

Analyzing multimodal constitutive processes in empirical research

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Abstract

This article addresses the methodological implications for empirical research of an ambition that cuts across a number of theoretical traditions known as post-structural thinking, Cultural Studies, Science and Technology Studies (STS), Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Agential Realism. This ambition denotes an effort to understand *the becomings* of our reality; and more specifically, to understand the process of such becomings as complex, shifting and fluid. The purpose is to develop analytics which take potentially multiple forms of constitutive forces as the point of departure and awards the empirical material a prominent position in the process. An empirical approach within this type of research places demands on the types of data produced, how the data are processed, and the analytical strategies that are developed. We will attempt to provide insight into what such efforts could look like, which theoretical tools are put to work, and how specific researchers have gone about developing an empirical design with strategies for data production, analysis and text.

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Introduction

A research ambition that appears to cut across a number of theoretical traditions known as post-structural thinking, Cultural Studies, Science and Technology Studies (STS), Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Agential Realism have been surfacing in recent years. Stated in very general terms, this ambition denotes an effort to understand *the becomings* of our reality; and more specifically, to understand the process of such becomings as complex, shifting and fluid – with periodical sedimentations, ruptures, contradictions and change. The ambition seeks to understand how different phenomena and boundary settings are naturalized or denaturalized; how they are discursified, materialized, ritualized and practised; and how all of this occurs entangled in sometimes simultaneous, sometimes alternating states of order and disorder. The ambition is pursued with different emphases on different types of constitutive processes within the various theoretical traditions. And it is also pursued with different emphases on volatility versus continuity within subdivisions across the research areas of the theoretical traditions.

Feminist thinkers from the traditions mentioned have been important driving forces in developing concepts and challenging analytical perspectives (see Søndergaard (ed.) 2007). For instance, poststructuralist philosopher Judith Butler emphasizes discursive practices such as constitutive and subjectifying processes – with a clear interest in the material effects of discourse, but also granting subjects the space to challenge discourse. Conversely, Anne Marie Mol stresses the agentiality of the material as the constitutive force of matter. Her work is characterized by a focused interest in delimiting the analytic as much as possible from human agency (Mol, 2002; Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2006). As an Actor-Network theorist, Anne Marie Mol is critical of the humanist thinking which has given the human subject analytical priority for decades within certain areas of the social sciences.

In spite of all of the differences, however, these traditions – from post-structuralism to STS/ANT – carry an overall ambition to encompass both social, discursive and material constitutive modes; and for some (specifically the poststructuralists), subjective modes as well. It has been essential to attempt to include and analyse constitutive processes and effects in all of these different forms. This is the approach we are referring to in the title of this article.

In this article, we use the concepts of new-materialism and multimodal constitutive analysis. Following poststructuralist and constructivist theory, new-materialism signifies the type of thinking that attempts to conceive of materiality as a

constitutive force in its interaction with discourse. Our concept of multimodal constitutive analysis attempts to precede a step further and avoid privileging any of the two forces: materiality and discourse. Instead, the potentially multiple forms of constitutive forces are taken as the point of departure for an analytical approach, and the empirical material is awarded a prominent position in the process through which the possible weighing of forces is carried out in the final analysis.

We have become increasingly concerned with the question of how this approach could be refined in ways that will keep it analytically open in relation to the ambition of thinking multimodality when it comes to constitutive processes. Our immediate interest springs from our own empirical work, where we have experienced a concrete need to develop analytics which open several constitutive modes including materiality as constitutive forces. It is important to note that not all empirical fields will demand the analysis of the entire range of modalities. And our interest is not the development of yet another dogmatic demanding the inclusion of all possible forms of constitutive forces of the multimodal constitution. Rather, our point is that the potential to discover, investigate and analyze across the entire range of possible constitutive forces offers more complex analytical openings than approaches that in advance - before the empirical material has been allowed to challenge the understanding - have chosen a specific modality to focus on, such as for instance subjectification while giving less priority to matter as constitutive movement. We are therefore primarily concerned with the potential of the approach and the flexible, empirically sensitive use of it.

An empirical approach within this type of research places demands on the types of data produced, how the data are processed, and the analytical strategies that are developed. We will attempt to provide insight into what such efforts could look like, which theoretical tools are put to work, and how specific researchers have gone about developing an empirical design with strategies for data production, analysis and text. We will begin with the conceptual approach, with Judith Butler and Donna Haraway representing poststructuralist and STS thinking, respectively. Both have been important sources of inspiration for Karen Barad, who further elaborates on the theoretical framework in what she calls Agential Realism. An empirical researcher such as Stine Adrian (Adrian, 2006) has utilized Agential Realism in her methodologically explicit study of assisted reproductive technologies in clinics in Sweden and Denmark. Adrian's research design offers a good point of departure for inspiration and the further development of the multimodal constitutive ambition. But Sarah Højgaard Cawood (2005, 2007), Malou Juelskjær (2000, 2009) and our own research also provide examples of approaches that may serve as starting points for the development of this type of thinking.

