

Fieldwork in philosophy, emancipation and researcher dis-position

A post-qualitative research exemplar

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Stephen Heimans

*Griffith Institute for Educational Research (GIER), Griffith University,
Brisbane, Australia*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to offer an exemplar of post-qualitative “fieldwork in philosophy” research. The paper proposes features of such philosophical fieldwork and adumbrates examples of concepts that have emerged in the process of undertaking the research.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is conceptual, drawing on an abductive approach. Post-qualitative understandings that question the validity of methodology and theory as separable entities are operationalised.

Findings – The paper provides insights into how post-qualitative research might be undertaken and what might emerge in the process.

Originality/value – This paper fulfils a need for an example of research that is post-qualitative. Additionally, the possibilities for doing “fieldwork in philosophy” are extended, as is the work of Jacques Rancière with respect to emancipation.

Keywords Fieldwork in philosophy, Post-qualitative, Ranciere

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

This paper arises out of an Australian education policy trajectory study (Lingard and Garrick, 1997) that focused on one policy from its inception in government to its enactment (Heimans, 2012) in one institution. One finding from the research was that across a broad spectrum of research and policy sites (e.g. the university that the research was based at, in the national and state government bureaucracies, and in an education institution) practices were being neo-liberalised. The research found “policy as numbers” (Lingard, 2011) to be widespread. This is where policy is constituted as numbers and is tied into the pervasiveness of the logics of accounting, and where education is a product for sale in a market involving the rational choice-making of individuals bent towards furthering their own interests; an educational substantiation of *homo economicus*. During the study (conducted between 2009 and 2012), the logics of research practice likewise were becoming increasingly subject to similarly inflected ideas. This paper derives from this policy research project and presents ideas that arose as a response to the widespread neo-liberalising of practices. It focuses on the disposition of the researcher and makes proposals that aim to create difficulties for the neo-liberalising of research (see Davies, 2005 for more on the neo-liberalisation of intellectual work).

The research was a PhD project whose title became *Characterising – (an) Education Policy*, conducted through the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia. The idea for working the project out as a “fieldwork in philosophy” came from Taylor Webb, and the author would like to thank him for this.



The research project used an abductive methodology (Blaikie, 2007), that started with critical and theoretical approaches to practice (Heimans, 2011) and then put “data” into close and ongoing conversation with “theory” – each iteratively inflecting the other. (The quote marks around each of these words – data and theory – indicate that they became problematic categories as the research progressed.) The theorised methodology that emerged as a response to the neo-liberalising of practices during the research worked directly to slow down researcher rationality (Stengers, 2005a). This kind of slowing down is not temporal, but instead refers to enacting research processes that delay causalities and conclusions – that resist the closure of rationality. The project, developed into a “fieldwork in philosophy” (Lather, 2014). This kind of a paradoxical fieldwork developed also to make conclusions more difficult to reach with fieldwork and philosophy becoming entangled together. An example of this concerns genre and in this case the genre of a (this) journal paper. Explicating ideas about doing fieldwork in philosophy, as it is discussed here, concern making an argument that is against making an argument. This kind of paradox will demand from the reader a constant virtual red pen where they can scratch out bits that contradict the central argument that is against making an argument.

This paper focuses on three theoretical methodological resources that emerged in the process of doing the fieldwork that relate to researcher disposition. Here the idea of disposition is eviscerated to become dis-position. This is in part an ironic move. But it also a practical one, so that the enmeshed bodily and professional positions of a researcher are made problematic. In the philosophical fieldwork described here positions are constantly under threat and the place of the researcher is out of place. Being a researcher should be precarious. But there is a purpose to this dis-positioning. It might offer resources that enable the unfolding of ways of doing research that resist neo-liberalisation where their embeddedness in a particular fieldwork circumscribes the possibility to derive useful knowledge for use elsewhere. The resources offered here are:

