A Giacometti portrait, postmodern emergence, and creativity

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Abstract
The notion of “postmodern emergence” is being used increasingly to frame and inform investigations into a diverse range of topics, and it is likely that this will continue. Postmodern emergence offers promise to researchers who seek alternative ways of generating new knowledge and want to work with creativity. However, the nature of the relationship between postmodern emergence and creativity has not been fully explored. Using a particular creative act, the painting of a portrait by artist Alberto Giacometti, and drawing on my own arts-based research, the synergies between postmodern emergence and a practice-theoretical approach to creativity are identified and unpacked from ontological and epistemological positions. Recognizing the place and value of creativity in postmodern emergence serves to support the work of postmodern emergence researchers, and indeed other qualitative researchers.

Keywords
Creativity, postmodern emergence, qualitative research, portraiture

Introduction
Postmodern emergence provides a theoretic underpinning to researchers who do not want or are unable to work within empiricist or “conventional humanistic qualitative” (St. Pierre, 2013: 654) research paradigms and seek alternative ways of creating new knowledge. Postmodern emergence is a methodology, writes Margaret Somerville (2007: 225), although she also refers to it as an “ontology” (Somerville, 2008: 209) and draws on images (mental and painterly) to, as she says, “further articulate what postmodern emergence might mean” (Somerville, 2008: 117). That said, postmodern emergence is not something to be understood solely in dialogical terms, and any debate about it being, say, methodology, concept, or theory is not the main concern. The important thing is that researchers are referring to the “spirit” (Somerville, 2008: 217) of postmodern emergence increasingly to frame and inform investigations into a diverse range of topics including discourses in science (Crerar, 2013), the use of practice theory in understanding and representing teaching (Mathewson Mitchell, 2013), and the teaching of visual arts (Mathewson Mitchell, 2014). In these studies, postmodern emergence researchers have drawn on what Somerville (2007) refers to as “creative potential” (p. 225) to generate new knowledges. However, the nature of the relationship between postmodern emergence and creativity has not been fully explored. An appreciation of this relationship makes a large body of creativity scholarship more obviously applicable and available to postmodern emergence researchers. It highlights the need for them to incorporate creativity into their education, research structures, and processes and to ask important questions about reflexivity.

These matters are brought to the surface by referring to a particular creative act, the painting of a portrait by artist Alberto Giacometti, drawing on my own arts-based research, and unpacking the synergies between postmodern emergence and creativity from ontological and epistemological positions. Underlying these concerns is the question of how best to conceptualize creativity, such that it aligns with the
character of postmodern emergence. One must start, then, by asking, “What is creativity?”

Creativity

Creativity is considered a heterogeneous concept (Sternberg, 1999: 83–100); its meaning is different when viewed from an individual’s perspective (see, for example, Sternberg, 2006: 2), from a systems standpoint (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and organizationally (see Robledo et al., 2012: 711).

Also, so-called “Big-C” creativity, involving “eminent creative contributions” (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007: 74), tends to be differentiated from little-c creativity—everyday creativity that provides “an ability to be flexible in meeting the demands of life” (Banaji et al., 2010: 20), or as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) puts it, an “important ingredient of everyday life” (p. 8).

The “standard” (Runco and Jaeger, 2012: 92) definition considers creativity to be a process which “involves thinking that is aimed at producing ideas or products that are relatively novel and that are, in some respect, compelling” (Sternberg, 2006: 2). I have no issue with the terms “novelty” or “value”; these words get to the heart of what one normally has in mind when describing something as “creative.” The term “process,” however, linked as it is to psychological research dating back to the mid-1950s (see Stein, 1953: 311–322) invokes the sense that creativity is mechanical. This is evidenced by the fact that the process of creativity is enacted through stages or phases (see, for example, Csikszentmihalyi, 1996: 79). What is required here is a conceptualization of creativity that is not disconnected from postmodern thought, a conceptualization that works ontologically with postmodern emergence. Creativity has been conceptualized from a practice-theoretical perspective (Nayak, 2008; Rae, 2015), and it is argued here that this makes the place of creativity in postmodern emergence even more luminous and useful. It better informs and supports the work of postmodern emergence researchers, if not researchers working in many other areas of qualitative research.

