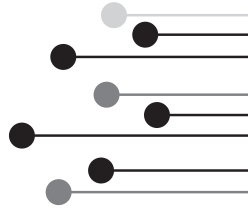


4

Fluid Methodological Spaces

Methodologies Matter



Methodologies are choices, often onto-epistemological and theoretical, and cannot be divorced from the values, beliefs, backgrounds, bodies, and affects of the researcher or the research context. Methodologies are political, and they have power to disempower, empower, and validate and invalidate experiences, data, lives, and material. Methodological choices not only generate and highlight data, but they also construct and contextualize studies, programs, scholars, and research aims. Methodologies can be informed choices, taken for granted, or just used uncritically without any alternatives. Alternatively, methodologies can be situational, complex structures or constellations that are in flux.

GLOSSARY

Methodology. Strategy or plan of action that provides a rationale for the choice of methods. Research design (Crotty, 1998, p. 7).

Methodology. Generalizable, rational form of activities that are embedded in historical practice (Novikov & Novikov, 2013, p. 8).

Methodology-against-interpretivism. A disruption of traditional qualitative research that seeks to think *with* data rather

than *force* data analysis to speak only through mechanistic, discretely defined codes (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. viii).

Methodology. Utilized to break down the false boundary between theory and practice (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p. 2).

Methodology. The assumption that researchers conceptualize research in a certain way (Creswell, 2007, p. 248).

In this section I work against given, stable, rigid, and predetermined methodological structures. Instead, I discuss fluid methodological spaces where multiple things and methods occur simultaneously and where frameworks and methodological foci are diverse and continuously changing. I provide examples of research designs and methodological flows with varied research objects, practices, enactments, and ways of representing realities. In these spaces that could also be called incorporeal (i.e., reality that is abstract) and fluid spaces, similar and different methodologies, tools, and approaches come together at different times. “Methods” and “tools” are not methods and tools in their stable meaning or rigid structures, but “methods and tools” begin

and end in an unforeseen and unpredictable “order,” forming incomplete methodologies without absolute identities or nonidentities. Methods and tools are conceptualized as temporary structures that are being regenerated again and again. Following this line of thought, methodological flows, tools, approaches, and techniques do not collapse, fail, or disappoint. Instead, they melt, transform, circumvent, infiltrate, appear, and disappear while opening up new directions for qualitative research. This section is about methodologies that always begin again by having “already begun.”

Methods imply order, they reflect traditions

My methods should be your methods or

even better our methods collectively; shared and identical methods

replicable methods

methods with more legitimacy, power, V-A-L-I-D-I-T-Y

They look good

They are recognized preferably by funders

I have been trained in methods

I have acquired knowledge about methods

I do know methods Wait a minute I know what?

Methods, they demand

Methods, they teach

Methods they make me (un)do

● How could a method be wherever it is while not being everywhere?

More specifically, my argument here is more critical and ontological, with a focus on the ontologies of practice (see Mol, 2002). From this perspective, scholars acknowledge epistemological and methodological multiplicities and accept the uncertainty, fragmentation, and temporality associated with this multiplicity. They are concerned about knowledge, not as a singular but as a multiple event. I wonder how researchers can ontologically combine multiple and overlapping methodological events, forces, and practices (not multiple and distinct methods as often described, for example, in mixed-methods literature) that extend the objects of research, various roles, and social expectations. By *methodological extensions*, I refer to forces, events, and practices that might build from theoretical, cultural, and methodological traditions but at the same time move beyond documented tools of data collection and analysis, thus expanding the notions of normative research.



Robert Ulmer

Section key points:

- Methodological order, linearity, and containment can promote hierarchies and increase methodological surveillance and external quality control.
- **Fluid and multifaceted methodologies can offer new dimensions of research to better articulate, accommodate, and reflect anticipated conditions and preferred spatial dimensions for qualitative research.**
- In fluid and incorporeal methodological space, methodological moves might have temporary limits and porous boundaries before morphing into something else, whereas other research elements and moves may be completely unknowable and indescribable.

“Fifteen hundred years ago everybody knew the Earth was the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago, everybody knew the Earth was flat, and fifteen minutes ago, you knew that humans were alone on this planet. Imagine what you’ll know tomorrow.” Kay (Tommy Lee Jones), Men in Black [Movie].

