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Inquiry as divination

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> What is realised here is a power that comes from beyond or before the conscious will, from a nature or an affect that is impersonal, preindividual, and complicit with chance. Ramey (2012: 162)

> If thought searches, it is less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than that of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps.
> Deleuze & Guattari (1994: 55)

Abstract

The article proposes *divination* as a speculative method for inquiry, drawing primarily on the work of Deleuze. Divinatory practices would be diagrammatic, ambulant, cryptic, affirmative and experimental. They would look for strange relations between the one and the many, in the shifting totality of the cosmos, and entertain relations that are always to some extent inhuman. The article offers an example from an ethnographic study of classroom interaction. It suggests that divination has the power to import "catastrophe" into the frameworks and methods of research, in the hope of clearing a space for creativity and unforeseen outcomes.

Keywords

speculative method; post-qualitative research methodology; Deleuze; early childhood;

hermetic philosophy

Introduction

In the ontological and posthuman 'turns' that have agitated qualitative research, there is a need for new methodologies fit for sensing the forces and intensities of immanent participation and more-than-human relationality. I propose *divination* as a speculative method, drawing on the half-submerged presence of occult and esoteric thought in the work of Deleuze. I will argue that it is in esoteric knowledge and practice that we might find what immanent inquiry needs in order to escape anthropocentrism and the transcendental relations of categorical reason, with its dualities of mind and matter, general and particular, global and local. In contrast to these constrained relations, divination discerns stranger affinities and more baroque forms of participation of the one in the many, and the many in the one. The contours of these relations may be sensed, but can never be fully comprehended or represented, as they are constantly re-formed by the movements and forces that constitute them. Such an inquiry would entertain unpredictable alliances and "unnatural nuptials" among heterogeneous participants, human and nonhuman (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 242). What would formerly have been understood as data analysis would become something more like a Deleuzian (2000: 5) "apprenticeship to signs": a matter of cryptic encounters with the enigmatic surplus that inheres in signs and events. Divination would demand techniques that are symbolic, intensive and diagrammatic – ways of reading the world and tapping into the forces that compose events in order to unfold their ramifications, and draw lines from the known to the unknown (Deleuze, 2003). Toward the end of the article I offer a small example of what divinatory practice might look like, and explore some implications for educational and social research.

Occult practices as the "dark precursors" of philosophies of immanence

Perhaps it is not surprising that immanent ontologies present a challenge for research methodology. Deleuze lamented that philosophy itself had yet to achieve the creative complicity of life and thought that immanence demands. Philosophy was failing to grasp the

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dynamic unity in which thought marks life and life activates thought, leaving instead only the choice "between mediocre lives and mad thinkers" (Deleuze, 2005: 67). We are still waiting, Deleuze asserted, for that "fine unity" of mad thought and wild life, in which neither consumes or diminishes the other, but instead urges the other on, in the enjoyment of a kind of Nietzschean rude health. In the same way, I would argue that immanence has yet to fully infiltrate the conceptual architecture and the methodic practices of social inquiry.

I consider divination in this article alongside other pre-scientific or hermetic practices – magic, shamanism, sorcery, witchcraft, alchemy. These somewhat disreputable practices have been engaged in recent years by philosophers and theorists interested in the productive force of the "chaos of potentials" (Stivale, 2008: 20) that precede and exceed reason.[1] Taking the Deleuzian *oeuvre* alone: divination, sorcery and witchcraft manifest at various points, together with 'cosmic artisans' such as Messaien, Bacon, Beckett and other diviners of high modernity who dare to wrangle the forces of the cosmos. Animal relations offer alternatives to the structure of "filiation" that hampers thought and arrests the movements of difference. Dionysus, the Greek God of wine and altered states, appears as the creative excess of intoxication and cruelty that lurks in the interstices of representation.[2] Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 247) propose a minoritarian 'politics of sorcery' whose potential has been fleshed out by later writers seeking resources to combat capitalism's own dark arts (Pignarre & Stengers, 2011; Ramey, 2010; 2016). These appearances of the occult in Deleuze's work are often fleeting or allusive. Nevertheless, according to Joshua Ramey, whose work informs this article, they testify to "a kind of secret priority or silent prerogative given to esoteric knowledge and practice as a clue to the multiple meanings of immanence" (2012: 103).