We start with the philosophical thinkers who offer abstract principles and concepts but who themselves largely abstain from larger and more systematic empirical analysis. However, their concepts inform the subsequent models of analysis and analytical search strategies that represent the concrete part of the empirical methodology.

Judith Butler and the discursive praxis

Judith Butler turned almost everything upside down when she published her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* in 1990. In the book, she argues that gender cannot be understood as a stable and innate phenomenon residing in men and women as an essence; rather, gender could be seen as discursive practices intervening in the world and creating the very phenomena (i.e. gender differences) that they claim to name. ‘Gender is something you do, not something you are’ became a repeated mantra with roots in her concept of gender performativity¹.

From here, the inspiration spread like wildfire from gender and sexuality studies², to ethnicity studies³, to studies of organizations and professions⁴, and to studies of social categories of various kinds⁵. The inspiration flew further into intersectionality research shifting its perspective towards an understanding of how different social categories intersected, i.e. interacted in ways that did not leave any category – or categorical constitutive praxis – intact, and towards an understanding of how the interaction itself transformed what was interacting (Juelskjær, 2009; Kofoed, 2004; Lykke, 2003; Staunæs, 2003; Søndergaard, 2005b). These analyses showed how categories dissolved and became new phenomena through their reciprocal pervasion – a pervasion that occurred both discursively, practically and with materializing effects.

So there were many offshoots from this poststructural way of conceiving the world. With Butler (and with roots back to Michel Foucault), a shift occurred away from a realist descriptive approach toward analytics based on a constructivist perspective concerned with the processes that create phenomena and attentive to the balancing of phenomena between stability and instability - a shift in perspective from *a curiosity about a stable state of affairs* with the possibility of thinking through definitions, causality and prediction/control to *a curiosity of becoming* with the possibility of thinking through process, motion and disturbance/change (Staunæs & Søndergaard,

¹ In her book entitled *Kønsforskning. En Guide til Feministisk Teori, Metodologi og Skrift* (2008) (*Gender Studies. A Guide to Feminist Theory, Methodology and Writing*), Nina Lykke has conducted a genealogical analysis revealing the background for these concepts in the history of science.

² By scholars such as Bronwyn Davies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Dorte Marie Søndergaard and Margareth Wetherell.

³ By scholars such as Malou Juelskjær, Jette Kofoed, Ann Phoenix and Dorthe Staunæs.

⁴ By Scholars such as Catrine Hasse, Eva Bendix Petersen, Lis Højgaard and Dorte Marie Søndergaard.

⁵ By scholars such as Patti Lather, Lene Myong Petersen and Elisabeth Adams St. Pierre.

2008; Søndergaard, 2005c). In order to sustain this shift in perspective, we will present a number of concepts from Butler's texts which have inspired Barad's thinking and which are constantly activated in the thinking and research designs of the above-mentioned empirical researchers.

"There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results", Butler wrote in 1990 (here cited from 1999: 33). Butler developed this point with inspiration from John Austin's speech-act theory, which worked with illocutionary speech-acts, i.e. speech that creates what is expressed through the utterance. Butler combined this idea with Foucault's concept of subjectification and Althusser's concept of interpellation. Both concepts focused on the becoming of the subject and identity through discursive practice and interpellation (Butler, 1990, 1993; Davies, 2000; Lykke, 2008; Søndergaard, 2005a). Against this background, performativity became a concept denoting the process whereby something, e.g. gender, emerges through discursification.

Butler understood performativity as a citational and recurring constitutive praxis. She underlines that performativity should not be understood as a singular act. Performativity will always be a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and it is through the reiteration that it obtains its effects (Butler, 1993, p. 12). It is through this understanding of performativity that the concept of subjectification should be understood. Subjectification is about the subtle processes whereby the subject emerges in and through discursive practice. In Butler's words, "subjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves" (1993, p. 7), underlining the understanding that there is no original or authentically acting subject behind the acts of the subject.