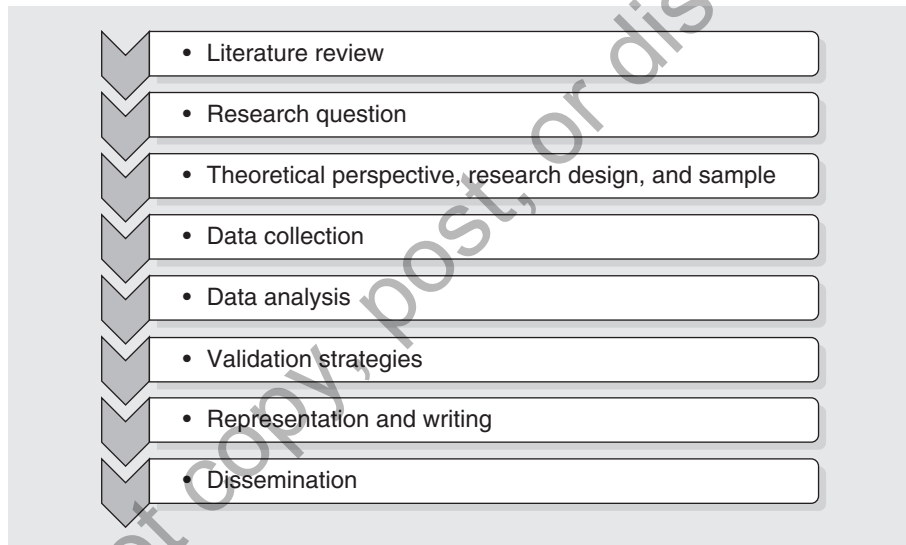
—Jason

What Do Linear Methodologies Do?

The linearity and order in qualitative research processes as described in many introductory books (see, e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) might help researchers conceptualize qualitative research practices without becoming overwhelmed with the plenitude of methodological and

theoretical options. The research process begins with a literature review and research questions, then moves to the formulation of theoretical perspectives and overall design (see Figure 4.1). Introductory books and methods courses teach us that research design should be transparent and follow published guidelines and procedures and that methodological citations are needed. Furthermore, different tools of inquiry, including data collection and analysis methods, can be separable units and distinctive methodological containers. Novice researchers are often taught that the representation of findings and writing should follow thematic flow and descriptive structures so that readers can locate and verify validity and rigor. As a result, some qualitative researchers may be anxious to follow the “right” procedures.

Figure 4.1 Linearity and Order in Qualitative Research Process



Cleanness, linearity, predictability, careful planning, and onto-epistemological consistency are sometimes considered hallmarks of quality qualitative research. Such order, linearity, and containment are likely to limit research, promote hierarchies, and increase methodological surveillance and external quality control, especially during peer reviews. **Sometimes order and linearity in designs fail, and scholars may encounter various unpredictable events, urgent decisions, and unexpected interactions.** These unanticipated hurdles can create possibilities for methodological adaptation and alternative representations of research processes beyond linearity and certainty.

The purpose of this section is to reconsider the linear logic and invariability in qualitative research designs. The circular, emergent, and messy nature of qualitative inquiry and research design has been acknowledged by many scholars (e.g., Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Lather, 2007a; Luttrell, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mason, 2002; Maxwell, 1996). For example, Luttrell (2010) characterized qualitative research design as a plan for researchers to make decisions that leaves room for individual judgment. Furthermore, she referred to various standards for study designs, including clear research questions, demonstration of study significance, definition of key concepts, data that match research questions, systematic and triangulated data collection, and reflexivity. Luttrell also noted that qualitative research design is interactive in that all design parts are interdependent, making a coherent whole and creating interaction between the researcher and the study participants/study context. Process is also iterative—going back and forth between different design elements.

In your own research, you could:

- Document what is gained and lost by methodological linearity and predictability, possibly embedded in your research activities
- Map your messy and multilayered interactions with different social and material study contexts and data
- Create your own labels for your processes, tools, and approaches

Even though some current notions of circularity in qualitative research designs take into account unexpected changes (e.g., Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 1996), this circularity may still build on historical origins, logic, standard labels, recognizable categories, and coherent identities. Massumi (2002) noted that as long as any event is ongoing, its outcomes stay uncertain, and its labels and identities are subject to change. In the context of qualitative research design, Massumi's ideas could indicate uncertainty and methodological open-endedness that ultimately also acknowledges risks and implies the need for creativity. Massumi also argued that science has its own "default design" that meets newness and innovations with predetermined procedures and available techniques. **In other words, Massumi cautioned scholars not to label and categorize newness and innovation by existing labels and structures.** At the same time, Massumi worried that science might result in indeterminability (not acting or creating

It's more than unpredictable events. Doctoral students who want to live on the periphery of their disciplines and recognize and seek to build bridges across gaps between disciplines will need a strong tradition in the basic tenets of methodologies in order to bend/blur them.

—Chandra

I think the clean representation makes young scholars feel as though they may be failing in their research endeavors because it is almost a secret that the research process NEVER works like this.

—Darby

What about newness to the discipline? Do labels have to be previously unused in order to be considered new to an audience that has never seen them before?

—Chandra

but maybe paralyzing), especially within the social worlds of predetermined order and discourses of methodological certainty. Often, methodological linearity and order are assumed and expected, and cyclical revisions and methodological reconstructions are merely seen as acceptable exceptions to the linearity (not as the option on its own or as an option outside the normative other). For example, within circular research design processes, linearity is always still present in the form of return. A return (e.g., to research questions, to data, to a theoretical perspective) serves as

one expected point, a point of arrival and departure, thus contributing to linearity itself. From this circular perspective, fluidity is seen as a temporal change and exception rather than an anticipated condition or preferred spatial dimension.

What Might Happen in Fluid Methodological Spaces?

