Research as Practice: On Critical Methodologies

Introduction[i]

Isabelle Stengers, perhaps unwittingly, perhaps knowingly, echoes a theme of the work of American philosopher Stanley Cavell (1995, p. 136) when she invites in the first edition of the journal *Subjectivity*, her readers to join her in slowing down, in hesitating, pausing, taking a breath in the face of our own endeavours to 'produce subjectivity' (Stengers, 2008, p. 49). Cavell's gesture of hesitation is similarly evocative and provocative. Where Stengers pushes for an approach which betrays or reveals rather than denounces, Cavell suggests that in the face of apparently constitutive philosophical oppositions, in stead of seeking to decide we should seek to dismantle. Betrayal rather than denunciation; revelation rather than condemnation; dismantling rather than deciding. Alluring and seductive ideas but the question is begged: where is the critical edge? This volume grapples with this question. It hesitates in the face of the complex relations between theory, research methods and practice, and the persons and places, or milieus, they are embedded in. It represents an attempt to revive the question as to what it means to *do* psychology critically, or for that matter, to *practice* critical theory.

Critical approaches in psychology have usually aimed not only to develop theoretical insights and challenges to the mainstream but also to take seriously the implications that methods and practices have for critical theorising and vice versa. This special issue presents a selection of papers that in different ways consider research methods, and the methodologies underpinning them, as concrete

practices of relating and engaging with theory as well as with culturally specific contexts or sites. They reflect and problematise how these more or less embedded, participatory or activist practices of research and critique relate to the cultural and societal practices they engage with, criticise and potentially seek to transform.

How can methods and methodological considerations have a critical impact on practice? How can research methods incorporate critique, and how is critique reflected in the methods used? What dilemmas are faced by researchers who position themselves at the intersection of theoretical, methodological, personal and practice concerns? And what insights and pitfalls emerge as we straddle cultural, disciplinary, inter-personal and intra-personal divides when doing research as practitioner/activists and/or with practitioners across different spaces, places, countries organisational and institutional contexts? These are some of the concerns addressed by the papers in this volume.

Past experiences and current debates deliver numerous reasons to suggest that reflecting the intricacies of critical psychological research methods and their relations to practice should be a central question for critical theorising and research. Juxtaposing current academic debates around subjectivity, text, power, and communities of practice, with the inescapable need to engage critically with the exploding social interest in the documentation of practices (auditing, quality assessment, evidence based practice, evaluation, benchmarking, standardization etc.) highlights that methods are more than mere research tools. Indeed, as "qualitative research" becomes a generic term denoting (almost any) off-mainstream theory applied to empirical reality, there is a danger of it becoming vague and meaningless. To combat such developments it is thus important to revisit and build on critical methodological traditions that do not accept mere thick description, authentic

representation of voices, or arbitrary hermeneutics (with or without coding procedures) as the only revolutionary way to overcome self-sufficient academic theorising. In University Departments around the world the space for intellectual subversion and critical voices is slowly being squeezed, sacrificed on the altar of performance indicators, ranked journals and publish or perish realities. In such a context it seems timely to attempt to retake some ground, to attempt to rematerialize or at least reflect upon the position of critical projects (nonetheless) emanating from psychology and to examine ways in which to make research matter.

This special issue of Qualitative Research in Psychology has been long in the making, hesitant indeed, and the experience of putting it together illustrates that exploring these variously related approaches to methodology, critique and practice is just as timely an endeavour as it is a challenging editorial task. The initial idea for the special issue grew out of a session on "practice research" and critical psychology at the *3rd Nordic Conference on Activity Theory* held in Copenhagen in September 2004. This origin speaks of a broadly defined and critically oriented background in "activity theory" and traditions of Marxist German/Scandinavian Critical Psychology (cf. Haug 1977, Holzkamp 1983, Dreier 1999, 2008). While a number of the papers (Jefferson and Huniche, Khawaja and Mørck , Motzkau, Nissen) in this volume have important roots in these traditions, it has always been our aim to re-contextualise and insert these strands of thinking into the much wider remit of contemporary critical methodologies at the interface of theory and practice. We are at one level - at least within the editorial group - realigning and reorienting ourselves as scholars occupying, at times, disparate positions in a trajectory under continual development. Thanks to the positive response to our call for papers, this volume presents a diverse set of perspectives on methodology, practice and research addressing issues of concern within the broader landscape of contemporary critical theorising in psychology.