- (1) Writing as a haecceity based on Elizabeth St Pierre’s work; this proposal works against the individuation of researcher dispositions, edging towards articulating the dis-positionary, un-individuated entangled writing body and body (that is) writing.
- (2) Performing and an intervention, drawing strongly from the work of (anti) philosopher Jacques Rancière; this proposal works against the “terrors of performativity” (Ball, 2003) in which people are required to not only do their jobs but “perform” them for inspectorial accountability regimes. Performing cuts against the demands and expectations of performativity. And intervention is opposed to theorisation; this proposal is intended to offer a way for research to upset theory-methodology couplets, in which easy conclusions about the “lives of others” (Chow and Rohrer, 2011) might be made. It intends to open space for writing that assumes an already-writing-reader; where oppositional presupposed positions go awry upfront.
- (3) A theorised methodological “device” called the glance. The glance draws from the work of Rancière again and offers a way to write about the paradox of seeing what is unseeable. Another paradox presents itself; how can one write about what cannot be seen? Again, this works against the grain of the production of research outcomes that might enter easily into the market of knowledge production. It is intended to make the production of easily useful analysis, evidence and findings more difficult.

These three resources are outlined in more detail below, following a brief introduction to “fieldwork in philosophy”.

Fieldwork in philosophy

We have used this to begin thinking about the ontological turn in qualitative research as a moment in the “fieldwork in philosophy” that I have been much interested in ever since I stopped feeling like we were going to be “scienced” away by the goings on in Washington. Shifting from objects to assemblages and from proliferating and competing paradigms to meta-method across paradigms, Karen Barad (2007) and all those who have put her to work across so many disciplinary formations have become my new theory girl- and boyfriends (Lather, 2014, p. 2).

The work presented in this paper responds to the moment that Lather identifies in the quote above and aims at messing up long standing generic knowledge production techniques concerning theory, methodology, data, the empirical and so on. This is necessary according to St Pierre (2014, n.p. – this quote is from Bettie St Pierre’s plenary at the 2014 International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry on Practices for the “New” in the New Empiricisms, the New Materialisms, and Post Qualitative Inquiry) who suggests that:

At some point, I believe you’ll realize you just can’t “do” conventional humanist qualitative methodology because it no longer makes sense. You can’t think it, so you can’t do it. And then panic may set in, because no one will tell you what else to do if you don’t do a qualitative study.

And the work reported on here evolved out of the panic that St Pierre describes and the adventure and risk of doing research “in” the post-critical/material/ ontological turn; doing “fieldwork in philosophy” became a way to approach these challenges. However, and this is a crucial point, doing, and now writing about, such fieldwork does not indicate that this is necessarily a proposal for a new methodology that might be straightforwardly applied elsewhere. The point that St Pierre is making is that each piece of research needs to be attentive to its own particularities – developing its own theorised – methodologies and empirical entanglements.

But as it has emerged in the research project drawn on here “fieldwork in philosophy” allows a focus on the “doing”. As such “it” is just a temporary settlement, or a singularity with inbuilt ambiguities and a conceptual “shelf life”. Doing fieldwork in philosophy is an in-between – as Stengers (2005b) would have it – “thinking par le milieu” that is formed out of an ongoing unseparated engagement between fieldwork and philosophy. The fieldwork becomes tentative and slow, inflected by a range of emerging theoretical/philosophical/empirical inputs so that in the end “more” thinking work is done with “less” (in the case of the research project reported on here – a great deal of interview “data” was collected but barely touched upon). The process undoes the speed with which conclusions might be drawn, delaying the next word that completes the rationality/judgement couplet [...] and so [...] (Stengers, 2005a). Practically, “doing more with less” means putting into conjunction a plethora of resources – it means delaying the desire for analysis and exegeses.