Butler differentiates here between two aspects of the subject's process of becoming: subjection and coming to subjective existence (subjectivation). In later empirical research inspired by the respective conceptual apparatuses of Butler and Foucault, however, this point is undertaken more consistently as the simultaneity of those two kinds of processes. The basic idea – that there is neither subjective being nor agency outside a discursive constitution – is maintained in the use of subjectification as the concept for this simultaneous two-sided constitutive process (Davies, 2000; Kofoed, 2004; Staunæs, 2004; Søndergaard, 2002a, 2002b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). And precisely here – in this simultaneity – one of the most challenging and resilient moments in empirical analysis is to be found. That is why you in many of the analytical models built on this type of thinking will find analytical questions focusing on the contextual conditions for becoming a long side with questions about the subject's interpretation and negotiation of those same conditions. And in the concrete analyses that these analytical

questions have helped develop, you will see the simultaneity formulated in analytical points that insist on the simultaneity of the interaction when it comes to the description of the contextual premises and negotiations.

Butler consequently suggests that materiality is also to be understood as process; processes of materiality must be thought as being stabilized over time and thereby producing effects in terms of fixations, boundaries and surfaces that we normally call materiality (ibid., p. 9). In a moment we shall see Donna Haraway and Karen Barad unfold this point in different wording and with different emphases.

The gendered body is the focus of discussion in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and Butler uses the example of the distinction between sex and gender to argue that it is problematic to differentiate between discourse and materiality. The very establishment of a distinction between sex and gender (discourse and materiality) is in itself a construction, she points out. It is therefore important to capture the inseparability in the phenomenon by focusing the cultural norms governing the materiality of the body. One must rethink the process whereby bodily norms are acquired and taken on, she says, because this is not about the subject taking on something normative as such, but about the 'I' being formed through the process of taking over itself. Again, there is no subject *behind* the deed; rather, a subject emerges *through* the deed. In this manner, Butler attempts to think simultaneity and a genuine coherence between phenomena we usually separate: materiality and discourse, materiality and sociality, culture and subject. If you ask Karen Barad, however, this attempt is open to criticism, because Butler's formulations over and over imply an analytical priority of discourse at the expense of materiality. But before we unfold the theoretical background of Barad's criticism, we will briefly present two focal points in Donna Haraway's thinking that inform Barad's theoretical edifice.

Donna Haraway and the material-semiotic

Donna Haraway's thinking is rooted in the life sciences, and her work first and foremost emphasizes the constitutive processes of materiality. She analyzes how biological and technological phenomena are created, formed and stabilized. She does this by means of what she calls 'material-semiotic analysis'. This concept designates the mutuality and inseparability between materiality and signs, including materiality and language. This implicates the understanding that agency is not delimited to humans, but is distributed to a wide variety of non-humans as well as humans. The two conceptual tools – the coupling of materiality and semiotics and the assignment of agency to all 'objects', 'natural' as well 'cultural', human as well as non-human – bring an end to both the understanding of material phenomena as passive 'things' and the notion of the scientific discovery as an objective reflection of something 'untouched'. According to Haraway

cells, organisms and genes are not discoveries, they are processes designating historical forms of interaction (2000, p. 24-25). “A gene”, says Haraway, “is not a thing, much less ‘a master molecule’ or a self-contained code. Instead the term *gene* signifies a node of durable action where many actors, human and non-human meet” (Haraway, 1996, p. 142). This is the first focal point.

The second focal point is Haraway’s concept of apparatuses of bodily production. The concept designates the constitutive intersections – techno-scientific, biological, social economic etc – through which a given phenomenon is constructed and must be investigated. Haraway’s methodological approach is tightly woven into her theoretical concepts. The understanding of ‘objects of knowledge’ – Haraway’s generic term for all of the phenomena we are interested in and investigate – as material-semiotic and the significance of the apparatuses of bodily production not only indicate topics of investigation but also how to proceed. The concepts designate the perspective in which the knowledge objects should be seen – her empirically analytical approach – and they are complemented by her concept of ‘imploding knots’ as condensations to be unfolded and whose threads can be followed analytically. In her work, the unwrapping and the analytical processes are helped along through narrative figures that she creates and makes her allies as deconstructive tools (Højgaard, 2007). And her figurations are many: cyborg, trickster, coyote, OncoMouse, dogs, chips, genes etc. In addition to being deconstructive tools, metaphors and narrative figures also generate entirely new forms of perspectives and situated views; constructed to inspire new ways of thinking. The development of concepts and metaphors is about shifting meaning; about doing “a little re-tooling” (Lykke et al. 2000 p. 55).