We are aware that the German Scandinavian tradition[ii] of critical psychology may be uncommon to some readers. To illustrate the main themes of the context this volume has emerged from we would like to offer a short introduction to this version of critical psychology.

What is sometimes referred to as the 'tradition' of German/Scandinavian critical psychology emerged from intellectual and political struggles in the Free University in former West-Berlin during the 1960's and 70's (see Mørck and Huniche 2006 for a fuller account; Tolman 1991 for an overview; Osterkamp & Schraube, forthcoming). This critical psychology can be characterised not so much as an anti psychology but as a counter psychology, an attempt to rescue psychology from itself and re-define it as a historically developed theory about subjects as societal beings, and re-establish it as a psychology for and about these subjects. The philosophical foundation for critical psychology is informed by historical dialectical materialism, and specifically builds on ideas developed in Marxs theses on Feuerbach concerning human subjectivity and practice (Marx & Engels 1998), as well as the Soviet cultural-historical activity theory of Vygotsky, and above all, Leontiev[iii] (a legacy which has been taken up in various other strands as well (cf. Engeström, 1987; Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005; Wertch, 1991).

A number of topical works from the 1970's and early 80's (including Dreier, 1980; Haug, 1977; Holzkamp, 1973; Osterkamp, 1975; Osterkamp, 1976; Schurig, 1975; Seidel, 1976) developed a theoretical framework and a research methodology for a science from the standpoint of the subject. This arguably culminated in Klaus Holzkamp's "Grundlegung der Psychologie" (1983) [Foundation of Psychology], the most quoted and comprehensive presentation of the theory, although this new critical psychology was from the start a heterogeneous collective practice that was deeply

embedded in the socio-cultural transformations and political activities and discussions of the Student Revolt and the New Left.

The conceptualisation of subjectivity for this new 'science of the subject' was an explicit attempt at overcoming problems in the dominant psychologies that stated the relationship between the individual and society as external and regarded behaviour as a dependent variable, or construed personality as either functional or dysfunctional. The critical aim was to establish the subject as historically developed, characterised as fundamentally societal in its existence and as defined through its practical engagement with the world. In seeking to become part of and contribute to subjects' endeavours to gain a systematic understanding of constraining and enabling societal conditions, critical psychology aimed to be a theoretical as well as a practice-oriented, emancipatory and political project. The core of the critical stance was the argument that mainstream psychology serves the interests of capitalist/bourgeois society by individualising problems and proposing personal work on the self as the solution to these problems. Mainstream psychology was thus criticised for construing personal compliance as 'normal psychological functioning', and thereby directly helping to obscure perspectives that could allow subjects to actively engage with and change repressive societal conditions.

It was additionally argued that methods have to be adequate with respect to the phenomenon under examination and that human subjectivity is best studied by getting at first person perspectives. As this approach was taken to fields where psychological questions arose in practice, it became commonly known as practice research (Fahl & Markard, 1999; Nissen, 2000). By aiming for an involved intersubjective exchange and getting at first person perspectives, it becomes possible to analyse how individual existence is mediated through the overall societal context, i.e. how each