Less simply, in the long-term engagement between fieldwork-philosophy-fieldwork-philosophy, “research” reveals a complex negotiation with no easy truces. As Koro-Ljungberg (2012) demands “Researchers of the World, Create!”, arguing that research should resist simplicity and embrace multiplicity and complexity “that methodological multiplicity and complexity can move researchers

towards conceptual, analytical, and interpretive spaces that can meet the needs of ever-changing communities of practice” (p. 814). These ideas are an argument against mechanistic and unaccounted-for, or written-out, simplification of qualitative research. In concert with this, and as conceptualised here, “fieldwork in philosophy” struggles with and against simplifying tendencies. The following sections of this paper adumbrate researcher dis-position resources that emerged through the fieldwork in philosophy. These are not theoretical or philosophical or methodological resources *per se* as they emerged through the fieldwork in philosophy. They reside in this way in their singularity – in the awkwardness of their unresolved settlements. They invite an intervention by the reader, who will be asking, but what might these resources become?

So, the rest of the paper does not set out a linear progression of ideas that form into an argument for or against a particular position to a problem or justification for any future action. They are as much as anything notes made on the way through some fieldwork in philosophy research. If they could be, they would be Rancière-ian “scenes” (Rancière and Paul, 2013), that capture some of the conjunctions of events that enable some things to be thought, said and heard while excluding others. In terms of structure, the first section below concerns the articulation of a mode of writing that attempts to “get out of” the individual human body as the location of the production of written ideas. The section after that focuses on performing and an intervention and explores some of the contradictory possibilities in performing and spectating (drawing on Rancière again) – as ongoing paradox that might apply to doing research. Following that, there is an exploration of the “glance” – on what can/ not be “seen”.

Writing as a haecceity

“Writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written it [...]” (Cixous, 1993, cited in Lather, 2007, p. 4). It is tempting to locate writing as an act of individuality perhaps this is both a limitation and opportunity that English contains in the “you” from the quote above. To focus on the opportunity, “you” is both singular and plural. It is both the one that does the actual writing and all those that this oneness is entangled with in research-writing. To explore this further St Pierre (2011) and her writing about the post-modern critique of the “liberal individual of Enlightenment humanism” (p. 618) is germane. She traces through Descartes and Locke, and their beliefs in, and description of the human, the power that prevails in and instantiates the separation of the human from everything else. What follows is the possibility of the mastery of the universe and the binary oppositions of man/nature, knower/known, subject/object and so on. She suggests that “the principle of individuation” (p. 618) allows the organisation of the “undifferentiated into identity” (p. 618), and the possibility of division and separation, and of determining beginnings and endings and of making an essence, that then makes everything with that essence the same. This is the process where, “one human being could be individuated/divided from other human beings-that each human has a centre, an identity (an ‘inner self, ‘inner voice). We also individuated the human from everything else [...] [C]learly individuation (the creation of categories such as *man* and *nature*) is an act of power” (p. 618, italics in original). Against this, St Pierre argues that “in postmodernism the aim is to de-individuate” (p. 618), and then outlines the history of the idea of haecceity borrowed by Deleuze and Guattari from Aristotle via Duns Scotus.

She suggests that haecceity concerns “mingling, assemblage [...] relation, becoming” (p. 618). It is an idea that Deleuze (1995) made use of suggesting that “[O]ur individuality is rather that of events [...] a philosophical concept, the only one

capable of ousting the verb 'to be' and its attributes" (p. 141). "A haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Such a "middling" though is not an isolated or isolating one, but rather one that is entangled. St Pierre turns to quantum physics to develop this idea further, using the work of Karen Barad (2007), where Barad suggests that, "[T]o be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with one another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interaction" (p. ix).

And so for this fieldwork in philosophy writing occurred as a haecceity. It was an event of de-individuation, though undertaken by a single hand, the individual rational person – the writer and the writing author (as a verb) one another, write each other into becoming some other thing – in a meshwork (Lefebvre, 1991) (and here this is taken to mean all those entities, (e.g. people, ideas, physical objects and so on) that also are (be) coming into being in relation with the writing including things internal and external to the text itself).