Karen Barad and Agential Realism

Karen Barad is a student of Haraway and trained in thinking the material and the semiotic as interconnected. But Barad rethinks this point through what she refers to as a diffractive reading (again, a Haraway’an concept) of a number of theoretical traditions (Barad, 2007). Diffraction draws on a classical definition in physics where the concept points to how waves combine and move be it water, sound or light. The movements implicate differences as generated from within. Where the concept reflection operates with a distance to the object and with assumed fixed, absolute boundaries between subject and object, between objects, representations and knowledge producers – the concept of diffraction implies such possible differences and boundaries as results of movement from within the interconnected/mutually saturated phenomena you are dealing with.

Barad works with diffraction on many levels and with respect to many types of problems. She guides her reading of other theories by way of this concept. Judith Butler and Danish physicist Niels Bohr in particular take up a central position in her diffractive readings. The ‘waves’ that are sought out to enable the diffractive input from Butler’s work are multiple, but among others they consist of the concept of performativity, of the focus on iteration and citation as that which generate the effects of performativity, and of the entire theoretical development on the materialization of bodies and of materialization as process. According to Barad, however, Butler’s work, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), and her ideas about the materialization of bodies place excessive emphasis on matter as an effect of discursive performativity. Barad holds that Butler gives priority to discourse as performative in the final analysis. Furthermore, Barad continues, Butler’s theorizing of materiality is not broad enough. Butler only focuses on bodily materiality, whereas the ambition ought to be the creation of a theory of materiality as such: matter intertwined with discourse. That is why Butler’s work requires a diffractive reading through Niels Bohr, the argument goes.

So Barad focuses on matter and on the fact that matter can be known differently, depending on the apparatus it is known through. This is in line with Bohr, where the measurement apparatus can never be thought of as objective or independent of the scientist. Following this, she draws the point about discourse as performative through the focus of Bohr and physics on the meaning of materiality. And from this, she develops a concept of materiality as performative, implying (unlike much ANT-thinking) the material, the discursive and the subjective as genuinely intra-acting.

Intra-action is used as an alternative to interaction. And again, the rationale is that one must be cautious with everything that leads towards a preconception of separations and boundaries. Separations, boundaries and fixations do emerge from within the processes of intra-action. The concept of *inter*-action, however, comes to assume a separation of individual agency/doing as something preceding *interaction*. And that line of thought is less productive, according to Barad. We need a different kind of conceptualization, hence intra-action:

The neologism “intra-action” *signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the “distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, *agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements*. (ibid., 2007, p. 33)

So materiality and discourse intra-act in this thinking. But the processuality is brought further into the concepts. The definition of materiality presupposes that substance cannot be fixed; on the contrary, materiality is always substance in its intra-active becoming. Materiality is not a thing, but a doing, possibly a “congealing of agency”, she says, following both Donna Haraway and Judith Butler (ibid., p. 151). Barad: “Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agential, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of different differences” (ibid., 137).

The Foucault-inspired definition of discourse that is used underlines discourse not as what is said or as a synonym for language; rather, discourse

is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements. Statements are not the mere utterances of the originating consciousness of a unified subject; rather, statements and subjects emerge from a field of possibilities. This field of possibilities is not static or singular but rather is a dynamic and contingent multiplicity. (ibid., p. 146-147)

In this way, discursive practices become productive. And it follows that matter and meaning are both agential; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. They are never and will never be articulated separately.

So this is the basis for the concept of agential realism, the concept designating Barad’s theoretical apparatus: Agential for the conceptualization that everything does something, everything is performative, everything has agency; never delimited but always in intra-activity with something else. And realism as the concept for the fact that the agentiality has real effects. Consequently, realism is not about the representation of something substantialized or something already defined as the difference between subject and object, between materiality and discourse, but about the real effects of intra-activity. And these effects will always themselves enter intra-activity the moment they emerge (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2006).

From Foucault, Haraway and Bohr, Barad finds the inspiration to reuse the concept of apparatus as a form of boundary-making around these very complex and fluid processes and their effects. Apparatus is *not* to be understood as a passive instrument of observation, but as material-discursive practices that create differences and delimitations and thereby phenomenon. At the same time, they are themselves phenomena, but phenomena in the form of open intra-active practices without immanent boundaries. In this sense, apparatus is an analytical concept that can be used to think place and space of

production and becoming. But it is also through apparatuses that difference and boundary-setting practices are constituted through the fact that specific agential intra-actions cause what Barad calls agential cuts (Barad 2007 p. 155).