The so-called “practice turn,” itself an ontological turn, puts practice at the center of social life. Thus formulated, practice becomes, as Bill Green (2015) puts it, a “primary organizing principle for the social world” (p. 122). This view is being taken up in a range of areas and disciplines such as education (Reid, 2011) and health care (Hopwood et al., 2013), and as Theodore Schatzki (2001) writes, this is “making decisive contributions to contemporary understandings of diverse issues” (p. 10). Creativity scholars such as Keith Sawyer (2012: 59–75) are turning to sociocultural theory to help explain creativity, albeit without referring directly to practice theory, but this is nevertheless useful. A social view provides context for emergence, which of course is relevant here, and “connects creativity with every day social life and practices” (Paloniemi and Collin, 2012: 23) so that it is not rarefied and idealized as something requiring “genius” (Nayak, 2008: 420). A practice approach to creativity arguably makes it more accessible to researchers.

Research has also been conceptualized as practice (Fish, 2009: 135); however, there appears to be little if any scholarship linking creativity-as-practice to research-as-practice, let alone to postmodern emergence (apart from the connections that Somerville herself made and which will soon be covered). This is the reason I turn to Giacometti:

Through the large window I could see the sun in the treetops above the low roof line on the other side of the passageway. Inside the studio there was Giacometti directly in front of me, with the canvas just to the left of him, between me and the door. Behind him and below the window stood a large table covered with empty turpentine bottles, heaps of paper, dried paint tubes, discarded brushes, and plaster casts of small sculptures. To the right were several sculptural stands holding works in progress. In the corner stood a number of tall plaster figures, and on the wall behind them a large black head had long ago been painted. (Lord, 1980: 59)

The above is James Lord’s description of Alberto Giacometti’s studio in Paris as Giacometti painted Lord’s portrait. Portraiture has a role to play in qualitative research, especially in supporting reflexivity (Rae and Green, 2016), and Giacometti’s studio provides an interesting and useful backdrop to this conversation about postmodern emergence and creativity. This is a conversation that has been fueled by my reading of Lord’s (1980) observations of, and discussions with, Giacometti as he painted Lord’s portrait and by what has been written about postmodern emergence. Thus, Giacometti and Lord help us to steal a look into creativity. It is a glimpse of the experience of only one creative person, over just 18 days, and it is where creativity is contextualized as art-making rather than any number of other possible creative actions. However, Lord’s book, A Giacometti Portrait, does provide a rich description of creativity in a way that resonates deeply with postmodern emergence and so is employed here as a platform to discuss that particular relationship. This discussion will be structured according to how Somerville (2007) originally articulated postmodern emergence—by considering emergence, the ontology of “becoming,” and the epistemology of “generating.”

Postmodern emergence

Similar to creativity, emergence is a heterogeneous concept. Philip Gorski (2016: 211) separates property emergence (forming patterns—for instance, bird flocking) from epistemological emergence (individual responses to a certain property, for example, migration arising from job opportunity), which is different again from ontological emergence (causal power derived from a combination of elements—for example, H₂O). Hodgson (2000: 75), coming from a social science understanding of emergence and picking up from the work of
Kyriakos Kontopoulos (1993: 22–23), explains that “the marks of an emergent property include its novelty, its association with a new set of relations, the stability and boundedness of these relations, and the emergence of new laws or principles applicable to this entity.” Here is something of a link between emergence and creativity in the sense that both work toward what is, or will be, new. This fits, somewhat, with how Somerville discussed emergence, although the novelty that Somerville seeks is hardly a law or principle, and not stability either. It is useful to note, too, that in her article Postmodern Emergence, Somerville avoids the sort of classification and codification that Gorski and others use, instead providing graphic and evocative illustrations of the concept of “emergence.”

According to Somerville (2008), emergence occurs out of a pause in the iterative process of representation and reflection. Such a pause is constituted when a particular assemblage of forms and meanings comes together as a moment of representation, a temporary stability within a dynamic flux of meaning-making in (re)search for new knowledge. (p. 209)

The term “diffraction,” rather than “representation and reflection,” also has a place here, that is, in the sense that Karen Barad (2003: 803) used that term. Diffraction signifies “a methodological ambition to shift perspectives and allow for alternative patterns to emerge,” like the way light passes through, bends, and morphs an object of study (Skågeby, 2013: 7). Other illustrations (not definitions) of emergence offered by Somerville (2007) include “a radical turning point in a student’s research process” and “the appearance of new images on [a student’s] painting and his reflections on that process, knowing that I was witnessing the emergence of a new methodology” (p. 228). For Somerville (2007), “Emergence occurs in the space between data, representing grounded (but unknowable) material reality, and analysis, as the act of meaning-making” (p. 230).