Occult practices can be understood as belonging to a deviated, meandering philosophical line identified by many scholars - a tangled and broken line to be sure, but one that errantly connects the ancient Stoics, Giordano Bruno, Nicholas da Cusa, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Tarde, Bergson, Pierce, Whitehead, Simondon, Ruyer and of course Deleuze. The occult influences that Ramey discerns in this 'minor' line inside twentieth century philosophy interrelate by ramification and intensification rather than Platonic descent: they express, he

argues, "a kind of eclectic, bastard and nomadic spirituality, one without pure origin or urtext, situated at the crossroads of competing civilizations and conflicting orthodoxies" (2012: 5). Elizabeth Grosz engages several of these thinkers in her recent corrective to contemporary materialisms that have, in her view, forgotten matter's debt to the vital forces of ideality. She equates ideality to "a kind of magical or religious thinking that seeks the orders of connection that regulate the universe itself" (2017: 12) and commends Nietzsche's challenge to science: "Do you really believe that the sciences would ever have originated and grown if the way had not been prepared by magicians, alchemists, astrologers, and witches whose promises and pretensions first had to create a thirst, a hunger, a taste for the *hidden* and *forbidden* powers?" (Nietzsche, quoted in Grosz, 2017, 104; emphasis retained). Ramey (2012: 37) identifies pre-modern thinkers of immanence, such as Nicola da Cusa and Giordano Bruno, as "dark precursors" of speculative philosophy, and outlines the transformation of thought that hermeticism both demands and effectuates:

> For both Deleuze and the hermetic tradition generally, certain intense, mantic, initiatory, ascetic, and transformative practices are necessary for thought as much as for meditational or visionary experience. Conversely, for both Deleuze and hermeticism, authentic thought is identified, beyond mere accumulation of cognitions, with an expansion of the mind's ability to endure the intense modes of perception and communication necessary for psychic reintegration and cosmic renewal. Thought in this way might be defined... as a regenerative principle of natural and social development. (Ramey, 2012: 5)

Ramey argues that hermeticism has played a major, if covert, contribution to "*experimental immanence* as a theme in modern philosophy" (29; emphasis added).

There is also a distinct tinge of occult practice in Deleuze's account of the interpretation of signs. Signs for Deleuze are enigmatic reserves of hidden forces; they "testify to the spiritual and natural powers which act beneath the words, gestures, characters and objects represented" (1994: 23). To interpret signs is to cultivate a creative response to these hidden forces. Signs may be material or incorporeal, as well as linguistic, and are important

not for what they signify or communicate, but for their potential to enter into relations with other signs, and thereby rouse the mind to new connections. The interpretation of signs requires skills of deciphering and divination. "We must be Egyptologists", Deleuze asserts in his analysis of the operation of signs in Proust's writing. He continues:

> For there are no mechanical laws between things or voluntary communications between minds. Everything is implicated, everything is complicated, everything is sign, meaning, essence. Everything exists in those obscure zones that we penetrate as into crypts, in order to decipher glyphs and secret languages. The Egyptologist, in all things, is the man [sic] who undergoes an initiation – the apprentice" (Deleuze, 2000: 92).

I will argue that interpretation in qualitative inquiry can be reconceptualized as just such an "*apprenticeship to signs*" (Deleuze, 2000: 5; emphasis added), shaped through cryptic encounter with the enigmatic surplus that subsists in the "obscure zones" within educational and social events.

There are dangers of reductionism and colonialism in moving, as this article does, among and across different esoteric practices. Systems of magic, sorcery and divination are culturally and historically specific: their efficacy issues from the shared spiritual, political, affective, and ethical charge that they hold for the groups who fabricate them.[3] Divinatory practices for educational and social research must not be opportunistically stripped from the specific belief systems and realities of other cultures and eras, as assets for reinvigorating the waning efficacy of scientific rationality, in a repetition of colonial predation. The Egyptologist, it must be admitted, is a far from innocent figure in the history of Western imperialism, and it would be only too easy for our cryptic encounters to degrade into grave robbing. Inquiry needs to be mindful of the threat that Western fascination with indigenous and subaltern cultures has always posed to those who have become the objects of its attentions, and its good intentions (Greenblatt, 1991). Inquiry must develop its *own* pragmatic arts and fashion its own situated practices – ways of thinking and of reading the world that are grounded in the specific milieu of social research, and the problems addressed by those involved (Stengers, 2008). I return to these issues later in this article.

Such techniques are always going to involve a combination of uncertainty, caution and risk. Ramey (2012: 175) notes that magic is predominantly a "tentative, ambulant and experimental enterprise". Immanent thought, like magic, may well discharge itself in the flash of instantaneous revelation, horror or transformation, but it accrues, as noted, from a long apprenticeship in the reading of signs and the development of faculties of discrimination. Practitioners must learn to test and "taste" the likely effects of an intervention that could be toxic at the wrong dosage (Stengers, 2008). Immanent thought accordingly involves "a sort of groping experimentation" according to Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 41), carried out nevertheless according to measures that are not sober or rational, but "belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess". It is in this respect that, in their famous phrase, "*To think is always to follow the witch's flight*" (41, emphasis added).