Agential cuts is an interesting concept. The idea here is that it is in the intra-acting movements in the apparatuses, that potential intersections, distinctions, boundaries, demarcations, differences, categorization etc occur; often in the form of something we tend to perceive as evident and preconceived, and which many scholars will describe as fixed reality. According to agential realist theory, it is through these agential cuts and through specific intra-active acts that boundaries, categories and properties of phenomena are established and that specific concepts – specific material-discursive articulations of the world – become meaningful.

Barad takes up Butler's concept of iterative citation and develops it into a concept of iterative intra-activity. Like Butler, Barad wishes to underline repetition as the motor in performativity. But Barad focuses on the repetition in the more comprehensive intra-activity between the many constitutive modes, including time and space as effects of iterative intra-activity (Juelskjær, 2007, 2009).

In this way, the openness and curiosity of this thinking in relation to the possibilities for constantly qualifying one's sight for further complexity is inspiring. For example, the concept of apparatuses of bodily production, which Haraway talks about and Barad elaborates, can be extended in relation to other phenomena: apparatuses of the production of bullying, apparatuses of the production of sports performance, apparatuses of knowledge production etc. Apparatus is an unfamiliar concept– and reminds us in this connection to include the many different constitutive modes, their intertwined characters and their effects as immediately entering the very intra-active processes that the concept of apparatus itself acts as a lens for.

We cannot substantialize anything in these intra-active processes – we cannot put anything down as *the* causal point of departure; as *the A* which leads to *the B*: neither in the form of materiality, discourse, culture, the social, the subject or anything else. Barad therefore redefines the concept of causality by underlining that we cannot understand causal relations within this theoretical framework as specific relations between isolated objects. Causal relations demand a specification of the material-discursive apparatus that enacts an agential cut between intra-actively producing entities. One must understand which agential cuts between intra-actions have produced the differences and properties which create effects – together and in relation to on another.

One may ask: Are there people in this conceptual framework? Yes, there are. There are people, there are bodies and there are subjects. For instance, human bodies are phenomena that appropriate – and are appropriated by – specific boundaries and properties through these open intra-action dynamics (Barad 2007, p. 172). The

boundaries of bodies are produced in intra-action with other materialities, discourses etc. The human subject is also found to have a constitutive position in the apparatus. Subjects are part of the intra-active processes making up the world, but they are not the point of departure in the world. Man is a part of the world – the world of intra-active becoming. And as a part, man is accountable. There is a concept of accountability connected with human agentiality. In agential realism thinking:

We are responsible for the cuts that we help enact not because we do the choosing (neither do we escape responsibility because ‘we’ are ‘chosen’ by them), but because we are an agential part of the material becoming of the universe. Cuts are agentially enacted not by wilful individuals but by the larger material arrangement of which ‘we’ are a ‘part’. (2007, p. 178-179)

With Barad, an analytical opening for an enhancement of the complexity-sensitive ambition is established, both in relation to the quantity of constitutive forces that can be included and in relation to the character of the degree of infiltration that these forces can be thought to operate through. But the theory lies as an offer of concepts on a rather abstract level. Barad does not specify the processes and phenomena in relation to e.g. empirical analytical use. She does not qualify her concept of the human subject and does not help establish tools for steering constitutive modes analytically in a reciprocal weighting against each other. Nor does she offer tools of delimitation with respect to production apparatuses. On the whole, there is much work to be done. But she expands the perspectives – our thinking technologies – in ways that can inspire empirical work and, if nothing else, rings nicely with the ambition to refine multimodality as analytical potential, not as analytical dogmatism.

From abstract concepts to empirical research design

An empirical approach to research inspired by the type of conceptual framework presented here makes demands – as mentioned earlier – on the types of data produced, how data are treated, and on the analytics developed in order to generate empirical points. In the following, we will provide examples of how scholars have transformed the concepts into empirical research design. In the presentations, the focus will vary according to the different phases of the individual designs in the research process.

Stine Adrian and assisted reproductive technology

Stine Adrian has also studied assisted reproductive technology (ART) (Adrian, 2006). Adrian has primarily drawn inspiration from Karen Barad and Charis Cussins (1996; Thompson, 2005), but also from Donna Haraway; and through Barad, from Judith

Butler. Adrian's first move to transform this theoretical heritage into empirical tools has been to specify research questions.