Somerville (2007: 229) also used grounded theory to illustrate the place of emergence in research. Barney Glaser (1992), one of the originators of grounded theory, also asserts the importance of emergence in that context: “The researcher must have patience and not force the data out of anxiety and impatience while waiting for the emergent. He must trust that emergence will occur and it does” (p. 4). Here is a reminder to resist any tendency to “thingify” emergence, to use Barad’s (2003: 812) term, but rather to keep it in motion. This is exactly what Somerville does. For example, she resists “emphasis on verification, the residue of empiricist research that there is an attainable truth that exists outside representation” (Somerville, 2007: 230). Thus, the postmodern conceptualization of emergence is important, opening up, not closing down, opportunities for creativity. There is no quest for objective reality; realities are multiple. Rather than seeking “reality,” Somerville (2007) emphasizes notions of “becoming” (p. 230) and “generating” (p. 234).

Emergence is just as well rendered in our example of creativity, Giacometti’s portraiture: “Everything must come of itself and in its own time. Otherwise it becomes superficial,” so Lord (1980: 54) quoted Giacometti. Furthermore, “what really disturbs me is the way the painting seems to come and go, as though Alberto himself had no control over it. And sometimes it disappears altogether” (Lord, 1980: 45). In another illustration of what might be described as emergence, Lord (1980) comments to Giacometti, “In some of your sculptures and paintings I find a great deal of feeling” (p. 47).

This provocative description matches Silvano Arieti’s (1976) vision of creativity: “The magic synthesis of conscious and unconscious thought processes” (p. 13), and Somerville’s (2008) view that postmodern emergence is “informed by intuition and responsiveness” (p. 210). Chad Barnett (2009) takes this a step further and introduces the term postmodern assemblage, believing that this term is better suited to research into artificial and complex contexts, such as social networking, and where moments are not so much emergent but artificially constructed. No doubt, the relationship between postmodern assemblage and creativity would also be a fascinating topic, especially given progress in multimedia art (and life).

An aspect of emergence is imagery:

the emergence of new knowledge is held in an image that has a direct relationship to my embodied experience of the place of the research. The image is pre-verbal in the sense that it involves multiple sensory responses in a particular moment. (Somerville, 2008: 212)

This comment requires a little contemplation. Somerville is not necessarily referring to emergence as occurring in a particular moment. Indeed, a series of related moments might be a more appropriate description, and Somerville illustrates this by referring to painting, stories, and interviews—all moments that are somehow connected and collectively contribute to the image. The point here is that postmodern emergence has a temporal quality, which is reinforced by Somerville (2007) when she discusses her epistemology based on generating: “I want to focus on the makings, the creation of products and assemblages, in an iterative process of representation and reflection through which we come to know in research” (p. 235).
Turning now to the “postmodern” aspect of postmodern emergence, there is another link with what the creative Giacometti thought, as interpreted by Lord (1980):

What meant something, what alone existed with a life of its own was his indefatigable, indeterminable struggle via the act of painting to express in visual terms a perception of reality that had happened to coincide momentarily with my head. (p. 72)

Giacometti himself shows sensitivity and perhaps even resistance to a fixed and unchanging reality by making the following comment: “the point is that you see things in a different way from others, because you see them exactly as they appear to you and not at all as others have seen them” (Lord, 1980: 89). While not analogous with postmodernism, which emphasizes, for example, mini-narratives and individual interpretations that are time- and context-bound (Grbich, 2007: 10–11), Lord’s reference to “a” (not “the”) reality and Giacometti’s “seeing in different ways” do serve to decenter the notion of a single and stable reality. They introduce a notion of emergence that is always-in-motion, “straining toward [its] possible meaning” (Nancy, 2002), rather than to simply “understanding it” (p. 6).