Witchcraft and sorcery in/as inquiry

Witches and sorcerers "haunt the fringes" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 244). They occupy the liminal position of the 'Anomalous' in their societies, living at the borderlines of their territory, at the edges of the woods or the outskirts of their villages. They have an "affinity for alliance" with animal and demonic entities that are themselves anomalous intermediaries. This alliance with the anomalous allows the sorcerer to gain inhuman knowledge and power. Deleuze and Guattari counterpose the relationality of *alliance,* typical of social formations such as packs and bands, to that of filiation, whose straight lines of heredity and hierarchy govern familial and State relations. Alliances form through modes of affective complicity that are indifferent to the bonds of family resemblance and filial obligation, and are more like contagion and epidemic:

> ... contagion, epidemic involves terms that are entirely heterogeneous: for example, a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecule, a microorganism. Or in the case of the truffle, a tree, a fly, and a pig. These combinations are neither

genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations. (Deleuze
and Guattari, 1987: 242)

Despite holding an anomalous position with respect to the laws and conventions of civilised
society, the sorcerer is not, however, a social isolate. Sorcerers are intensely sensitive to the
clandestine forces that act upon humans, and connect them with non-humans in "dark
assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 242). Ramey (2012: 64) goes so far as to suggest
that sorcery offers "a model of what all human life might be, beyond the entrapments of the
traditional human essence". Skonieczny (2017) explores the possibility of a minoritarian
politics of sorcery for contemporary political and economic conditions, and finds
revolutionary potential in the conceptual persona of the sorcerer. He writes: "The sorcerer
is thus a finely-tuned receiving device, who … can attune him- or herself to something which
is "not yet conscious" for society as a whole, and yet permeates it and pushes from
underneath." (Skonieczny 2017: 976). This persona - though it would always be at risk of
collapsing into the empty posturing of bravado – has a certain appeal for those of us who
would still call themselves social and educational researchers, however mutated the
subjectivities and the inhuman alliances of researchers would necessarily become.

Divination and the diagram

Turning to divination: for Deleuze, divination is central to the ethics of the *event*. In *Logic of
Sense,* working from Stoic philosophy, Deleuze (2004) proposes divination as a mode of
creative and ethical encounter with events through the affirmation of chance. This would be
a kind of speculative or future-oriented interpretation that works the chance and alterity
that attend events in order to open thought and action to new directions and connections.
The logic of the event demands engagement not with what actually occurs, but with
"something *in* that which occurs, something yet to come which would be consistent with
what occurs, in accordance with the laws of an obscure, humorous conformity: the Event"
(Deleuze, 2004, 149, emphasis added). Divination attempts to access the incorporeal and
unrepresentable *sense* that subsists in/as virtual events, in order to counter-actualize or
creatively replay it. As Ramey (2012: 173) writes, counter-actualization is not a matter of

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reacting to events but of *ramifying* them, "extending their implications to unusual or unforeseeable conclusions, carrying lines of sense farther than they are intended to reach. To counter-actualize is to replay, and in some sense outplay, the drama of events themselves".

In affirming chance, divination attempts to clear the space of creation from the 'givens' that return thought to cliché and impede the ramifying of events into as-yet-unknown territory. Deleuze, in his engagement with the work of Francis Bacon, states that the challenge for the modern painter, and indeed for modern thought in general, is to escape or at least pervert those givens that always already envelop us:

> the painter is *already* in the canvas, where he or she encounters all the figurative and probablilistic givens that occupy and preoccupy the canvas. An entire battle takes place on the canvas between the painter and these givens. There is thus a preparatory work that belongs to painting fully, and yet precedes the act of painting.... This preparatory work is silent and invisible, yet extremely intense, and the act of painting itself appears as an afterward ... in relation to this work. (Deleuze, 2003: 99; original emphasis)

The battle with the givens, in Bacon's work, is engaged via "aleatory marks" or "asignifying traits" (2003: 100) – random or accidental strokes, smudges or deformations of the paint, around which, and from which, the painting emerges in chancy ways that cannot be anticipated at the outset. The aleatory mark undermines the orders of figuration and representation, releasing the work from conventional meaning, and circumventing the will of the artist. "It is as if the hand assumed an independence and began to be guided by other forces", Deleuze writes. "The painter's hand intervenes in order to shake its own dependence and break up the sovereign optical organization: one can no longer see anything, as if in a catastrophe, a chaos" (100-101).