person makes sense of their own position, restrictions and possibilities to act and engage within this societal context, and from their respective personal standpoint. At the heart of this analysis is the exploration of three main elements: identifying relevant *conditions* as they matter in specific ways in the lives of specific subjects and in the practices studied, what those conditions *mean* to subjects and practices, and thus how each subject *reasons* their actions from their own subjective standpoint. This analysis works from the assumption that objective conditions are meaningful only in their mediatedness through both collective objectifications and through each subject's perspective. This is why the meaning of objective conditions and each subject's reasons for acting in specific ways, need to be considered as fundamentally interrelated. Accordingly they must be studied in unison, rather than as isolated units with external connections. This is why the 'subject' of research is defined as a 'co-researcher', as they are the 'experts' of the conditions, meanings and reasons that surround the problem at the heart of research that engages with practices they are involved in. In this sense such research is inevitably also 'owned' and guided by them. As the aim of practice research is to develop both theories about the studied phenomenon and to develop practice, the role of the researcher is defined as participatory and cooperative, thus leaving behind ideas of a scientific gaze from the 'outside' and the researcher as a neutral observer of given facts (see also Danziger, 1990).

All of the papers in this issue resonate in some way with the themes of this critical tradition, either explicitly or implicitly. As we can see, German/Scandinavian critical psychology as originally formulated aimed not only to develop theoretical insights and challenges to the mainstream but also to take seriously the implications that methods and practices have for critical theorising and vice versa.

Positioning towards wider critical transitions

German/Scandinavian critical psychology is continuously evolving, seeking wider connections to critical theorising in the social sciences and this volume is testimony to such developments. It seeks to re-examine and reshape critical relationships between theory and practice, and to establish links to multi- and transdisciplinary types of engagements. As such it inevitably resonates with other recent initiatives that have characterised the landscape of critical theorising around methodology and practice engagements not just in the UK; these include the launch of the journal *Subjectivity* in 2008, initiatives around the formation of a psycho-social network that aims to help consolidate and promote the diverse initiatives captured by this label (e.g. Stenner, 2007; Frosh, 2003; Wetherell, 2007, 2008; Gill, 2008; Burman, 2008; Parker, 2004, 2004a; Hollway & Jefferson, 2005) the trans-psychological journal *Critical Social Studies – Outlines* (in which some of us have been involved in different ways since 1999), and the promotion of various forms of inter- and transdisciplinary engagements aiming at re-shaping the 'foundational dynamics' of psychology (Stenner & Brown, 2009, Stenner & Taylor, 2008).

A range of different theoretical frameworks underpin the varied use of concepts like the 'psychosocial' or 'practice research', and such concepts seem indicative of a move away from the ubiquitous pre-fix 'critical', while retaining the critical impetus. Here the notion of 'transdisciplinarity' can be seen as providing implicit cohesion to the projects presented in this volume, particularly in view of the fact that Holzkamp's suggestion of a 'science of the subject' (rather than a 'critical psychology') was a move towards a transdisciplinarity of sorts.

'Transdisciplinary' is not a fixed concept. In the context of this volume, in a broadly Foucaultian spirit, emphasis is placed on critical awareness of the mechanisms of knowledge, power and exclusion operating within disciplines, and our own and others' inevitable complicity within- and relation to disciplines; but at the same time a space is opened up between disciplines that allows for

examining the limitations of particular ways of knowing and being (attending to the situated and personal as well as the abstract dimension). Understood in this way transdisciplinarity carves out a positive space for recognising and taking seriously that which escapes disciplinary knowledge. Using Stenner & Taylor's (2008) metaphor we could say that where interdisciplinarity could be seen as the setting up of trade-routes between pre-established disciplines, transdisciplinarity would be described as the creation of new spaces of knowledge and practice that critically transform the existing territory and open it up to new possibilities of action and change (cf. Jefferson 2004, 2006, Motzkau, 2009, in press). Through their specific research practice contributors to this volume aim to abandon the deep trodden ruts of the discipline to go cross country in order to create and inhabit such spaces.