Here, I am reminded of an earlier project where I endeavored to explore creativity in professional practice (Rae, 2015). The context was public health. Working within the framework of postmodern emergence—or the spirit of it—I used art-making and other devices to facilitate the emergence of new ideas. Data were gathered from various sources and perspectives. These data included artworks made after I conducted several initial interviews and which I later used to prompt further discussion during subsequent interviews with those same participants. There were also transcripts of my conversations with the research participants, as well as notes from a research journal. To prepare myself to work with the concept of postmodern emergence, I reflected on a selection of terms that Somerville (2007) used to describe it: “becoming aware,” “the appearance of new images,” “a radically different piece of writing,” “open[ing] up their writing practice,” “chang[ing] her whole approach” (pp. 228–231). Such phrases signify turning points in research which emerge within a framework of “dynamic inter(play) between data and theorizing” (Somerville, 2007: 230), as fertile ground for new associations. I found it especially useful to note Somerville’s use of that word “between” (data and theorizing), which can be taken to indicate that knowledge does not simply amass; knowing emerges “from the relationship between parts” (Somerville, 2007: 239), in my case, from the synergy between artworks, transcripts, and research notes. In postmodern tradition, none of these parts or forms of data were privileged over others, and no data were considered to represent “truth.”

Becoming

He is obliged to feel that it is necessary to start his entire career over again every day, as it were, from scratch. He refuses to rely on past achievements or even to look at the world in terms what he himself has made of it ... He often feels that the particular sculpture or painting on which he happens to be working at the moment is that one which will for the very first time express what he subjectively experiences in response to an objective reality. (Lord, 1980: 27)

Giacometti’s creative practice and the suggestion that he is never adequately, and certainly not automatically, equipped to execute the next artwork are echoed in Somerville’s (2007) ontology of “becoming.” She considers that a precondition for emergence is the “undoing of subjectivity” (p. 232), a “becoming other” (p. 232), or being “born of the space in-between” (p. 234) which, according to Somerville (2007), is “the condition for generating new knowledge” (p. 34). Giacometti explained a similar thing:

What I am doing is negative work ... You have to do something by undoing it. Everything is disappearing once more. You have to dare to give the final brush stroke that makes everything disappear ... What’s essential is to work without any preconception whatever, without knowing in advance what the picture is going to look like. (Lord, 1980: 45)

While Somerville (2007) does not use anything like the term “negative work” in discussing her ontology, she does write of “the space of unknowing; the absences, silences and disjunctures of the liminal space with no narrative; the relational of any coming into being; and the messiness, unfolding, open-ended and irrational nature of becoming-other through research engagement” (p. 235). Somerville (2008) also uses the phrase “chaotic place of unknowing,” which came originally from her doctoral student, Tamah Nakamura:

Waiting in the chaotic place of not knowing, and not knowing when and if I would know, and, further, not knowing what I would know, while honouring the informants’ knowledge as greater than my own, acknowledges, method as a creative process. (p. 210)

Giacometti conceptualized his negative work (and the same may be applied to “unknowing”) as “openings” and “holes” that provide opportunities from which work can progress. An example is, “I have to make a little hole in nature ... And pass through it ... Yes. I’ve made a hole but it’s too small to pass through” (Lord, 1980: 88). Creativity and postmodern emergence alike “cannot begin with logic but come from a place of not knowing” (Somerville, 2008: 210). According to Somerville (2007), the theoretic idea of “liminality” comes closest to this (p. 232). Liminality—the “blurring and crossing of thresholds and boundaries” (Butler Brown, 2007: 5) and “time outside time” (Turner, 1982: 253)—has been considered a feature of the postmodern world (Butler Brown, 2007: 5) and linked with creativity. Emma Brodzinski and Deborah Munt (2009: 279) even refer to it as a “metaphor for the creative process,” or to put this another way, creativity occurs “in the realm that acts as a threshold and a container for possibilities” (Govan and Munt, 2003).
There is a link with complexity theory here too, where, according to Von Allen and Deborah Brodzinski (2009: 314), unpredictability “open[s] up a liminal space of not-knowing.” The surprise that emerges from this unpredictability and unknowing has been associated with creativity also (McDaniel et al., 2003: 272–273). Indeed, here are some relationships that the postmodern emergence researcher may want to take note of: the value of placing oneself in a place of unknowing, betwixt and between, to seek something new and valuable, or to “generate” it.