This is the operation of the *diagram* – to introduce "catastrophe" into the static, vertical relations of signification and figuration. The diagram "unlocks areas of sensation" (102) and imports a presentiment or "germ" of a new rhythm or organisation. When it succeeds, and

this is by no means assured, the diagram reaches beyond itself and brings new things into view. Gangle observes that the diagram *"pre-creates"* the painting, by setting up particular conditions for the operation of chance:

> The function of the painterly diagram is to "cast" a concrete, aleatoric structure that may or may not contribute finally to the finished composition of the actual work but the mutual determinations of whose elements provide virtual conditions or openings for its creative production. The diagram does not directly determine the work, but conditions the process of its creation. The role of the diagram is thus that of a seemingly paradoxical kind of mediation, one which "mediates" a radically unforeseeable and indeterminable creative act. (Gangle, 2010: 80)

The diagram is thus, in the words of Bogue and Semetsky (2010: 116) "a map which engenders the territory to which it is supposed to refer." Gangle argues that the diagram applies not only to art, but to all modes of creation: "Creation in Deleuze is always (not only in the study of Bacon but throughout his entire philosophy) a matter of initially diagrammatic and machinic preparation. (2010: 80-81)."

Doing inquiry diagrammatically might therefore involve constructing little aleatory machines designed to import "catastrophe" into the frameworks and methods of research, policy and practice, in order to clear a space for creativity and unforeseen outcomes. Examples of such work already exist. De Freitas (2012: 557) for instance explores the potential of diagrams as a "creative force" in research on classroom interaction. She uses mathematical knot diagrams as an a-signifying technique for disrupting conventional models of interaction to reveal lines of flight and rhizomatic complexities. Renold and Ivinson (2019), in their collaborations with young people living with transgenerational trauma and extreme poverty, collaboratively craft artefacts that condense the "residues and intensities" of the young people's experience. In turn these artefacts, heavy with symbolic intensity and diagrammatic potential, are inserted into public and political spaces to effect small catastrophes. For instance, an artfully mutated chair, expressing girls' experience of sexual violence, has appeared on the platform as a mute attendant in policy seminars and government health initiatives. My own previous work has attempted to incorporate a-

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signifying traits into research method by attending to the 'disconcerting' power of that which lies on the borderlines of language and body, and resists representation or capture by coding – such as laughter, cries, refrains, tears, snot, vomiting, lies and jokes (MacLure, 2011; 2013b; 2016).

It is also important to note that divination depends on careful *preparation*. The effort of "clearing" the canvas in order to open it, and oneself, to the vicissitudes of chance depends, as Deleuze noted in the quotation above, on preparation that is "silent and invisible, yet extremely intense" (2003: 99). The work of divination demands a certain rigor and "sobriety" (Deleuze, 2005: 344). It is not a matter of unlicensed, free-floating interpretation, and is far from the "pseudotransgressive sensationalism of solitary genius" (Ramey, 2012: 201). That is why, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the child and the madman are not eligible as "cosmic artisans": although they may have the agility to evade capture by convention, and the inclination to entertain inhuman alliances, they lack the solemn resolve necessary for the serious play of rigorous experimentation.

Inquiry as divination, though it may be invigorated by the prephilosophical practices of art, is not therefore a matter of open-ended imaginative play, or a willingness to "go with the flow" of immersive experience. For some, it may involve preparatory exercises specifically designed to loosen the hold of reason and common sense, in order to open up mind and body to new affects. Renold and Ivinson (2019) for instance, subject themselves and their coparticipants to taxing (though enjoyable) outdoor adventures as bodily and affective preparation for their collaborative "artful interventions". Walking has become popular as a dynamic substrate for speculative methodologies (Springgay & Truman, 2018). Cull (2011) proposes "attention training exercises" devised, again, to bypass the stale conventions of spectatorship and the conscious will in order to allow new forms of immanent, "ontological participation." Whether done via explicit exercises of mind or body, or less visibly, divination arguably always involves some form of "attention training" or re-training. This will inevitably demand some form of extended encounter or apprenticeship, as argued above. This may be served as the longueurs of time spent trying to clear the canvas of qualitative method in order decipher the signs of data differently (see below). It may also accrue from deep bonds

of alliance forged over time as part of a community that is trying and testing its own 'fabrications' (Stengers, 2008).

Divination in/as educational and social research

I have suggested that something akin to divinatory interpretation could ethically be put to work in and as research. Should we therefore be thinking about *methods* for divination? A textbook for sorcerers' apprentices? Taken as a set of general prescriptions, methods, as others have argued, kill the immersive, experimental character of ontological or "post qualitative" inquiry (St. Pierre, 2019; Jackson, 2017). They would ground the "witch's line" (Deleuze, 1997: 109). If we are to have methods, they would need, as argued above, to be *bespoke* ones – crafted to follow the specific grain and contour of the problem in hand, with a chancy, yet unbreakable relation to the hoped-for outcome. We would need, on the one hand, to pay careful and respectful attention to the complex forces in the event that is coming into existence, and on the other to be prepared to make the unwarranted leap toward an unpredictable landing.