If it is true that critical psychology has historically occupied a parasitic position, feeding off its opposition to the mainstream, then perhaps a move towards a transdisciplinary understanding of practice research could be seen as the attempt to avoid marginalization, even extinction, as the institutional space for non-mainstream positions rescinds (grass roots journals funding cut; overemphasis on publication in dominant journals, increasing streamlining, restructuring of university departments and degree programs etc). Similarly perhaps the concern of many of the contributions to this volume to overcome dualisms is indicative of a desire to escape the oppositional relationship to the mainstream. Perhaps the new connections, trajectories and alliances being established between, across and beyond disciplines, and through practices, hint at the reconfiguration of methodologies to study the situated subject with which this volume's contributors are concerned?

Thematic trajectories

The contributors to this volume are from, and engage with, diverse backgrounds, they research diverse topics and approach the question of research as practice from diverse angles. Nevertheless the papers circulate around a number of key themes. All the papers are in some way about subjectivity, researcher positioning, participation, spaces-places-and culture (straddling different countries of research and of researcher origin), traversing different theoretical and research traditions; they are all about the dilemmas of change and transformation, and they consider the embeddedness of research practices, not just in the sense of the immediate subjective involvement of the researcher as individual (with values etc.), but also in a wider cultural-historical sense.

The papers are loosely arranged along an axis beginning with research encounters based directly on the German/Scandinavian tradition of critical psychology and moving towards papers that do not directly draw on this tradition. In their own various ways all contributions embrace a wide and multidisciplinary framework of psychological research aimed at a critical engagement with theories, practices and change. In this sense, rather than a continuum, this is a spiralling move, continuously re-engaging with questions raised by the first papers and projecting forwards to issues picked up later in the volume in relation to different contexts and theoretical frameworks.

In the first paper *Jefferson and Huniche* discuss the pragmatics of *doing* research, reflecting on space/place and the relevance of their own concrete encounters for issues of epistemology and method; but also the relevance of such encounters for those who feature in their research as 'informants', subjects and co-researchers. Drawing on methodological resources from Anthropology and German/Scandinavian critical psychology they carefully examine their own engagement within places of research and with the subjects they meet during their research.

Jefferson, of English origin, working in Denmark, examines his encounters during fieldwork in Nigeria, where he studied prison practices, the everyday lives of prison guards and prison reform interventions. Huniche's research field is in her home country Denmark, where she researches the everyday lives of members of families with Huntington´s Disease. She examines, for example, how health care and activist practices, with reference to inherited diseases, play a part in their lives. Juxtaposing these apparently diverse topics/contexts, Jefferson and Huniche consider the contingent nature of their relations to the research subjects they engage with and the extent to which it is possible to accompany them across the various contexts of their lives to capture the dynamic nature of practices and subjects across contexts. A discussion is raised about the limits, boundaries and scope of specific research projects and the changing positions of participants. Questions about the boundaries of psychology as a discipline are also raised.

In their article *Khawaja and Mørck* offer a set up similar to that of Jefferson and Huniche, in that they examine their own positionings within their respective research. However, the methodological underpinnings are different here. Mørck is closely commited to social practice theory and critical psychological notions of practice research, while Khawaja positions herself within frameworks of poststructuralism and social constructionism. Their research focuses on the study of marginalized groups, such as young Muslim men living in Denmark. In a detailed analysis they examine and compare their respective research practices and discuss what it means for a female, Muslim, Danish-Pakistani researcher (Khawaja) or a female, non-religious, Danish researcher (Mørck), to engage in interviews with social street workers, and young school boys (all Muslims). They explore the significance of the methodological, personal and political attributions of researchers and what this means for positioning and knowledge generation during the process of data collection and analysis. Their explicit concern is to think through issues of methodology in ways which will not reproduce the othering and marginalising practices which they study. Where Jefferson and Huniche

seek to appropriate ethnography from anthropology in the cause of widening the remit of psychological research, Khawaja and Mørck demonstrate the rich potential of engaging with research subjects as co-researchers. At the same time Khawaja and Mørck's consideration of the transformative efficacy of their research for practices projects forward to questions of critical impact discussed by Motzkau.