Instead of seeing continuing changes or methodological fluidity as a more or less accepted exception to linear logic, viewing methodology as always already fluid and multifaceted can offer new dimensions to research. Fluid methodologies might also stimulate deeper or more engaged ways to represent, accommodate, and reflect anticipated conditions and preferred spatial dimensions often present in qualitative research encounters. In this section, I discuss the methodological system or space where research designs are no longer based on stable structures—rather, research designs could be seen as forces and events that highlight or create different types of methodological extensions. These forces and events have temporal and spatial dimensions.

In your own research, you could:

- Propose, live, and document research designs as events and extensions
- Connect design events to a specific time and space
- Map overlapping research events and interactive spaces
- Solicit peer feedback on your maps

Surprise

Methodological flows and multiplicity in designs can promote conceptual and analytical surprise and contextual responsiveness that might be lacking from mechanical or uncritical methods and approaches (see Koro-Ljungberg &

Mazzei, 2012). Not only does analytical surprise or contextual responsiveness keep researchers more deeply engaged in their research but can also enable scholars to methodologically adjust to changing circumstances in which they practice scholarship and interact with participants, data, and the Other. However, analytical surprise or contextual responsiveness might become impossible and unimaginable in normative and tightly controlled methodological and political contexts. Thus, viewing and approaching methodologies as events or aporetic entities without methodologies could provide a framework from which critical social science and qualitative researchers could conduct research that leaves room for surprise, responsiveness, and creativity.

Methodologies without methodologies

rest in fluid spaces occupy contested lands

*challenge me, us, data, perspectives, theories, frames, positionings,
knowledges, truths*

to co-exist

to be present in a single moment, in orderly chaos

Methodologies without methodologies

comfort my uncertainty

feed from my hunger for creativity and experimentation

provoke action and change turn me into a methodological rebel

against my better judgment for my great joyment

Methodologies without methodologies

leave room for unplanned interactions and analytical escapes

create a blind vision of absences and non-presence

Show me the impossible! Impossible!

Work Against Methodological Norms and Grand Narratives

In fluid methodological spaces, similar and/or different methodologies, tools, and techniques come together without absolute identities or nonidentities. Fluid methodologies exist outside stable boundaries and

cut-off points. In fluid spaces, “normality is a gradient rather than a cut-off point” (Mol & Law, 1994, p. 659). As a consequence, methodological flows and fluid methodological spaces do not collapse, fail (failure as inadequacy, lack, or not meeting the objectives), or disappoint. Methodologies and methods do not fail. The absence of failure also calls for different notions of validity and trustworthiness. Maybe “rigor” could be viewed as continually changing, situated, divergent (see, e.g., Lather, 1993, 2001, 2007b), and maybe even inaccurate and irrelevant.

In fluid methodological spaces, methods and research approaches melt, transform, circumvent, infiltrate, appear, and disappear. There is no “need for police action to safeguard the stability of [research] elements and their linkages—for there is no network structure to be protected” (Mol & Law, 1994, p. 662). In addition, fluid and incorporeal methodological spaces and extensions call for attention to change, divergence, and difference. *Incorporeal* refers to reality that is abstract—methodology that is “inseparable, coincident, but disjunct” (Massumi, 2002, p. 5). From this perspective, methodology will always stay indeterminate and ever changing. Following Massumi, one can access the incorporeal dimension of the methodology, not the methodology itself. Researchers can talk about different dimensions that might constitute a methodology, but knowing stays always uncertain. Incorporeal methodology travels alongside the methodology but does not become it. “With the body, the ‘walls’ are the sensory surfaces. The intensity is experience. The emptiness or in-betweenness filled by experience is the incorporeal dimension of the body” (Massumi, 2002, p. 14).

Complexity

Fluid methodologies are complex, but they do not necessarily complicate or confuse, especially when fluid methodologies are situated outside reductionist or essentialist frames. Complexity in this context refers to meeting and facing the limits of one’s knowledge. I believe that complexity is not necessarily concerned with technically advanced processes but rather processes that exceed individuals’ capacity to know them (see also Law, 2004). In fluid and incorporeal methodological space, methodological moves might have temporary limits and porous boundaries before morphing into something else. Sometimes research events and methodological moves may be completely unknowable, unrecognizable, and indescribable. I wonder how fluid methodological space would function without order or clear direction. How could a methodology be wherever it is **while not being everywhere**? How could a methodology leave room for whatever it left out? How might qualitative research methodologies respect and build from complexities? (See also Mol & Law, 2002.)

Conceptualizing Fluid and Incorporeal Methodological Spaces

In this section, I borrow from various philosophers and draw theoretical connections to Massumi's (1998, 2002) ideas on virtuality, movement, fluidity, and incorporeality; Deleuze's (1991) writings on virtuality; Baudrillard's (1983) concepts of reproduction; and Mol and Law's (2002) discussion on complexity.

Like ice in a glass. It fills the glass yet leaves room for other liquid to come inside, and the ice enhances the other liquid by making it a refreshing drink. But if no other liquid is added, the ice itself turns into the liquid and can serve as a refreshing drink in and of itself.