This writing haecceity enacts (Law and Urry, 2004) analysis and data following St Pierre (2011) who argues that;

[M]uch data – *what we think with when we think about a topic* – were identified during analysis and not before. Until one begins to think, one cannot know what one will think with. In that sense, data are collected during thinking and, for me, especially during writing (p. 621, italics in original).

But what happens to the writing – research haecceity? How might it perform? What is its place? What can it do? The next section of the paper takes a further step towards problematising individuation by offering resources that upset the place of the reader and the writer and the places of what the products of research and writing might become.

Performing and an intervention

What is the performance of the materiality of writing and temporary nature of performance (hence the use of the gerund form of the verb-performing) qua performance? What are its dissonances? I will draw on work here by Rancière (2007) as articulated in a "talk" on the emancipated spectator ("The Emancipated Spectator" was originally presented, in English, at the opening of the fifth International Summer Academy of Arts in Frankfurt on 20 August 2004). Rancière places his discussion in the context of his work on intellectual emancipation – one of the things that the "fieldwork in philosophy" became concerned with.

Rancière begins his talk by referring to what he calls the "paradox of the spectator" (p. 1). This paradox acknowledges that there is no theatre without spectators, but that spectatorship is a "bad thing". Spectators only look. As Rancière (2007, p. 2) states, "He who looks at the spectacle remains motionless in his seat, lacking any power of intervention. Being a spectator means being passive. The spectator is separated from the capacity of knowing just as he is separated from the possibility of acting". He suggests that to this problem two conclusions have been drawn. The first is that theatre itself is bad – as "the stage of illusion and passivity" (p. 2), and that one can find in Plato this understanding of the theatre that should be annulled in favour of a community that can do without such a form of "mediation". The second is that the theatre itself should be reformed, to do away with spectators, so that they become actors, "where they will learn things instead of being captured by images and become active participants in a collective performance instead of being passive viewers" (p. 2).

Further, Rancière (2007) suggests first that the spectator no longer be the passive viewer, who “identifies with the characters on the stage” (p. 2). Rather she must investigate the strangeness of whatever spectacle is presented, to investigate the reasons for this and further to find its cause – to act as an investigating scientist. Second, the spectator must not just observe but “must be torn from his delusive mastery, drawn into the magical power of theatrical action, where he will exchange the privilege of playing the rational viewer for the experience of possessing theater’s true vital energies” (p. 2). As such the “theatrical mediation makes the audience aware of the social situation on which theater itself rests, prompting the audience to act in consequence” (p. 3), or “it makes them abandon the position of spectator: no longer seated in front of the spectacle, they are instead surrounded by the performance, dragged into the circle of the action, which gives them back their collective energy. In both cases the theater is a self-suppressing mediation” (p. 3).

Rancière (2007) suggests that such self-suppressing mediation is what might be thought to occur in the pedagogical relation, where the distance between the knowledge of the master and the ignorance of the ignorant is that which is suppressed – what is taught is that which might reduce the gap between ignorance and knowledge. Paradoxically, however, instead, this gap is remade continuously, as, in order to convert ignorance to knowledge the schoolmaster must always be ahead of the ignorant one creating new ignorance for knowledge to replace. “The master is not only he who knows precisely what remains unknown to the ignorant; he also knows how to make it knowable, at what time and what place, according to what protocol” (p. 4). The core of Rancière’s (2007) argument here is that the knowledge that the master has, is that of the “knowledge of ignorance”, which is what is transmitted to the student; “the knowledge that he must have things explained to him in order to understand, the knowledge that he cannot understand on his own. It is the knowledge of his incapacity. In this way, progressive instruction is the endless verification of its starting point: inequality” (p. 4). Opposed to inequality for Rancière (2007) is the presupposition of equality, and in the process of its verification comes the possibility of emancipation. “Emancipation is the process of verification of the equality of intelligence” (Rancière, 2007, p. 4). This is the opposite of the stultification that is inherent in the presupposition of the inequality of intelligences that the schoolmaster whose primary knowledge is that of the distance between knowledge and ignorance and the preservation of (the exactness of) this distance.