Adrian's overall objective is the understanding of what happens in the meeting of material agency and discourses of which meaning ART takes on for patients and personnel. She is very concerned with allowing a prominent place to matter in her research. Methodologically, she therefore goes through the body by focusing on eggs, sperm and embryos – with inspiration from Haraway's "imploded knots" – in her empirical data production (ibid., p. 55). This means that she continuously adjusts her focus, centring on precisely these phenomena, before she extends it to other phenomena (ibid., p. 16). She then concentrates her research questions as follows: "How do discourses, practices and different (human and non-human) actors' actions meet in creations of eggs, sperm and embryo in sperm banks and fertility clinics?" (ibid., p. 12). And in further specifications of the research question, she focuses on the agency of materiality, for instance in the form of gender-bodily differences, which she chooses to call "gender-dimorphism".

Drawing on Butler as well as Barad, Adrian focuses on material-discursive repetitions of – and breaks with – processes of naturalization and normalization. She also focuses on the effects of tales of creation and how these tales circulate in law, advertising and in the stories of the clinics, the patients and the personnel. Notice here that she already weights narrativity as one of her three specified foci. In spite of the emphasis on the agency of materiality, it is not only language and discourse, but a very specific type of discursification, i.e. narrativity, which is chosen for the final presentation of the results of the analysis in her dissertation.

The next step in Adrian's design is the choice of the type of data she must provide access to produce. With an interest in the numerous different elements that are important for the creation of eggs, sperm and embryos, she becomes interested in how "technologies, cells, patients, personnel, media, pipettes, norms, policies, laws etc. act in the encounter and form these creations" (ibid., p. 55). To gain the access necessary to study all of these elements, she chooses to make observations, conduct interviews and collect all forms of supplementary material that somehow show, mention or use material and discursive processes of creation in relation to her focus. Supplementary material includes websites on infertility, presentations from pharmaceutical companies, patient sites and websites from sperm banks and fertility clinics; she sought judicial documents, manuals for doctors, official documents, statistics on the use of the treatment and newspaper articles on fertility and ART (ibid., p. 60).

The observation and collection of material was carried out in many different places. During the observations, she let her view be guided by the theoretical point of departure, focusing on both human and non-human agency. With the creation of eggs,

sperm and embryos as the continuous focus, she looked for all of the occurrences – both human and nonhuman – that could be said to contribute to the creation of these phenomena, focusing particularly on how they related to one another. This is what she looked for and what she. She looked for cultural products and stories, for images on the walls and for technical procedures. She looked for human and non-human creations in the practices in the clinics, in fertility conferences for fertility personnel that she attended, and wherever she came as an observer.

Conversely, the interviews, conducted with both patients and personnel, focused on personal experiences and on the processes they became part of as they participated in the creation of eggs, sperm and embryos. She was concerned with the boundaries for the use of technology the interviewees themselves established and where they positioned themselves with respect to the customary distinction between nature and culture. She was also concerned with the movements in time in relation to these themes. So her interview questions were of the following type: “What happened during the scanning?” “What did the pictures show?” “What were your considerations when...?” (ibid., p. 74). Adrian would pose very intimate questions about the experiences and the course of events, just as one asks in discourse- and cultural-analytic interviews (Davies, 2000; Søndergaard, 1996; Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005; Wetherell et al. 2001).

Adrian, on the other hand, encountered a challenge from empirical data when it came to the meaning of emotions. Adrian did not want to include the subject explicitly as an agential force in her study due to her strong obligation to STS and ANT and their problematizing of the primacy of the human in earlier social science. But emotions were pushing so openly from the empirical material as a force present in the tales of creation that she consequently included emotions as agential in the analyses along with technologies, materialities and discourses. Emotions ultimately became part of her focus in the observations and interviews. To bring consistency between her material-discursive focus and her interest in emotions, she adopted Hochschild’s (2003) definition of emotions as a form of sense that we use and work on in many different ways. Adrian elaborated this into an understanding of emotion-work as a performative practice articulated as intra-activity between different actors. She concluded that emotions must be understood as both socially, culturally and materially conditioned. With reference to Cussins’ concept of ontological choreography (Cussins 1996, Thompson 2005) and after these conceptual specifications, Adrian developed a concept of emotion-choreography as part of the work carried out in fertility clinics. By way of this concept of emotion-choreography, she kept focus on both the social, cultural and material aspects of the processes of becoming.

Analytically, in this way, Adrian pulled the theoretical concepts relatively directly into her reading- and search-strategies. Eggs, sperm and embryos were analyzed

as imploded knots, which – she says – at the same time had iconographical meaning, i.e. an important role in the creation of cultural imagery (Adrian, 2006, p. 17). She therefore read/searched analytically for material and discursive agentiality for the creation of the implosion and she read/searched analytically for interaction/intra-action between different agentialities, human and non-human. Especially in the visual material, she looked for denotations and connotations and the ascription of meaning to different signs.