Qualitative researchers may actually be well-placed to perform divinatory interpretation, disposed *as they already are* to move back and forth between the virtual realm of ideas and their actualization in what one might, under conditions of mutation or perversion, continue to call 'data'. Perhaps there is something of the Egyptologist or the metallurgist in the researcher's dedication to following the contours of their "materials" in order to arrive at new knowledge or prospects for action. Or at least there could be. Bogue, outlining the implications for learning of Deleuze's pedagogy of signs, states that this "entails first a critique of codes and conventions, an undoing of orthodox connections, and then a reconnection of elements such that the gaps between them generate problems, fields of differential relations and singular points" (Bogue, 2008: 15). I would argue that something interstitial, unforeseen and indefinable – a sense of the singular and the anomalous – can, if we are crafty and careful, emerge from the strange "reconnections" of the singular and the connected in qualitative inquiry. From, on the one hand, lengthy, careful immersion in the "field"; and on the other, the chance encounter with the coalescence of forces that issue in

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and as individual examples or events of "data". These examples lodge themselves in the mind, body and memory as (enticing) *problems,* precisely because they carry presentiments of their wider, virtual connectibility, coupled with the intimation of something singular and irreducible, that is exceeding the ambit of conventional method (cf MacLure, 2013a).

Even that most disparaged of methods, coding, can be seen in mutation as potentially divinatory and event-ful. I have previously described research coding thus:

> The process of coding is both active and passive – a matter of actively *making* sense yet also of accommodating to something ineffable that is already 'there'. The researcher is at this point a live conduit between the materiality of things, and the struggle for concepts, and one's 'shared entanglement' with others, and with the uncut and unbounded totality of the data, can be *felt* (MacLure, 2013a: 174).

I might now read these remarks as auguring a practice akin to sorcery or divination – of sensing the anomalous that lurks in the interstices of categories, via the intermediary position of the researcher herself as 'conduit'.

The remarks could also be seen as gesturing towards divinatory interpretation according to the Deleuzian semiotics introduced above. The description of the process of coding invokes the "apprenticeship to signs", in its allusion to sensing that which exceeds representation, and its suggestion of the transformation of *self* that is wrought in the cryptic encounter with signs. Such an apprenticeship also appears to be implicit in this account of the "slow intensity" and the affective charge of coding:

> there is languorous pleasure and something resolute in the slow intensity of coding – an ethical refusal to take the easy exit to quick judgement, free-floating empathy, or illusions of data speaking for itself. More importantly, when practiced unfaithfully, without rigid purpose or fixed terminus, the slow work of coding allows something other, singular, quick and ineffable to irrupt into the space of analysis. (MacLure, 2013a: 174)

The fragment expresses something of the ordeal of apprenticeship – the slow yet resolute dedication to one's materials (here, the "data") in the absence of certain outcome, in order to release, and endure, the "flash" of the sign, which is nothing more (or less) than the differential leap of intensity across "disparates" (Deleuze, 1994: 20). "There is no apprentice who is not "the Egyptologist' of something", writes Deleuze, connecting this figure to other symptomatologists whose vocation also depends on training in sensitivity to the signs emitted by the material to which they have dedicated themselves. "One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease. Vocation is always predestination with regard to signs. Everything that teaches us something emits signs; every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs" (Deleuze, 2000: 4). The researcher's struggle to interpret is not dissimilar therefore to the adventures of the apprentice Egyptologist, deciphering the hieroglyphics in the "obscure zones" of the crypt.

Above all perhaps, divination involves *intensification*. Ramey elegantly sums up its significance for Deleuze as an enduring preoccupation with the "imperceptible intensity at the heart of the empirical". He elaborates:

> Deleuze [attempts to] account for how and why it is that when certain affective states reach given thresholds of intensity, the mind is invited to fuse its faculties in acts of conjecture that connect otherwise independent circuits of sensation, habit, memory and understanding. Natural disasters, important political events, certain moments in a love affair, sequences in a film, passages in a piece of music, and many other intensities can force sensation, memory and thought to overstep their ordinary bounds (Ramey, 2012: 125).

We could think "data" intensively: that is, as miniature natural disasters or moments of transport, or indeed catastrophe, where affective intensities incite the mind to contract relations that cannot be represented, but allow us to overstep the bounds of the familiar. This would require us to go beyond the conventional focus of empirical qualitative research on the actual, to engage, or diagram, the virtual forces and intensities of events. The 'field'

from which ethnographic knowledge has always issued would now also be a *transcendental* field of a-subjective potentials (Deleuze, 2005).