—Jason

Connecting With Massumi and Deleuze

For Massumi (2002), the virtual is real but abstract. The same problem, the same critical condition, is replayed in multiplying variations. Massumi (2002) discussed dimensions of the virtual as “multiple levels that have different logics and temporal organizations, but are locked in resonance with each other and recapitulate the same event in divergent ways, recall the fractal ontology and nonlinear causality underlying theories of complexity” (p. 33). Deleuze (1991) proposed that the virtual does not have to be realized but is actualized. Following Massumi and Deleuze, the fluidity is inaccessible but can be “figured out,” worked through, and images of it may be constructed.

My call for methodological fluidity, representation of variations, and increased attention to methodological flows is not a call for unqualified relativism—relativism that absorbs and accepts anything unconditionally. Instead, an order might exist, but it is not linear, logical, or rational. According to Massumi (2002), variation is punctual; it is realized at structurally spaced intervals, often through predictable moves and positions. From the perspective of fluid methodologies, spontaneous connections are expected, and “accident zones” can create openings for different ways of engaging, knowing, moving, fracturing, and changing. Furthermore, the methodological, analytical, and interpretive potential of unique, multidimensional research situations may be better actualized if qualitative researchers focus on flows, cracks, and infoldings and unfoldings rather than linearity, order, and simplicity.

It could be argued that one of the main purposes of fluid and incorporeal methodological space is not to represent but to resonate and add to reality. Massumi (2002) suggested moving toward affirmative methods that embrace their own inventiveness and add to (rather than confirm) reality. Methodology could be a spatial register of research intensities—intensities

How could fluid methodological space function without linear order or clear direction?

How might qualitative research methodologies respect complexities?

How can researchers ontologically combine multiple and overlapping methodological extensions (not multiple and distinct methods as often described, for example, in mixed-methods literature), objects of research, various roles, and social expectations?

How could a method
leave room for whatever
it left out?

True. It's important to remember that the net production of energy from fermentation is much less than energy produced from an aerobic process. Interestingly, multiple species can do both processes. Thus, I would argue that neither of these forms of methodologies can or should exist exclusively from one another. They each serve a purpose, depending on the environment/context of the objects, subjects, etc.

—Chandra

of various research acts. These research acts and events form an immanent relation that continually changes. Methodologies and research events belong to this continually changing interaction as the dynamic corporeal or abstraction that is always unmediated. “When the event-dimension migrates to a new space, its elements modulate. There is no general model for the catalysis of an event. Every time an event migrates, it is re-conditioned” (Massumi, 2002, p. 81). Massumi (2002) also referred to the situations in which a system (in this case a methodological system) is momentarily inactive and in ferment. During this fermentation, methodological research events, acts, and objects come together and multiple methodological paths become possible.

Thinking about methodologies without methodologies through the process of fermentation serves as an interesting example of energy transfer in the absence of one main material (oxygen). In the enzyme-catalyzed fermentation process, sugars break down without oxygen, decomposition takes place in the absence of air, or microorganisms grow in bulk. In methodological fermentation, energy is being created in the absence of normative methodology, textbook tools, techniques, or simplified linguistic categories.

In your own research, you could:

- Map out different variations of the “same” problem, phenomenon, condition
- Create images of fluid methodological spaces in which you visit, inhabit, or experience
- Imagine how your research “objects,” texts, observations, and you, among other things, blend into each other and interfere with each other in unanticipated ways; theorize and reflect on what you see!
- Allow your methodology to ferment and observe the “consequences,” decomposition of knowledge, newly created substance, and future events following the fermentation
- Teach and educate others about the possibilities of fluid designs
- Work with local structures (IRB, committee members, funders, etc.) to allow more flexibility, revisions, and open-ended tasks during the research process

- Think about revisiting and revising ideas and projects from different perspectives
- Build different optional paths into your designs

Connecting With Baudrillard

Methodological events create interactions and movement between miniaturized method and theory particles. Baudrillard (1983) proposed that

the real [of research and research design] is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. (p. 3)

Similarly, methodologies can be reproduced in different variations an indefinite number of times. These variations combine elements from existing and maybe more widely accepted methodologies, but each new constellation is never the same as before. Baudrillard (1983) talked about this infusion of real and illusion that happens in simulacra and copies without the original: “Concrete trees with real leaves printed into them, a hog made out of reinforced concrete, but with a real hog’s skull inside, concrete sheep covered with real wool” (p. 90). Following Baudrillard (1983), copies without originals could be seen as series of reproduced objects, and this reproduction absorbs the production processes and changes the production itself, as well as the producer and product. The methodological space referred to here is no longer linear or one-dimensional but cellular, including indefinite generation of the same signals or genetic code.

Connecting With Mol and Law

In fluid methodological space, social objects exist, draw upon, and recursively form the space. Methodological flows transform without sense or points of discontinuity.