The interesting aspect here is to see materiality (non-human) prioritized along with discourse and sociality (human) in the research questions, data-producing strategies and the analytics, and to see how Adrian – when she gives priority to human agentiality (i.e. emotions and experiences) in her empirical data and analyses – develops consistency with the material-discursive focus by specifying the very concept of e.g. emotionality to allow matter involved.

The presentation of the results itself, the reporting, and the writing up of the research results is done with discourse as medium – and in narrative form with the point of departure in the concept of processes of creation. Here, Adrian leans on Donna Haraway's notion of knowledge production as 'story-telling practice' and underlines her own participation in this praxis. She weighs the experiences of the patients and personnel and is concerned with Polkinghorne's differentiation between narrative and paradigmatic ways of realization. The result is an ambition to communicate the results in narratives.

This material-discursive strategy and analytic conclude in a narrative presentation which raises one's curiosity about what the alternatives might look like if the agentiality of the materiality was also brought into this part of the work. Can we imagine forms of presentations that mix the material-discursive to the same extent as we have seen it done in the rest of this research design, i.e. in the research questions, data production and analyses? Images might possibly have greater material agentiality embedded – intra-acting with discourse and meaning? Physical models, visual shows – could they pass as prominent elements in the presentation of research results? There are obvious invitations to the fantasy of new-materialism thinkers in this part of the research process with its challenges to communication.

Lis Højgaard and the agency of the objects of knowledge

In Lis Højgaard's project on knowledge production, gender and the organization of research, the empirical material itself calls for an analytic including materiality and the agency of materiality as one of the constitutive forces that goes into the processes producing gendered scholars, research and research organization. The project was originally planned as a cultural studies project inspired by Foucault and Butler's concepts of subjectification and performance. The study was thought to generate insights

into processes of becoming through a discourse analysis approach. The research questions originating from this approach were to track discursive practices in the performance of science and scientist: How are science, scientists and scientific organization 'done'?

The project data consists of group- and individual interviews with male and female researchers. They were interviewed on scientific breakthroughs, on scientific 'discoveries' that they had conducted themselves and on the production processes in which these breakthroughs took place (Højgaard, 2003). But the empirical material produced in the project pointed beyond the theoretical framework employed and asked for analytics capable of handling the many types of materialities – cells, animals, plants computer technology, microscopes, steering technologies, research policy – that came forth in the stories provided by the scholars. It became urgent to be able to grasp both what constituted the different objects of knowledge, which constitutive possibilities of subjectification they offered the researchers, which meaning the materiality of the knowledge objects are attributed, and which properties and widely distributed effects are ascribed to them.

The effort to capture the multiplicity of matter in the narratives on scientific breakthroughs using concepts from discourse analysis did not sufficiently open up for focusing on the different ways in which the objects of knowledge 'worked' in the constitutive processes that the analyses were pursuing. In the first phase of analysis – with inspiration from Latour and STS – concepts such as agency, bodies, sensitivity-creating becomings and enacting forces (Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2006) were adopted. Through these angles and concepts, it became possible to see how materialities – in this case the materiality of the objects of knowledge – could be conceived as actively co-constitutive in subjectification processes (Højgaard, 2007). A more consistent shift of perspective in the analysis of the material – aided by Haraway and Barad and their concepts of material-semiotic actors and intra-activity – could deepen the access to the complexity in the constitutive processes and reveal how materiality and discursive practices of meaning are woven together and interdependent, mutually constitutive and transformative in ways that is not possible to detect when solely focusing on discursive practices.

A new-materialist approach opens the possibility of approaching the empirical material with a specific focus on materiality – intra-actively or as a material-semiotic actor – e.g. through the notion of imploded knots. In this project, the scientific breakthroughs and 'discoveries' could be viewed as imploded knots that can be untied, and those threads can be followed in order to capture the complexities at stake. For instance, such a knot could be the 'discovery' of an enzyme whose constitutive history as a 'discovery' articulates intra-activity between different actors. The untying of such a

knot would call for answers to questions such as: Through which apparatuses – material-discursive practices – are the agential cuts that constitute the enzyme as a ‘discovery’ performed? Which relational practises are offered and made possible in the process? What does it mean to the intra-active relations that the apparatus encompasses microscopes, cells, proteins, biochemical substances, eyes, hands, and bodily presence over time? Which opportunities for subjectification can be sought in these relations? Which iterations or citationality can be thought to be co-constitutive for the subjectification options? As man or woman, how does one become a scientist through these processes? And how can the multitude of constitutive modes be combined?