Ramey gives a beautiful example of intensive movement from an early discussion by Deleuze of Mallarmé's poem, *Éventail*, or *Fan.* In this poem, it is the *closed* fan that expresses the pure potentiality of intensive movement. The fan's stillness, Ramey (2012: 93) writes, expresses "a kind of involuted or 'complicated' infinity" that symbolizes "the unlimited density of potential movement" in which "lies the entire mystique of what will have occurred with any movement, any gesture". The poem, then, is a symbol, in the Deleuzian, and Proustian sense outlined above. It does not offer explanation, but incites thought or action. It is energetic. For Ramey, symbols are, "in some sense, *diagrams of immanence"* (110; emphasis added).

An immanent inquiry might therefore treat data events as symbolic rather than representational. Rather than draining examples of their intensity in order to elevate them to generality, the aim would be to try to unfold the potentials that they express, in order to be opened to new connections. Data would no longer be representations, available to be mined for meaning. Instead they would be *hieroglyphs*, whose sense cannot be separated from their appearances.

The jump

Divination will always incur the risk of a loss of ontological security, as a result of refusing to allow oneself to be removed to a place of safety, somewhere *outside of, or above events*, through dogmatic thinking or the comforts of method. It undermines the conception of choice and decision as the simple exercise of the interpreter's will, and commands subjection to the vicissitudes of chance. The researcher, in exercising choice, is simultaneously exercised by it, in the manner of Ahab's "choosing" of Moby Dick as the object of his obsession: *"a choosing that exceeds him and comes from elsewhere"* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 244, emphasis added).

Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 55) contend, as quoted at the top of this article, that "if thought searches, it is less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than that of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps." Stengers makes a similar assertion, albeit in a rather more solemn register. Writing under the influence of William James, Stengers states that immanent or speculative practice involves "… a jump that demands trust but offers no warrant" (2008, 45). This is unconditional or "precursive" trust. It must be exercised in the absence of the usual guarantees afforded by logic, theory, superior judgement or common sense. Stengers quotes James' description of the jump:

> We can and we may, as it were, jump with both feet off the ground into or towards a world of which we trust the other parts to meet our jump – and only so can the making of a perfected world of pluralistic patterns ever take place. Only through our *precursive trust* in it can it come into being.
> (James, W. 1922, quoted in Stengers, 2008: 44; emphasis added)

However, Stengers also insists that the jump with both feet never really leaves the ground from which it ventures forth, because it is always *situated* in a specific encounter or event. She elaborates:

> the jump is not only toward, … it cannot be dissociated from the ground it leaves. You never trust in general and you never jump in general. Any jump is situated, and situatedness here is not limitation. If a jump is always situated, it is because its aim is not to escape the ground in order to get access to a higher realm. The jump, connecting this ground, always this ground, with what it was alien to, has the necessity of a response. In other words, the ground must have been given the power to make itself felt as calling for new dimensions.
> (Stengers, 2014: 203)

To give the ground the power to make itself felt as "calling" could be understood, in slightly different terms, as diagrammatic practice.

Triptych

I want to turn now to a specific example from a classroom ethnography that I was involved in some years ago. The example includes a data "event" that came to haunt me and my co-researchers (MacLure et al, 2010), and I have returned to it on subsequent occasions. The event concerned a young child, Hannah, who remained silent when her name was called out during "registration" period in the classroom. Hannah's noncompliance seemed to prompt an unappeasable rage for explanation from teachers, classmates and parents. As researchers we were drawn into that vortex of explanatory insufficiency. We too wanted to know why, and who/what to blame. *Why are they doing this? Who is to blame? What does it mean? Where is it coming from? Who is responsible? How can we fix it? How can we stop it? How should we analyse it?* Our starting position therefore was one of judgemental reason and dogmatic critique (Latour, 2004). We were looking for hostages (Stengers, 2008).

Conventional qualitative approaches would seek the explanation for Hannah's silence in general categories or concepts, such as power, interactional dynamics, family dysfunction, autobiographical experience, selective mutism, etc. This was our own initial inclination. But we were drawn to the event by the strange *force* that it seemed to exert: we were unable to stand fully outside it, or above it. Yet we were also unable to let go. The example assumed a kind of agency: it drew us in. But it also felt portentous – it seemed to point beyond itself, towards potential extensions and connections. It seemed to be emitting signs. It felt diagrammatic.

So I turn to it again here to try to indicate what could be involved in divinatory or diagrammatic practice, involving a symbolic "reading" of data not for the meanings they convey but for the unanticipated connections that they afford.[4] Rather than looking for underlying causes or reasons, the aim would be to try to unfold and follow the hidden potentials of the data event. To comprehend a symbol, according to Ramey, "is to be compelled to perform the action it prescribes, or at least to find oneself drawn into the event it ramifies" (2012: 95). The composition of three fragments below exhibits, I suggest, the "uniting-separating" operation of the *triptych* as described by Deleuze in his analysis of Bacon's paintings, where "the borders of each of the three panels cease to isolate, though

they continue to separate and divide" (2003: 108). The three elements of the example remain distinct and resistant to incorporation into any over-arching narrative or representational schema; yet some obscure "rhythm" runs through them.