Sometimes fluid spaces perform sharp boundaries. But sometimes they do not—though one object gives way to another. So there are mixtures and gradients. And inside these mixtures everything informs everything else—the world doesn’t collapse if some things suddenly fail to appear. (Mol & Law, 1994, p. 659)

Additionally, in the context of research, methodological flows can include multiplication of images created and re-created throughout the research process. Research processes can be actualized through movement from one sample to another, through infoldings and outfoldings, redoubling and reductions, the methodological past projecting ahead to the future. Fluid methodology is the reprocess—a methodology that is actualized by being differentiated and differentiating itself. Methodological originality as a concept or position is no longer helpful or appropriated, since originality is being replaced by virtual, endless reproduction, multiple tiny and fragmented methodologies. Fluid methodology dissolves binaries and hierarchies. Mol and Law (2002) proposed that “when investigators start to discover a variety of orders—modes of ordering, logics, frames, styles, repertoires, discourses—then the dichotomy between simple and complex starts to dissolve” (p. 7). Fluid methodology pays attention to the systemic relations and energies being transformed and transported from one event to another or one object to another.

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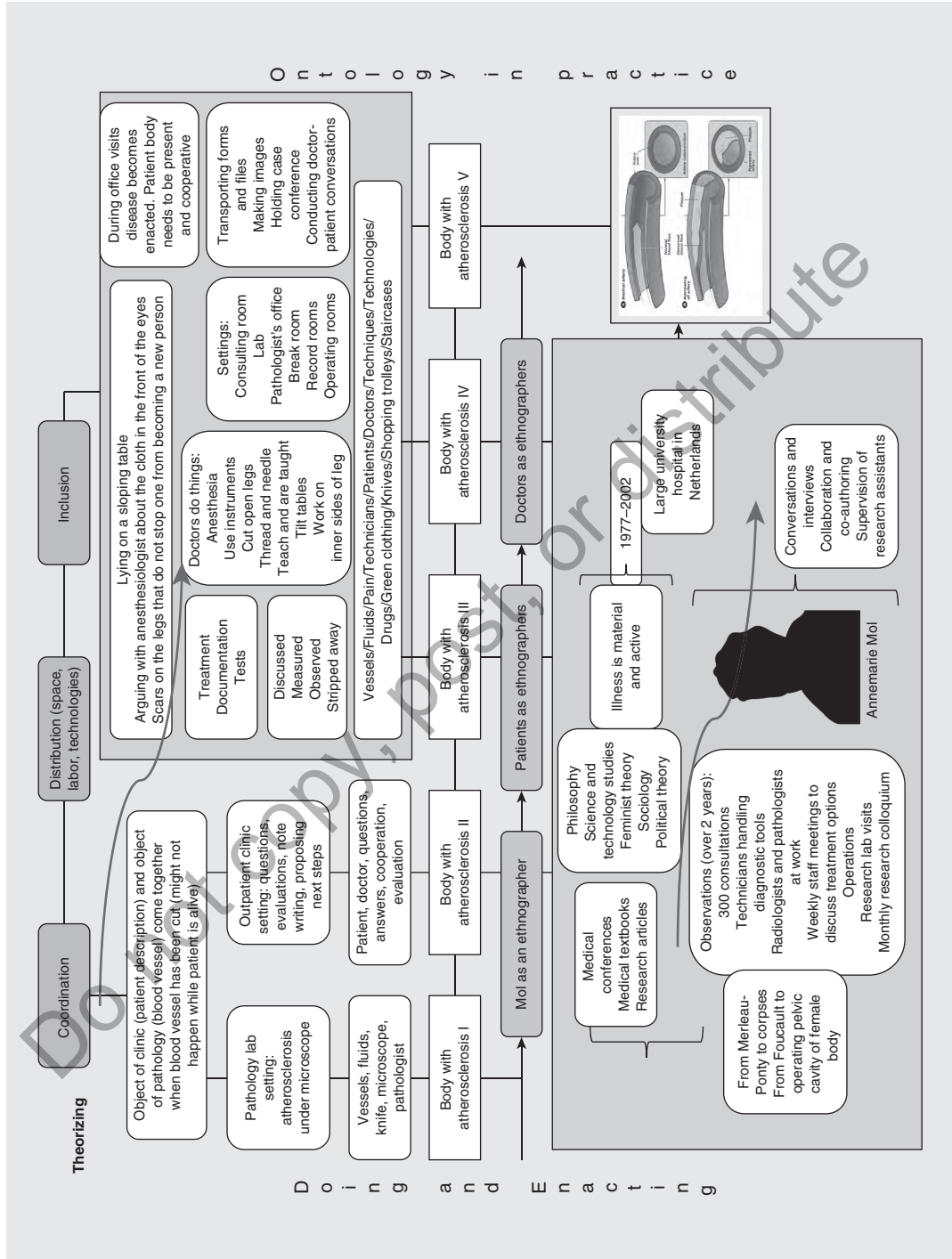
Annemarie Mol's Fluid Methodology

Next, I discuss in more detail one example of methodological flow, namely, Mol's (2002) ethnographic work of day-to-day diagnosis and treatment of atherosclerosis. I do not use Mol's example as a generalizable model to be used with every study situated in fluid methodological spaces or frameworks, and I don't see her work as representative of all other cases. Additionally, there is nothing unique in her work per se (see Massumi, 2002), but it is exemplary in its detail and singularity. In this singular example (belonging to oneself and extendable to others at the same time), Mol illustrates how one object can actually have multiple variations. Massumi (2002) talked about an organization that has different logics and degrees of temporality that are resonating but also diversifying at the same time—following fractal ontology and nonlinear causality. This nonlinear causality is present in Mol's work. For example, Mol was interested in scrutinizing the ontological politics of medicine and how different medical “problems” and objects are framed and individual lives are shaped. Mol's work utilized different theories, including those of philosophy, anthropology, and technology—she referred to her approach as a study in empirical philosophy.