For Rancière (2007, p. 5) then emancipation is linked to the verification of a presupposition of equality of intelligences where there is no “gap” between intelligences; where each intelligence can verify its equality in making “the poetic work of translation”(p. 5) the beginning of an apprenticeship. The question is to see what might be done under such a presupposition. In opposition to the ever-maintained-by-pedagogy distance that ignorance has to knowledge, the distance is between that which is already known and that which can be learnt in the same way in an enactment based on the presupposition of an equal intelligence:

The distance that the “ignorant” person has to cover is not the gap between his ignorance and the knowledge of his master; it is the distance between what he already knows and what he still doesn’t know but can learn by the same process. To help his pupil cover that distance, the “ignorant master” need not be ignorant. He need only dissociate his knowledge from his mastery. He does not teach his knowledge to the students. He commands them to venture forth in the forest, to report what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to verify it,

and so on. What he ignores is the gap between two intelligences. It is the linkage between the knowledge of the knowledgeable and the ignorance of the ignorant. Any distance is a matter of happenstance. Each intellectual act weaves a casual thread between a form of ignorance and a form of knowledge. No kind of social hierarchy can be predicated on this sense of distance (Rancière, 2007, p. 5).

What are the implications of Rancière's (2007) ideas, remembering that he will take us soon back to a discussion of performance and writing? The first thing to note is that Rancière describes these ideas as interventions not as theories, and as interventions that are polemical (Rancière, 2009). The other essential and related thing, for the writing here, with respect to Rancière's ideas, is that they completely undo balances between scholarship and emancipation to unbalance a position where research aims to reveal what might be hidden beneath what people do or say, or to expose the workings of power that operate silently behind peoples' backs to one where the point is not to use theory and then work with it to produce some findings, rather the point is to intervene, and to do this through a continuous polemical translation and counter-translation of words as they are found.

Intervention contra theorisation, cannot be achieved just in the words as they appear in text. As opposed to the revelatory possibilities of the theory-methodology complex (where all is revealed ON the page), intervention depends on what the reader sees, thinks and does with what is written here – what is on the page is the start of something else, where an equal intelligence can make an intervention. Revelation ON the page, also implies that the relevant and revelatory action has happened already and that a reader must be positioned as one whose ignorance is assumed, the text being the mechanism whereby a particular truth is able to be shown, and that a particular knowledge is made to be ready for revelation. What theory is able to do is to provide the reasonable argument for the revelation – in short, it offers an explanation of the workings of the “world”. In this scenario the reader is assumed to have an intelligence that is unequal to that of the author where the reader's knowledge depends on the authors'/researchers' powers to operate theory as a device that might marshal words in the service of truth and knowledge for the ignorant, to explain the world to the assumed ignorance of the reader – in terms of both acting upon that ignorance substantively and acting for the benefit or in the interests of the reader. In the writing that has been undertaken here, the assumption is that the reader is also simultaneously and indissolubly a writer, and one who does not need the world to be revealed or its operations explained to them by some other (higher) authority. The writer/reader is one who can decide for themselves what might be in their interests.

The different “logics” of emancipation (Bingham *et al.*, 2010) that underpin each of these opposing versions of the reader/writer relationship were important to the performing of a “fieldwork in philosophy” as I am articulating it here, and to which we will now return, via the recount (or translation of?) of Rancière's talk on the emancipated spectator. I would note here that this paper then forms an exemplar of an attempt to “work out”, or work its way out of the logic of explanation, that underpins the presupposition and re-instigation of inequality. This process, that forms part of “undoing explanation” as the *modus operandi* of scholarship, is also one that necessarily involves writing what a reader is differently – as above, I have said that a reader is also a writer.

So, the logical opposition between reader and writer is undone. The places that a reader and a writer take are (re)moved, or in Rancière's terms, redistributed – there is

a redistribution of the sensible – for example how can a reader also simultaneously BE a writer?:

All these oppositions-looking/knowing, looking/acting, appearance/reality, activity/passivity-are much more than logical oppositions. They are what I call a partition of the sensible, a distribution of places and of the capacities or incapacities attached to those places. Put in other terms, they are allegories of inequality (Rancière, 2007, p. 5).