> Hannah, aged 5, never responds during the morning ritual of taking names for "the register". This silence, the authors write, opens a "hole in the ceremonial order of the classroom" (MacLure et al, 2010), into which a deluge of demands for explanation pours, as teachers, classmates, parents and researchers are gradually drawn into its ambit.

> Bartleby the Scrivener, in Melville's short novel of 1853, does not comply with his employer's instructions but responds with "I would prefer not to". This "formula", Deleuze (1997: 73) writes, "creates a vacuum within language", into which a deluge of demands for explanation pours, as boss, colleagues, landlord, police and prison staff are gradually drawn into its ambit. Bartleby dies in prison, having preferred not to eat.

> In the video for the indie band Radiohead's '*Just'*, a man lying in the street refuses to say why. His refusal incurs a barrage of demands for explanation from the pedestrians and a motor-cycle cop who are successively drawn into its ambit. The man finally whispers the secret to the desperate crowd. The camera zooms out to reveal all of the participants lying motionless on the ground.
> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oIFLtNYI3Ls)

 "Are you not tired of all these explanations?" asks Latour (2004: 229).

The fabrication or assemblage wrought by the three fragments can be understood, I will suggest, as a *diagrammatic composition* as defined by Ramey (2012: 162): "The diagrammatic composition is a new being, an assemblage. What is realised here is a power that comes from beyond or before the conscious will, from a nature or an affect that is impersonal, preindividual, and complicit with chance".

The first fragment, relating to Hannah's non-compliance is interpreted symbolically: that is, as containing, folded within it, hidden intensities that might be *un*folded to disclose occult meaning or potential. Recalling the quote from Ramey (2012: 125), above, it seemed to spark "acts of conjecture that ... force[d] sensation, memory and thought to overstep their ordinary bounds". The participants in the three fragments associate in non-natural "alliance" rather than family resemblance. The juxtaposition of the fragments does not offer an overarching explanation or concept that would encompass all three. Nor does it elevate one example to a superior position of explaining or solving the other two. It is, rather, an assemblage that expresses two of an infinite number of potential "ramifications" of the classroom event - the result of sensing something moving *in* the three events that cannot be fully captured or represented, but which allows them to resonate.

I would suggest that the obscure, affective intensity around Hannah's silence operates as an a-signifying trait or aleatory mark that opens a diagrammatic line, introducing catastrophe into a number of domains: the order of the classroom, the self-certainty of the participants (including the researchers), the rationality of explanation, the power of critique. But in so doing the diagram is not only catastrophe but is, in the words of Deleuze (2003: 102) "also a germ of order or rhythm." It is this rhythm, a kind of virtual pulse, that connects the events and affords the precursive jump from one to another.

Diagrammatic or divinatory practice demands that we give up our inclination for narrative as well as logical coherence (c.f. Deleuze, 2003). Since the usefulness of the diagram consists precisely in its power to mobilise that which can only be sensed, and to undermine conscious intentions, there would be little point in attempting a research narrative that would retrospectively represent how "we" moved/were moved from one event to the next. I am unable to describe how, or even when, "Bartleby" and "Hannah" began to resonate, or the point at which the Radiohead video became complicit. It is not possible even to identify an originary "Hannah event" that would be located in a determinate space and time. The catastrophic force of Hanna's silence is distributed across the multiple occasions of its occurrence, on different occasions of taking the register. But perhaps the event that we are concerned with happened at the point at which a "fieldnote" was entered in Christina's research notebook? Or when it surfaced as a "hot spot" of our project discussions (MacLure,

2013a: 172)? Or even when it first made it into print as the focus of a journal article? Linear time is not really at issue here, since on the virtual plane, the three events are *already* connected as potentials; already participating in one another. The sense that resonates in events is, according to Williams (2008: 36) "more like a distant and embodied destiny that different events intermittently connect to, feed off and alter for all other events."

The affective frisson of the classroom event, and the interstitial "jumps" that connect it to the other elements in this composition felt, and were, unmotivated. We did not know in advance where we were going. But their untimely appearance nevertheless depended on *preparation* – on that apprenticeship to signs described above. The jumps are obscurely conditioned by hours of sifting and struggling, on the part of the researchers, with a mass of "raw" material in the form of fieldnotes and video recordings – cryptic encounters from which other transversal lines might have issued to form other data events. They are also inchoately connected, I would suggest, to the ennui of project meetings held loosely together by false starts and failed topics listless discarded, in a precursive, affective waiting for the irruption of some diagrammatic potential towards an elsewhere that we could not have predicted. And finally, those jumps were grounded in our shared concerns, as researchers and as educators, with practice, policy and lived experience in the spaces of early childhood education, and the implications for those caught up in it. We were determined to loosen our focus, or relax our gaze enough to ask better questions, formulate better problems or sense new implications. The unanticipated lines of flight that opened up were also, always grounded in our collective investment, and involvement, in Hannah's dilemma.