To provide more methodological details and demonstrate the fluid and incorporeal project, I crafted Figure 4.2 to represent Mol's methodological flow. This figure shows one example of multiplicity of a research object (in Mol's example, “body with atherosclerosis”) and the various ways Mol studied, observed, and constructed the enactment of atherosclerosis. Mol moved from one moment, place, object, and treatment to the next as a different atherosclerosis was being discussed, treated, measured, and constructed. Mol did not want to tell a story of an object, body, or disease that was removed from the practices and contexts that sustained and created these particular objects and bodies. For her, reality was an act that can be done, intertwined, or undone.

In Mol's ethnography, various methodologies and techniques were used to study medical practices in one hospital, observe multiplicity of the research object, and document ontology in practice. To gather materials and document her interactions with the environment in a university hospital in the Netherlands, Mol visited clinics, operation rooms, debriefings, and staff lounges over four years. The coherence of atherosclerosis was made visible through various tactics, including transporting forms and files, scanning images, providing diagnosis, having conversations in different spaces, and so on. Mol explained that different enactments of the disease can be added up and patients can be distributed between practices. Furthermore, there was no one single passive research object to be discovered. “Instead, objects come into being—and disappear—with the practices in which they are manipulated. And since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies” (Mol, 2002, p. 5). Mol argued that the body, patient, doctor, and technology were more than one and were always somehow related. Reality of “body” or “disease” was an act, something

Figure 4.2 Mol's Methodological Flow



that may be done or left undone. Instead of focusing on getting the research or design “right,” Mol illustrated methodological and conceptual movements in singular space and interconnectedness between objects and research activities, enactments, settings, actors, life at the hospital, and produced knowledge. For Mol, objects were interdependent and shaped by different modes of ordering. When different ways to enact an object meet other ways of enactment, practices interfere and objects transform. One goal of Mol’s work was to describe a single/multiple object as a part of practices in which they were enacted and created. In this type of work, there was not one fixed point of comparison between objects, since realities and enactments are multiple. Objects do not magically glide or silently move from one reality to another, but materials interfere and interact with objects, creating emotional, material, and psychological effects. Objects become part of the real—objects encountered when living with the real. Focus shifts from the truth to the goodness and appropriateness of methods, tools, and research practices.

Ontologies of practice present an interesting dilemma by blending theory and practice within singular events and by bringing ontology to practice and practice to ontology. Ontologies of practice combine the questions of existence and truth with the questions of diverse, differentiated, and perceptual/affective practices. Ontologies of practice materialize theories of truth and truths themselves. Additionally, ontologies of practice could be seen as a question of power, legitimacy, and social structures that enable certain practices to exist and to be considered as true and others not. They also call for critical reflection and adaptation, different ontological politics, and various changing and complex connections between epistemologies, methodologies, and theories (for diverse connections, see, e.g., Carter & Little, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009; Lather, 2007a). Mol and Law (2002) noted, “There is complexity if things relate but don’t add up, if events occur but not within the processes of linear time, and if phenomena share a space but cannot be mapped in terms of a single set of three-dimensional coordinates” (p. 1). Similarly, in the context of educational research and sometimes also in qualitative research, things, data, experiences, and bodies don’t always add up or follow linear logic. Complexity cannot be simplified into various digestible units and understandable or literal meanings.

There are two large arrows that go from left to right. Is this from doing to ontology or from enacting to practice?
—Chandra

Does the larger grouping next to ontology represent ontology? If not, what is that grouping? Why did you group these constructs? Does the large grouping near enacting represent enacting or something else?
—Darby

