely to be extremely generative. At the very least, it opens up the field to other ways of thinking and working, informed more by debates and developments within the arts and humanities.

We began with some observations and concern about research and scholarship, as contemporary doxa. I will close with these questions, from Elizabeth Grosz. “What would a science or body of knowledge be like”, she asks, that

instead of invoking the criteria of repeatability and the guarantee of outcomes required for industrial and technological efficiency, sought to endlessly experiment without drawing conclusions, without seeking law-like regularities? Would such a science approximate the singularity and uniqueness of art or intuition? Could experimental techniques themselves be derived experimentally, artistically, inventively, nonteleologically? (Grosz, 1999a: 11).

For those of us working in cultural inquiry and educational research today, in a time that too often seems set on closing down rather than opening up possibility, is this a future worth thinking about? I certainly hope so.

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1. An earlier version of this paper was presented as a Keynote Address in the Summer Institute in Qualitative Research (SIQR) symposium, Educational & Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester UK, July 2011. [↗](#)
2. It might be worth recalling Marx's notion of practice as "sensuous human activity" (Theses on Feuerbach). [↗](#)
3. Deleuze figures as a somewhat ambivalent reference-point, however – what might be called a haunting presence... [↗](#)
4. What he describes as "a kind of writing before the letter" (Derrida, 1982: 15). [↗](#)
5. In this regard, as Brian Massumi asserts: "If you don't enjoy concepts and writing and don't feel that when you write you are adding something to the world, if only the enjoyment itself, and that by adding that ounce of positive experience to the world you are affirming it, celebrating its potential, tending its growth, in however small a way, however really abstractly – well, just hang it up" (Massumi, 2002: 13). [↗](#)
6. See Somerville (2008) with regard to her research-supervisory work, and examples of the doctoral research in question. [↗](#)
7. Another aspect of the problematic of emergent methodologies in educational research involves those research practices that are not yet acceptable or intelligible publically, or 'socially recognizable' – for instance, in policy. While this matter is not explored here, but is an important topic, nonetheless. [↗](#)
8. "Art engenders becomings" (Grosz, 2008: 23). [↗](#)

9. Grosz draws on the work of Deleuze, Bergson, Nietzsche and Darwin, among other, within what might be broadly called a philosophy of becoming – a particularly generative resource for my argument here, even though I have not been able to follow this through in this instance. ↪
10. In this regard, see also Massumi (2002). ↪