Hasse and Trentemøller also critically examine researcher positionings and thus their own engagement in a transnational research project (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy and Poland) that looked at the way universities as workplaces create different possibilities for researchers' career paths (for example in Physics). Here not just the research fields and the national origin of the researchers, but also the disciplinary background of the researchers involved were diverse (including anthropology, philosophy, gender, culture studies and psychology). Using this project as a case study for their article, Hasse and Trentemøller examine examples of data and analysis generated within this project. Situated between social constructionism and critical realism, the authors describe a method of cultural comparison that could help to highlight the taken for granted categories implied in researchers' assumptions; here researchers' categorizations are taken to be part of research itself, rather than the underlying self-evident framework on which the research is conducted. Again, as in the previous articles, the analytic lens is turned on the assumptions of the researcher, a technique that relates to the idea of confronting the disturbing intuition that the researcher always already 'knows' the outcome of their research, an idea developed further by Lee. We might see this as inquiry proceeding from a 'suspicion of ideology' also our own (Markard, 1985).

Moving the focus back towards broader issues of research in- and on practice, *Nissen* takes the whole discussion onto a more theoretical plane by engaging with the question of generalisability and objectivity in practice research. He suggests a return to the roots of German/Scandinavian critical psychology in cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) in order to re-establish the "concept of objectification as the production of cultural artifacts through which human subjectivity is mediated". Drawing on resources from CHAT and Science and Technology Studies, Nissen conceptualizes the practices and artifacts of research as *prototypes*. Unfolding his argument alongside issues surrounding drug user treatment practices and an example of research into social work practice and youth work in Copenhagen, Denmark, Nissen transgresses traditional problems of 'descriptive subjectivism' versus 'disengaged objectivity', by developing the idea of prototypes as complex embodied/actioned 'objective' instances of transformation, empowerment and change within social practices imbued with ideological implications.

While not positioned within the immediate realm of practice research, *Lee* is also concerned with the theorization of change, subjectivity and agency as manifested within specific societal practices around food consumption in England. Lee charts the establishment of consumer choice as a regulatory principle, and explores the ambiguities of choice and alienation in the life of carer-consumers (child carers/parents) as embodied via three different practices: a British TV programme, an ongoing debate over nutritional labeling in Britain, and as seen via cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) as a potential alternative to capturing narratives of change. Considering these three examples alongside each other as different 'methodologies' of instigating, describing and regulating consumer choice and change, Lee aims to de-centre the prevalent concern for the 'subject' as nucleus of change, and argues for greater sensitivity for the multiple and shifting relationalities, i.e. the conflicts and coalitions that constitute carer-consumers' engagements with societal practices of

consumption and change. In this sense the 'methodological strategy of multiplicity' Lee develops to open perspectives for considering choice and change within and through consumer engagements, resonates with the analytic theory-practice move through which Nissen develops his concept of prototypes to problematise, among other things, the ways in which research objectifies "user perspectives" in drug treatment practices. This theme is picked up again by Motzkau, in relation to the deconstruction of developmental psychology and children as court witnesses, when she highlights that the inherently volatile operations of practice could be considered the material interface, or relay, through which any set of theories (traditional or critical) operates and becomes effective, either to discipline and control, or to open up paths for transformation and change.