Another Conceptualization Beyond Mol’s Methodological Singularity

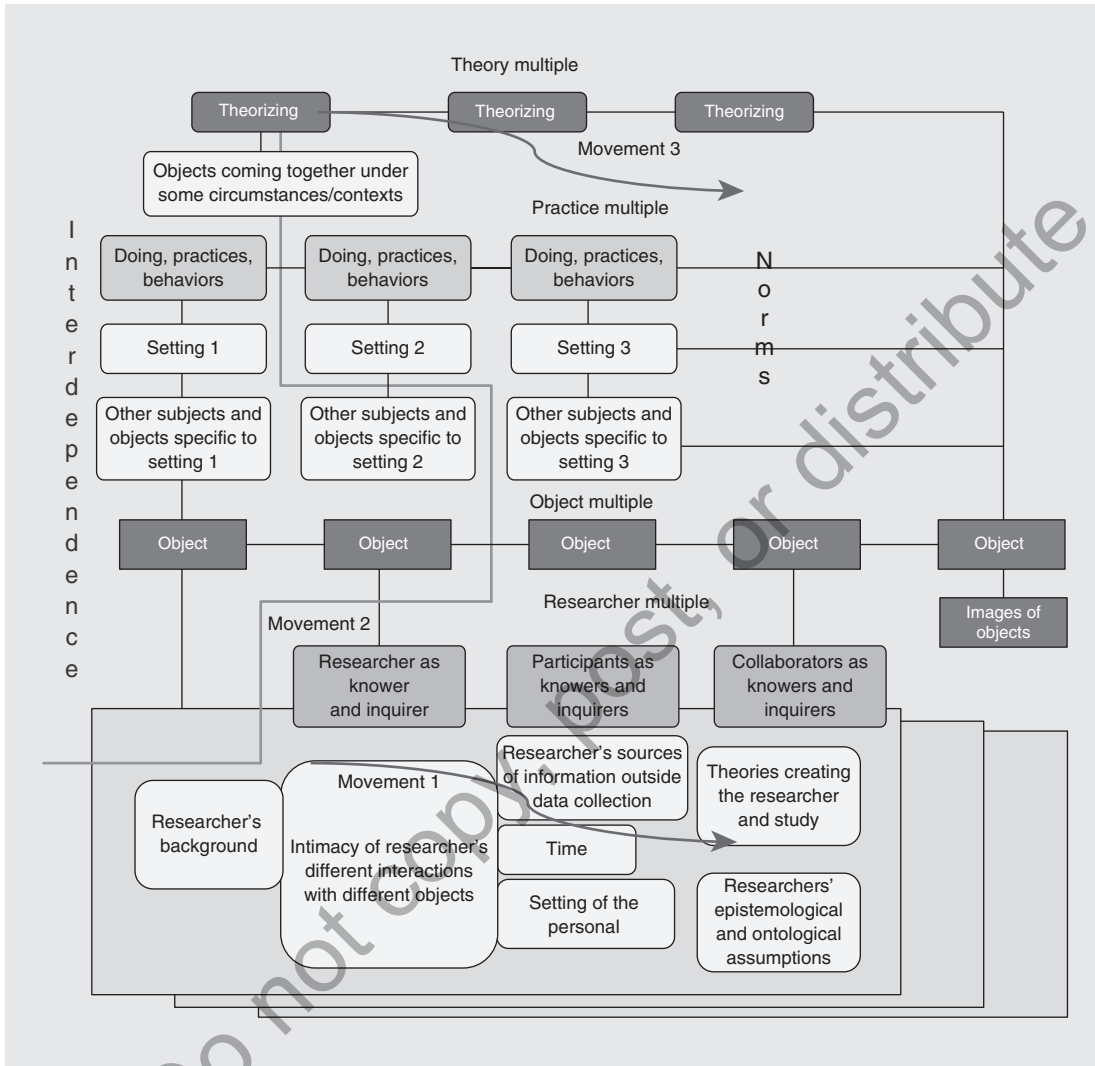
.....
In addition to mapping Mol’s fluid ethnography and research design, I created a second map to use her work in a more general context of critical social science and qualitative

research. Figure 4.3 is a conceptual illustration of fluid methodology where multiple methodological parts and objects come together in one space. More specifically, in this space, researchers no longer move from object to theory or from participants to text. Rather, qualitative researchers transfer from one way of acting, enacting, and experiencing the objects of research to another way. For example, a researcher could first observe objects being enacted in different contexts and then smoothly transition to writing about these enactments. These acts would not be separate research tasks but potentially overlapping interactions between the researcher and objects to illustrate the objects in multiple variations. The methodology or research process is not fragmented but involves fluid components connecting different acts of researching, living, and experiencing. When considering the value of this type of methodology, externally controlled or audible understandings of validity or rigor might not be sufficient or appropriate. For example, it is not enough to ask questions about the truth if multiple truths are visible or possible, and there are many ways to enact objects or methodology. Instead, it could be beneficial to turn the “validity” question into a question about the appropriateness of research acts and practices. From this perspective, knowledge is not a matter of reference but a result of manipulation and doing. “Instead of the observer’s eyes, the practitioner’s hands become the focus point of theorizing” (Mol, 2002, p. 152).

If practice becomes our entrance into the world, ontology is no longer a monist whole. Ontology-in-practice is multiple. Objects that are enacted cannot be aligned from small to big, from simple to complex. Their relations are the intricate ones that we find between practices.
(Mol, 2002, p. 157)

Following Mol’s example, methodology occurs as different movements or sets of research moments joined together to create something that we can recognize as a methodological event. These methodological events and movements are unpredictable gatherings of analytical, theoretical, and interpretive momentums. These gatherings, in turn, can take place in different material spaces. In addition, methodology is created and enacted through different dense and intense spaces that methodology encounters or interacts with—these moments are created when research is complicated and messy. Fluid methodological moments can be found only in spaces where movements slow down, speed up, disappear, and appear again. When methodology is done, carried out, implemented, and created, it cannot be compared to others but only to its own variations—including variations of a methodology within a methodology. Methodology carried out this way is real and material yet incorporeal (see also Massumi, 2002). In this corporeal state also, one order becomes multiple.