Importantly Rancière (2007) goes on to argue that even if the positions can be swapped over, the structure stays as it was. “What counts, in fact, is only the statement of opposition between two categories: There is one population that cannot do what the other population does. There is capacity on one side and incapacity on the other” (p. 5). Working from the opposite principle, he argues that emancipation begins with equality. He suggests that in the dismissal of oppositions, for example between looking and acting, in understanding that the distribution of the visible is “part of the configuration of domination and subjection” (p. 6), in realising that looking, for example, is an action as well that might confirm or modify the distribution and that transformation and/or reconfiguration of the world might come through its interpretation, the “spectator is active”. The spectator is active in observing, selecting, comparing, interpreting and connecting observations with other observations from “other stages, in other kinds of spaces” (p. 6). Also the spectator is not subjected to the “transmission” hoped for by the playwright. Just as the emancipated student learns what they will – a different knowledge to that of the master, the spectator saw, felt and understood so that they “make their poems as the poet has done, as the actors, dancers, or performers have done” (Rancière, 2007, p. 6). The spectator is always already active, is already outside the place made and the capacities assigned is always already performing.

Performing is the continual reworking of places, of re- and disassembling, of creating uneven outside/inside relations and of making who speaks, and who attends to the speaking ongoingly problematic, especially as the research expands in the length of its discourse and the quantum of its connections. Performing is an intervention assuming that whatever it becomes is unforeseeable, unthinkable.

However, how is it possible to see what cannot be seen? What is the methodology for such a task? What might a researcher do? In the next section there is a proposal explored for this related to the glance.

The glance

The “fieldwork in philosophy” process enacts myriad micro-analytics that are not at all transparent, occurring as they do “in-the-middle” of multiple recursive, iterative glances at literature, interview transcripts, media and other broader global/cultural semiotic stimulants. These “upset” or intermingle demarcations between the resources that are drawn on and into the process. The glance is one such intermingling:

This is not simply because the foreigner comes to know the language or because experience disillusion his gaze. Lucidity only provides another way of drawing the landscape, of creating an agreement between the lines and the shadows and the habits of belief. It is not because the aridity of stone or the cold of the tomb impose themselves where, before, the flowers of the festive people, and the happy future had been offered. It is because the foreigner, the naïf, it will be said, he who is not yet informed- persists in the curiosity of his gaze, displaces his angle of vision, reworks the first way of putting together words and images, undoes the certainties of place, and thereby reawakens the power present in each of us to become a foreigner on the map of places and paths generally known as reality (Rancière, 2003, p. 3).

The glance begins as a reawakened power to become a foreigner on the map of reality – presupposing an equality of intelligences to rework the putting of words and images together. If “fieldwork in philosophy” might become this, perhaps here we can link it with emancipation. But how? Mercieca (2012) discusses the gaze and the glance and emancipation in his article “Initiating the methodology of Jacques Rancière’: how does it all start?” His paper concerns how one might “become” emancipated. This begins via Rancière’s writing in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* where it is argued that equality is not an end, but a beginning- emancipation “simply means to act on the basis of the presupposition – or “axiom” – of equality” (Biesta, 2010). Mercieca (2012) asks how this beginning might in fact “be” begun, and with respect to methodology. This brings us to the gaze, where Mercieca (2012) takes us through Rancière’s and his analysis of the “voyage” of Ingrid Bergman – as told in the Rossellini film *Europe 51*. They suggest that for one of the characters who was invited to “look behind”, because of the “event” in which she was involved, she now looks “to the side” – no longer making connections and explaining, but taking an “interminable walk in the course of which the subject exceeds everything that it intelligibly could be said to be one with” (Rancière, 2003) – bringing into question the relation between word and image, no longer requiring justification and explanation (Mercieca, 2012) “walking under the sign of interruption, of the event and the words that, having suspended the ordinary course of things, now oblige us to go forward without turning back” (Rancière, 2003), But there is also a twisting out of place, “[A]ll of a sudden she turns around. She leaves the frame “[...] the action of a gaze that turns around and pulls its body along with it towards the place where its truth is in question” (Rancière, 2003).