**Generating**

Somerville (2008: 209) writes of postmodern emergence as an “opening up of the possibility of generating new knowledge,” rather than closing it down. In my study on creativity, that is what I attempted to do. I was influenced and informed by how Carter (2007) described invention, as “a double movement of… decontextualisation in which the found elements are rendered strange, and of recontextualisation, in which new families of association and structures of meaning are established” (pp. 15–16). This parallels how Somerville (2007) wrote of dismantling and re-assembling her journal notes, transcripts, paintings, and so forth, each time she “create[s] a new product from the research” (p. 239). Such descriptions guided my efforts to render the elements of my own research strange so as to facilitate the emergence of new associations (inventions). Carter (2007: 16) claims that, for practice-based research, this process is mediated materially, “allowing the unpredictable and differential situation to influence what is found,” which is how I interpreted the act of art-making in response to the participants I interviewed. It is likely that Giacometti had a similar view as he worked the canvas with brush and paint, applying “erasure, layering and reworking” (Fitch, 2010: 76), obsessively (Fitch, 2010: 80), in a style that “was not an end in itself, but rather a product of the process” (Fitch, 2010: 85).

One painting that emerged from my work was of the sea. I thought of the sea as a space that is betwixt and between—between the ocean and the land. Those who play in the sea, are, from time to time and in different ways, liminal characters, “disconnected from the set of rules which sustained them in the world they have left behind” (Mack, 2011: 165). Here, I imagined, was a space for change and the materialization of the novel—of creativity. I was assisted by the “partial and ambiguous applicability” (Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011: 291) of the artwork to the object of study, as a means for generating new insights. The artwork, as metaphor, provided arguments that challenged my thinking, creating contradictions and complexities and dichotomies that needed to be disentangled, and prompted me to seek alternative readings (Grbich, 2012: 214). New associations emerged from this and new knowledge was thus generated.

This notion of generating, not solving or completing, fits with a term that Giacometti used, *non finito*, which according to Lord (1980: 52) is also a sculptural technique evident right back to Michelangelo. Generating, within this frame of opening up possibilities and “keep[ing] things in process” (Somerville, 2007: 236), rather than finishing, must surely have uncertainty and even surprise as an element, and this is an area that has been explored in the creativity literature also. Surprise can be productive, “making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas” (Boden, 2004: 3), which is how Margaret Boden describes creativity, albeit as a reversal of Carter’s emphasis on rendering objects of research strange. However, this is far from a sequential or linear process. Discussing “generating” as an epistemology, and gesturing toward the work of Grosz (1999), Somerville (2007: 237) writes, “It is through these ‘modes of repetition’, the iterative processes of representation and reflection then, that the new emerges.” Again, this is similar to how Lord (1980: 109) writes of Giacometti’s practice in that illustration of creativity: “He was constructing it all over again from nothing, and for the hundredth time at least.” One might say that Giacometti seeks out uncertainty and surprise, over and over, in order to make something new.

Emotion and imagination have also been topics of creativity scholarship:

> The creative process through which an individual engages emotionally with a subject, whether that be putting themselves in the shoes of another human being or immersing themselves deeply in a topic or context and then, *crucially* (original emphasis), responding with imagination to that experience. (Munt and Hargreaves, 2009: 290)

If emotion is a component of creativity, and creativity is related to postmodern emergence, one might ask, How do postmodern emergence researchers work with their emotions, or respond to the broader notion of affect, taking the post-humanist view that affect is “what comes before action and by implication forms, rather than carries out, the dictates of desire” (Poynton and Lee, 2011: 637)? How may postmodern emergence researchers be reflexive in this regard, and how may they enter the unknown, registering affect and reacting with empathy? If affect is a “mediating precondition of practice,” as Stephen Kemmis (2009: 33) suggests, how may postmodern emergence researchers maintain or modify their practices, how do they become surprised, and make the most of surprise? How do they become like Giacometti? Answers to such questions, through future research, may provide postmodern emergence researchers with ways of entering and being (or becoming) in that space, responsively and ethically.