Nolas continues in this line of inquiry, focusing on narratives of change and the narrative conventions that govern researchers' accounts of change experiences. She takes this question into the realm of participatory action research and addresses the importance of language and discourse, by juxtaposing the action research narrative to a research narrative that followed ethnographic conventions. Exploring the case of a research project she was involved in, that aimed to understand and support cultural integration in a large engineering company, Nolas discusses the importance of taking every day, informal aspects of action research on board when theorizing change. She reflects explicitly on the stories we tell about our research, and similar to Hasse and Trentemøller, aims to escape seemingly inevitable reproductions of taken-for granted assumptions whilst studying the 'Other'. Pointing to the dangers of inadvertently participating in othering practices, she echoes concern also raised by Khawaja and Mørck's and Zavos and Biglia's contributions. Nolas resists the clean seamless accounts often given of action research projects, seeking instead to demystify the process in order to demonstrate how alternative stories can be told about research as practice. Hinting at an issue that is at the heart of the next contribution by Motzkau, Nolas notes that 'critical

consciousness' may already be in existence when the researcher arrives on the scene. Critique is not something to be developed from the 'outside'; it is not necessarily something we researchers import.

Motzkau picks up on issues raised by Nolas, but similar to Nissen, takes the discussion back onto an altogether different theoretico-practical plane. Working at the intersection of psychology and law, she positions her inquiry within a broad discourse analytical framework and draws on resources from the work of Deleuze and Stengers. Motzkau examines the use of language in the specific case of the deconstructivist critique of developmental psychology that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, in order to see why this valuable critique has failed to effectively engage or unsettle the developmental mainstream; and to highlight how it has thus remained ineffective for problematic practices surrounding children. Considering the deconstruction of developmental psychology as a specific 'practice of critique', Motzkau demonstrates how an unintended but self-perpetuating 'Semiotic of Accusation' establishes itself between the deconstructive and the traditional perspectives, giving relevant critique the appearance of accusatory anti-theses, that is easily dismissed by traditional perspectives. Again, the issue of researcher/practitoner positioning emerges, as Motzkau develops her analysis through a case example from her own past work as a psychological expert assessing a child witness for a German court (while she now works in the UK, Germany is her country of origin). While examining the issues surrounding psychological knowledge used in legal practice, she also reflects on the dilemmas of being an expert practitioner, and a researcher with a background in Marxist and discursive critical psychology trying to theorise psychological and legal practices critically. Working through this case example she argues that practice itself could be seen as the interface, or relay, through which critical theorising could become efficient, have an impact, by operating directly upon or alongside practitioners' already

existing awareness of the paradoxes and problems of their practice. Resonating with Nissen's and Lee's endeavour, she outlines how this direct engagement with the 'epistemologies of practice', could open up wider perspectives towards developing methodologies for critical transitions and impact for change.

Zavos and Biglia's contribution concludes this volume, because it re-visits most of the questions raised throughout this issue, but examines them in yet a different context: feminist activist research. Here we are powerfully reminded of the critical, political and transformative outlooks our work should/would aim to have in its resistance to new and old ideologies and an ever shifting mainstream. Zavos and Biglia pick up on issues of self positioning within research, the theorizing of critical impact, and the question of how to relate in a relevant way to those practices researched. Despite being positioned at an apparent distance to the specific theories surrounding 'practice research', the topics discussed by Zavos and Biglia project back across the whole volume. Zavos reflects on doing ethnographic fieldwork on gender and migration in the anti-racist movement in Athens, Greece, while Biglia focuses on her work on women activist narratives on gendered relations within social movements, politics and feminisms, in Barcelona, Catalonia. Examining the theoretical links underpinning feminist activist research in relation to the political stakes and commitments involved, they offer a detailed discussion of the personal and political dilemmas faced within their respective research projects. Occupying borderline positions vis-à-vis their own material their complimentary, though sometimes contrasting, voices offer important insights into the dilemmas facing the researcher who attempts to overcome the posited and institutionalised split between science and politics. They show how similar political feminist, activist commitments can result in different solutions to dilemmas confronted: Zavos pursues research and activism simultaneously and ethnographically, while Biglia separates the two activities. Together they

emphasize how at times, despite the best of intentions, researchers do come to occupy positions which contribute to create the conditions which they normatively resist, whether these be gendered or racialised. They demonstrate a sensitivity to the precariousness and contingency of positions that is common to many of the papers in this volume. Wanting to examine and study, but at the same time having ones own very specific and normative views about the need for change, critique and resistance, raises, once more, the question of participation; but at this point it becomes visible as the generic question of what it means to be a person, a human being, engaged in critical practices. Herein the organising (comforting, protected) position of 'being a researcher' has almost dissolved into the 'messy' world of lived practices, taking us back to the broad questions that drive the desire to develop a 'Science of the Subject', a 'science' at once 'by' and 'about' the subject.