Ultimately, what is glimpsed in the triptych above is apprehended distinctly but *obscurely*, in the mode of the "Dionysian thinker" (Deleuze, 1994: 259): as something that cannot be represented but can only be sensed – perhaps something akin to the scent of death that lurks in the rage for explanation; the amorphous turmoil stirred by explanation's inevitable tendency to recede; and the price paid by those who inadvertently trigger, but can never satisfy, its voracious appetite. These are unquestionably matters of educational and social concern.

Conclusion

Divination forces us to re-think the ethics and politics of *relationality*. The unnatural relations entertained by divination and the politics of sorcery present a challenge, not only to the static relations of representation, but also to theories that posit an unbounded, haptic relationality as the originary condition from which individuals and stable structures subsequently emerge. Colebrook (2019: 188) detects a colonial violence in the "fetishisation" of all-embracing relationality, as espoused in disparate domains including theories of emergence, post-Kantian philosophy, and relational aesthetics. The appeal to an encompassing relationality has further intensified, Colebrook notes, with the installation of the Anthropocene as a looming planetary disaster that is both the fault and the fate of an undifferentiated "humanity" (see also Yusoff, 2018). The privileging of relationality, Colebrook argues, inevitably suppresses the intransigent alterity of indigenous and nomadic societies, for whom recuperation into the global family will always mean erasure or exploitation. She argues for a decolonising relationality of incommensurability - of indifference to the settler demand for empathic relation to the globe (see also Jones & Jenkins, 2008). This would involve "a radical cut or refusal of relationality" at least in its hegemonic forms (2019: 185).[5] Colebrook discerns such a radically non-relational politics and counter-ethics in the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

Divination has the potential to effect a similar decolonisation of research methodology. There is a politics of divination in the diagrammatic line that forges relations of "incommensurable simultaneity," to use Colebrook's (2019: 191) words. In the diagrammatic composition, entities persist in their implacable separateness, resisting assimilation into larger schemes, but nevertheless gesture towards some fragile resonance. In the case of the data triptych above, this enabled my colleagues and I to think about the colonial violence that might inhere in the impulse to render others visible and comprehensible. It allowed us to suspend the inclination to contain analysis within generalising frames that allow us only to 'see' encounters between adults and children, or teachers and students. It may have altered, if only slightly, our assumptions about who and what are involved in educational events. I like to imagine that it has contributed, in diffuse

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and obscure ways, to a rethinking that is still continuing, about the kinds of relations that we want to form with children; and those that we might work to avoid.

Divinatory practices would, in summary, be diagrammatic, ambulant, cryptic and experimental. They would be affirmative: not looking for blame, but proliferating connection. They would engage the queer temporality and spatiality of the Event, and entertain forms of relation and participation that are always to some extent inhuman. I do not propose that inquiry should necessarily abandon the search for order and regularity, according to conventional logics of representation, discourse etc. But I have suggested that it is also possible to unfold something "inside" conventional inquiry – something that already inhabits its interstices - that would open it to unanticipated connections through the working of chance. In the esoteric practices that have been explored here, we might find what immanent inquiry needs to escape its thrall to hierarchy, transcendence and the sovereign will of the interpreter. At the very end of her monumental book, *Thinking with Whitehead*, Isabelle Stengers credits Whitehead with developing a mode of "empirical experimentation-verification that is *akin to trance,* because in it thought is taken, captured, by a becoming that separates it from its own intentionality" (2011: 519; emphasis added). This description also provides an apt condensation of inquiry as divination, and a fitting note on which to end.

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Notes

[1] Authors would include Deleuze, (1994; 2003; 2004); Deleuze & Guattari (1983; 1987); Stengers (2008); Ramey (2012); Semetsky (2011); Gangle (2015); Pisters (2006); Grosz (2017); Blake (2014).

[2] MacLure (2017) critically explores the significance of Dionysus as a figure for "post qualitative" research.

[3] "Fabrication" is Stengers' (2008) term of choice for the clinical practice of witchcraft.

[4] This renewed encounter with "old" data itself replays the dynamic of divination that I am trying to unfold, without being able fully to represent it. It can be understood as an attempt to *explicate* something implicated.

[5] Colebrook (2019: 185) is referring here to Deleuze, and argues that this radical cut in relationality is "only hinted at" in his work, in comparison with the more visible emphasis on the unbounded cosmic relationality opened by "higher deterritorialization". My argument would be that this "hint" is much stronger than she allows.