This bodily action is a metaphor for the methodological glance – twisting, but also walking out of oneness with everything, looking foreign-ly, gazing without readying an explanation. So the glance offers a space for a researcher to delay a translation of reality as it can readily be seen, to stretch out the “sensible” (that makes sense and is available sensually) aesthetics of analysis and findings. To pause in the impulse to make sense from what can be seen straightforwardly; to twist around in the lack of awareness that remaining a stranger to reality supports.

But there is more. The glance is also “a temporally bound, self-aware, and always already partial form of looking and perceiving [...] the glance is receptive to the agency of the other” (Lewis, 2009, p. 293, referring to Bal, 1996). In analysing *Europe 51* and Rancière’s *Ignorant Schoolmaster* together Mercieca (2012) argues that this twisting glance “moves away from the sensible” and for Rancière in *Disagreement* this twisting is “becoming political” (Mercieca, 2012, p. 414) – “as if this body tries to escape the compartmentalised boxes of the sensible, almost squeezing in-between the sensible boxes” (Mercieca, 2012, p. 414).

Mercieca (2012, pp. 414-415) articulates four steps in the “process of initiation of emancipation”, of which the glance is one. He notes that these are not a recipe to initiate the methodology of Rancière. Likewise, “fieldwork in philosophy” is not a methodology – it is becoming. To summarise – there was an encounter – an “event” that started off the process – that “brings about an opening, a new space-a gap in our sensible way of being, doing, seeing and speaking” (Mercieca, 2012, p. 414). Then there is an attempt to “explain” this through the “distribution of the sensible” – closing down the space “into the sensible (closed, order, hierarchical, meaningful) space” (Mercieca, 2012, p. 414). Third there is the glance – a twisting – a becoming foreign. Last there is a production of a “counter discourse which ‘brings dissensus to the sensible’”. And here is the rub. Of which Mercieca also speaks. The counter discourse becomes the sensible. Rancière is the new sensible – where/how can

we speak other than in his voice? Mercieca (2012, p. 415) suggests that “[O]ne does not become emancipated once, but is continually becoming emancipated”. The relation between the sensible and its distribution is a key question. How is the “event”, the gap, the glance, the reconfiguration able to be maintained? Mercieca (2012) also notes the vulnerability that emancipation opened up in the cases he draws from. Sense takes its pound of flesh. Working with the glance is not without risk.

Concluding reflections

Writing as a haecceity, performing and an intervention, and the glance are methodological inventions that might contribute to a researcher dis-position; that is one that is always out of place, is always entangled and emerging with a variety of human and non-human others, acts to upset settled positions and rearranges these. These inventions are here to provoke further invention, to engage what cannot be thought about or seen, to make a different kind of sense; paradoxically emerging out of and constituting, in part, a fieldwork in philosophy.

This fieldwork in philosophy, focusing on some of the “actualities” which such a mode of research might attend to, and draw on, has arisen as a response to the neo-liberalisation of research practices. It attempts to offer resources for delaying conclusions and producing ideas that are not amenable to easy take up by others, especially as evidence for action. This paper is an attempt to put a stone in the shoe of the rationalities that research gets caught up into and to which it contributes. Any future fieldwork in philosophy will therefore be unlikely to use the ideas as presented above as a basis for action. They are not meant as “tools” with which to educate or emancipate others. Rather they are resources that have tried to upset the “place” for research at the centre of the revelation and production of truths, evidence or solutions; to keep these as ongoingly problematic.

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Corresponding author

Dr Stephen Heimans can be contacted at: s.heimans@griffith.edu.au

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