Conclusion: Matter and Interest

> "One of the many beauties of the English language is the double 't' in 'matter'. It moves us away from substance , or any kind of stuff with which a general reason or cause for what we observe can be associated, and it connects us with the verb 'to matter'." (Stengers, 2007, p. 11).

Echoing this theme developed by Stengers, all of the concerns explored in this volume could be seen to converge on the question of 'matter'. Here 'matter' is considered at once as a substantive and as a verb; i.e. offering a simultaneous focus on the material (on substance), and on the unfolding instant of something mattering, becoming relevant. How does research relate to the contexts/subjects it engages with; how does it come to matter and be relevant? These twin themes of *making research matter* (the constitution of the subject of research *and* the relevance/value of research) are central to this volume as it examines the issues of the construction of subject matter (that is the creation of research objects/subjects/projects), while also attending to the value of

research, that is the issue of what matters where to whom, what kind of a difference research can make and whose interests are at stake or at play as research is conducted.

Thinking about researcher commitments and positionings, and examining questions of subjectivity and objectivity, raises the question of 'interest', i.e. what are the questions worth engaging with? How do we approach a research field in a meaningful manner? How do we become interested in it? The notion of 'interest' in the common (often implicitly dismissive) sense, often represents an instrumentalist conception of 'knowledge as constituted' and thus limited, by our own narrow 'subjective' interests. Understood in this way 'interest' would mean that our own interest (subjectively) limits what we can understand and examine (ideology). However, the perspective on 'interest' opened up by the contributions in this volume resonates with another one of Stengers' themes. Stengers highlights that 'interest', literally translates from the Latin as 'inter' (inbetween) 'esse' (being), i.e. being in between, or positioning oneself in between. 'Inter-esse' would then mean to expose oneself, and thus to interest oneself - or to allow oneself to be interested - by something, and in this sense it has the character of an event, "since it gives to that something a power it does not generally possess: the power to cause us to think, feel and wonder, the power to have us wondering how practically to relate to it, how to pose relevant questions about it." (Stengers 2007, p. 11). This speaks for the (hesitant) ways in which research itself might contribute to the creation of interest.

The themes of 'matter'/'mattering' and 'interest'/'inter-esse' are crucial when engaging with the vexing problem of agency and transformation, as they articulate new ways through which research practices relate to and facilitate the transformation and involvement of those populating the practices researched; and address how research practices and methodologies can create, facilitate

and hinder transformations in ways that sometimes implicate the researcher. All this is implied in the aim of considering research as practice, as well as the aim of re-defining the relationship between research, theory and practice.

We hope this editorial and this special issue might mark, or register and qualify part of the ongoing 'coming into existence' of critical methods in psychology. We hope to point beyond qualitative methods as the absence of statistics and controlled settings but also beyond semi-structured interviews and focus groups (the new mantra of qualitative research design). We hope to invoke a critical reflection amongst researchers engaged in critical projects about the nature and location of their methods, the assumptions and the possibilities and limits for knowledge implied by them and the dilemmas posed by fields of study which constantly challenge us to reach beyond our neatly or messily designed studies.

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[ii] We might question the accuracy of talking of a *tradition* of critical psychology. Is it not more, to use Dreier's terms (Dreier 1999, 2008), a trajectory featuring some key actors moving across and through changing action contexts and locations?

[iii] E.g. Marx/Engels 1998, Leontjev 1978, 1981, Vygotsky 1978.