Some forms of research, for example, arts-based research, focus less on moving from what is known to the unknown, as would be the case for positivist research, and more from the unknown to the known “as a means to critique existing knowledge” (Sullivan, 2009: 49). This, then, requires a re-focusing of attention from data collection to data creation (Sullivan, 2009: 50) and an epistemology, following Somerville (2007: 237), of generating. In fact, these notions
of research direction, data creation, and generation may be applied to qualitative research more generally because they offer “the freedom to let go, improvise and be creative” (Higgs and Titchen, 2007: 11). One might also consider, as Graeme Sullivan (2009: 45) does, that creativity is highly relevant to all research, not only postmodern emergence or grounded theory. It is relevant, as Sullivan (2009) writes, “irrespective of whether it was pursued by the inventive scientist or the imaginative artist” (p. 45). The nature and extent of this relationship between research (more generally) and creativity might also be usefully explored in further research.

Creativity in postmodern emergence research

Somerville makes clear that creativity has a place in postmodern emergence, but how is this relationship enacted? The substantial body of creativity research available to postmodern emergence researchers can in fact guide them in the areas of, for example, research support and education, and knowing how to incorporate play into research structures and processes. Starting with support, this is something considered important for people working on creative projects (Amabile et al., 2004: 5–32). “Psychological safety,” as Amy Edmondson and Josephine Mogelof (2006: 109–136) put it, is essential “because creativity involves so much risk-taking, experimentation, and frequent failure” (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010: 584) and because they are working with and in the unknown, as was noted earlier. This has implications for academic leaders, multidisciplinary teams that include postmodern emergence researchers and supervisors, as well as the postmodern researchers themselves who need to be open to, and even to seek, support.

The importance of the topic of creativity in the education of postmodern emergence researchers, especially doctoral students using postmodern emergence (and their supervisors), is also worth some contemplation, bearing in mind that Somerville (2008: 210) generated and first articulated her ideas about postmodern emergence by observing and working with doctoral students. Of course, creativity is likely to have a place in all forms of doctoral education, as Eva Brodin and Liezel Frick (2011: 133–134) suggest, and so too does emergence: “The project unfolds, the dissertation builds, knowledge emerges … in writing, in the pedagogic exchanges of supervision, and elsewhere” (Green, 2012: 16). How might creativity be implicated in doctoral education, especially doctoral education based on postmodern emergence? Keeping in mind the centrality of the supervisor/student relationship, a place to start may be for the supervisor to develop her or his own understandings of creativity and to reveal those understandings (Jackson and Sinclair, 2006: 130), as a form of modeling, perhaps. Similarly, students need to be helped to “articulate and construct their own meanings of creativity” (Jackson and Sinclair, 2006: 130). The supervisor might then show that they value the student’s understanding of creativity (Jackson and Sinclair, 2006: 130) as one way of offering psychological safety. This is not to say that students’ conceptualizations should not be questioned: “Challenging problem-working contexts provide favorable environments for practicing to be creativity,” write Norman Jackson and Christine Sinclair (2006: 131). Also, such questioning can serve to prompt, and provide a vehicle for discussing, reflexivity. In qualitative research, reflexivity replaces the objectivity that would normally be sought in other research paradigms (Grbich, 2007: 10) and should be considered key in postmodern emergence. Students are then positioned to “be critical evaluators of their own creativity” (Jackson and Sinclair, 2006: 131).

Creativity-as-practice has particular application to postmodern emergence. Conceptualizing creativity in a way that emphasizes its association with other “doings” (Schatzki, 2002: 72) or enactments of practice helps to reveal and amplify its relevance, if one accepts Paul Hager et al.’s (2012: 3) view that practices are relational. That is, creativity is not something to be brought to, in this case, postmodern emergence research, but something operating alongside a number of other enactments of research. For example, there is an alignment between creativity and the practices of interviewing, analyzing, writing, painting, and so forth. Whatever results from this, then, is a co-production around “a range of actors in space and time” (Hager et al., 2012: 4). Creativity thus formulated is embodied and also unstable (Hager et al., 2012: 3–4) as it works as part of (or as) an ecology of practices (Kemmis et al., 2012: 36). Practices are emergent (Hager et al., 2012: 5) and creativity-as-practice is also emergent, and so too are new ways of knowing arising from postmodern emergence research. The postmodern emergence research context, then, becomes a dynamic “intersection of complex social forces” (Hager et al., 2012: 4).