Figure 4.3 Another Map of Fluid Methodological Space



Researcher 1, researcher 2, researcher 3 . . . 15 . . . ∞ different variations of data, us

in relation to objects, practices, theories

Processes are messy and I want to leave them that way

No cleaning, no beautification

Can I, may I? Even in research? Or will I just do it anyway—without permission?

Secretly sliding in messy images

of research and life

silently working through complexities

just to illustrate that you also can do research and write differently

The Unexpected Lives of Methodologies Without Methodology

I hope that the above examples provoke and do the messy work of diversion and distraction. Maybe some **seeds** of productive complexity have been planted, and qualitative researchers could consider the methodological possibilities and new directions that variations embedded or exemplified through research objects and enactments could present. Multiplicity and simultaneity of processes, objects, intra-actions, and particles can create interesting and stimulating movement that may enable scholars to meet the unknown and movement that can resonate, maybe with otherness. This movement might be temporarily documented through **maps instead of linearity or fixed processes, as illustrated in this section.** Maps can also document methodological movement through particles in different cultural, geographical, and political spaces of knowing. As a result, documented methodologies are always partial and limiting because particles and objects do not stop moving or resonating.

Fluid methodologies serve as one alternative to linear and invariable research designs. Fluid methodology can create a space where scholars can reconsider their relationship with knowledge, data, traditions, and themselves. Notions of fluidity can also work against the stability of methods and the omnipotent power of “right” methodology that may portray methods as isolated, always (in)appropriate and (in)accurate, fixed, objective, and ultimately as controllable tools for research. Methodologies are not right or wrong, but when contexts and tools are continuously moving, the issue is applicability. Applicability, in turn, enables wonder and surprise. Incorporable methodology adds to the “real” by complementing it rather than confirming it. “Generating a paradox and then using it as if it were a

A good metaphor, as we apply our order to a process where we cannot know its beginning or end, but rather only what we label as beginning or end.

—Darby

Exactly! Why does a research process have to follow a traditional text structure? Why can't it be a picture, or a map, or a chart, or a song, or a 3D tangible object! I think in a lot of cases these nontraditional depictions would better serve the research process and/or data!

—Jason

well-formed logical operator is a good way to put vagueness [of concepts such as methodology] in play” (Massumi, 2002, p. 13).

Fluid methodology can also work against notions of singularity of data, knower, theory, and method, thus becoming a move away from essentialism. Interconnectedness of various methodological processes, as well as researchers’ and research’s relatedness to data, participants, research contexts, and policy, can be framed within multiple and potentially simultaneous orders, repertoires, discourses, and styles. However, these multiplications may not be easily captured by words commonly used in methodology texts, such as *audit trails*, *thick description*, *categorization*, or *member checks*. Instead, fluid methodologies offer numerous variations, conceptual agreements, or traces of methodological paths, inviting scholars to travel and explore.

One might ask what it takes to implement and practice fluid methodologies. How to do it? (Un)fortunately I do not have an answer. I do not know how to do it or what to recommend, since this type of methodology is unanticipated and becoming. Readers can borrow ideas, read about different examples, experiment with existing methodological configurations, but in the end each scholar is responsible for creating her or his own flexible and continuously changing methodologies. Methodologies as such are experimentations and projects without an end. As a result, scholars might need to educate others about alternative ontologies and be prepared to negotiate with IRBs, committee members, collaborators, and tenure and promotion committees how, why, and where this type of scholarship is carried out. For those scholars who would like more scaffolding, “In your own research, you could” inserts put forward some ideas of how fluid methodologies could be introduced to your work. In addition, later (especially in the pedagogy section of the book) I will also discuss some potential pedagogical implications of this type of scholarship. Yet none of these ideas are strategies to be transferred blindly or uncritically.

Furthermore, fluid methodologies can open up or point to the concepts and practices associated with methodology that is already “already there” without proclaimed arrival. Representations, descriptions, and reflections on methodological relations, repulsions, and connectivity may create a flow that picks up speed, moves between researcher and data and back again, changes, encounters its momentary limits, and begins to evaporate. Methodological flow and multiplicity could transform one research project, research act, design, or methodological arrangement into another without disruption or discontinuity, thus incessantly, immediately, and continuously changing researchers, their processes, and expected or experienced outcomes. Critical social science or qualitative research does not necessarily need to be communicated or presented as a question/answer binary. Baudrillard (1983) explained that “*the referendum is always an ultimatum*: the unilateral nature of question that is no longer exactly

an interrogation, but the immediate imposition of a sense whereby the cycle is suddenly completed. Every message is a verdict” (p. 117). What if qualitative researchers stopped translating complex events and conflicts into question/answer responses, codable categories, or verdicts? Qualitative scholars should be more concerned about the consequences of turning every message, finding, argument, or position into a verdict than confirming the norm and following grand narratives. Methodological fluidity cannot be premeditated, easily surveillanced, or protected. Maybe it can have a life of its own that we as scholars can only witness.

READING LIST OF LIFE

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