A practice-theoretical view of creativity opens up possibilities for postmodern emergence researchers because it treats creativity as a dynamic and in dynamic relationship with other practices of research. This works to resist a synoptic view of creativity, approached from the outside as if the postmodern researcher’s modus operandi is to “tame” the project or mount a defense against “unknowing” or unpredictability. Rather, creativity-as-practice allows postmodern emergence researchers to better position themselves within their projects, which further enhances opportunities for reflexivity. Moving away from a more-or-less mechanistic approach to creativity and adopting a practice approach makes available three decades of practice scholarship (Schatzki, 2012: vii). More recently, and for example, Green (2009) applied the Aristotelian concepts of aporia, phronesis, and praxis to professional practice, referring to these as “guiding principles” (pp. 9–12), wherein their interrelationships are “necessary in grasping the nature of professional practice” (p. 10). For the creative postmodern emergence researcher, there will likely be aporia—the “confrontation in one’s own practice with
unresolvable problematics, or paradoxes” (Green, 2009: 11) as they respond to the unknown and the unpredictable and “become other” in the generation of new knowledge. This aporia may be associated with tension, say between ideation and the status quo, or indeed one’s effort to break away from the status quo in order to be open to emergence. Aporia might be met with practical wisdom (phronesis) as the postmodern emergence researcher plays with complex patterns (Somerville, 2007: 231), rather than deconstructing them, or they may work in a way that is morally guided (praxis). Postmodern emergence researchers may benefit from reflecting on their creative practice as, inevitably, they work with the aporias, wisely, practically, and morally.

A practice approach to creativity makes such theoretical accounts available to postmodern emergence researchers and serves as a prompt for further exploration and possible expansion of the concept. It draws in an important movement, the new materialism, which is equally relevant to other forms of qualitative research (Hein, 2016). Drawing from Theodore Schatzki’s view of practice as the site of the social, Karin Bolldén (2015: 3) maintains that entities, objects, or matter forms an arrangement that is central to practice. In my research, these material arrangements, or “assemblages” as they may also be called in Deluzian theory, included artworks and the agential qualities of those artworks. Here is a challenge to the anthropocentric view so often taken in qualitative research. It is also a challenge to the notion of “representation”—or “representationalism”—which considers the reference point of knowledge to be the “the authorial subject of rationality and realism” (Green, 2009: 50). This, according to Maggie MacLure (2013), is “the enemy of difference, movement, change and the emergence of the new” (p. 659); it works in opposition to postmodern emergence. It is not surprising, then, to note that Somerville (2007) also refers to “the materialities and technologies through which we create” (p. 235), which is a concept that may be leveraged to open up further the creative potential of postmodern emergence research. Theorists and researchers are broadening their perspectives on creativity (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010: 590) and a practice-theoretical view of creativity illustrates how this may productively add to the application of postmodern emergence. Of course, even newer conceptualizations of creativity will emerge and no doubt make their own contributions.

**Conclusion**

Postmodern emergence is a new and useful way of approaching research and deserves attention by scholars. Although the roots of postmodern emergence are located in doctoral education, and generally within the field of education, this does not mean that postmodern emergence ought to remain there. Postmodern emergence has utility to researchers at all levels and across a range of disciplines. The platform so generously offered by Somerville can be used to further develop the theory, its interpretation, and relational qualities. Of course, the relational concern here has been with creativity, and it is posited that this connection serves to locate postmodern emergence alongside a considerable body of scholarship on creativity, including those areas of creativity scholarship that are, themselves, emerging. Considering creativity explicitly as an essential component of postmodern emergence adds to the richness of both concepts. It makes an expanding and diverse body of research on creativity more accessible to postmodern emergence researchers. This is not to put some positivist slant on postmodern emergence, but to open up opportunities for postmodern emergence researchers to recognize and play with such synergies, to support reflexive and diffractive thought through a better understanding of their position within their research, and to cope with the inevitable frustrations of aporia and being “unknowing.” Further discussion will hopefully unleash possibilities so that postmodern emergence researchers, including doctoral students, can move forward with enthusiasm and confidence.

This conversation has been initiated by Somerville and will hopefully continue, meander, bifurcate, and swell. It is, happily, unlikely to come to a neat conclusion. To this I feel Giacometti would agree, and I hand over to him for the last word: “it’s impossible ever really to finish anything” (Lord, 1980: 9).

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