The analysis of one ‘discovery’-story, one knot, can then be supplemented and contrasted to other stories of ‘discoveries’ that similarly set out from the same questions, but where the constitutive modes entail different combinations – where e.g. the agential cut includes the construction of advanced technology and constitutes practises of relations of a completely different character than in the example with the enzyme – all of this in order to understand variations and complexity in the constitution of science and subjectification.

By continuing to examine the material from the perspective that everything is agential and always intra-actively connected, one can – as in the example with the enzyme – become aware of threads/connections combining the specific materiality of the objects of knowledge with e.g. close bodily and emotional relations between the object and the scientist, with specific organizational practices of relations and specific gendered constitutive modes (Højgaard, 2007). Or in the example of the technological innovations, where the ‘discovery’ was constituted by way of a relational praxis offering the constitution of subjectivity through specific discourses of masculinity, intra-actively constituted by stories of modelling, technologies and methodological innovation.

A scientific ‘discovery’ contains scientific discourse, science-policy discourse, and social relations in the form of cooperation, hierarchy, power and competition and specific conditions of production, specific materialities, and sensuous, emotional and intellectual bindings to the object of knowledge. All of these phenomena represent modalities (social, material, discursive and political) that are co-constitutive of both ‘discoveries’, subjectification and the organization of science. Following these threads, the interview data can be supplemented by other types of data that offer contextualization and another set of angles that can be added to the constitutive movements.

When the concern is the use of multimodal analytics on interview data – as in this project – it becomes important to focus on how materialities are expressed, excluded, delimited and given meaning. The trick is to think of materialities as actors, as active fellow players – also when they are not offered as such by the narrator. It is a way

to discover nuances and become curious regarding discursivations. It is a search strategy capable of capturing pockets of meaning in the data that hold constitutive modes that could otherwise be overlooked. For instance, when cells are seen as having agency, this can be taken as an opening for applying expressions from the narratives such as ‘dialog with cells’ as an analytical angle. The expression ‘dialog with cells’ which might be understood as a curiosity, a funny way of telling, can be read from a multimodal perspective as a relationship to be pursued in the analysis. What does the telling of cells as partners in dialog or as something that offer you gifts contain, in contrast to the telling of the research object as passive? Which material-discursive practices does this reveal? Which types of constitutive forces could be present here? And which openings in the form of new movements of inquiry into the data could be buried here?

In these searches, the most important analytical point is the continuous focus of the intra-action perspective, a necessary tool in the negation of the taken-for-grantedness that is a prerequisite for the possibility of detecting new connections, new angles and not least the effects of materiality.

Dorte Marie Søndergaard and the virtual materiality

It was also the empirical material that called upon new materialistic approaches in Dorte Marie Søndergaard’s research. Søndergaard studies bullying among school children, and her research has invited questions concerning virtual practices and their effects in social and subjective processes of becoming and relating among children (www.exbus.dk). Computer games such as Counter Strike, Battlefield, Dawn of War and Sims take up a substantial part of some children’s spare time and social activities, and the project includes these activities as part of the empirical focus.

The research questions which have guided the analytical gaze have centred on the meaning of intra-action among virtual and non-virtual/real practices which many children take part in. The questions have focused on the intra-action among subjective, social and embodied effects across virtual and real platforms for the constitution of relations and experiences – including practices possibly containing bullying as a particular relational phenomenon.

Søndergaard’s earlier empirical work and her development of analytical tools – with particular emphasis on analytical sensitivity to grasp complexities – has already paved the way for attention towards complex, interacting constitution processes (2002a, 2002b, 2005a, 2005b). However, the necessity to include material agentiality among these movements of construction largely grew out of the work with virtual bodies, virtual technologies, virtual weapons and war material, all of which many children handle with considerable expertise (Søndergaard, 2008b). That called upon

inspiration from researchers such as Butler and Foucault as well as Haraway, Barad and other materiality- and complexity-attentive thinkers.

This attention had consequences for the research design. For one thing, the type of data had to be produced in ways allowing the generation of knowledge about bullying practices and intra-activity from as many perspectives as possible – and thereby to access knowledge about as many kinds of constitutive movements as possible.

Next, in relation to research design, the analytics had to be developed in a manner that made it sensitive enough to include intra-activity among all these forms of constitutive powers. Simultaneously, analytics had to balance carefully between ideals concerning research systematics and legitimacy, on the one hand, and analytical creativity on the other. Predefined and fixed demands in relation to methodology had to be replaced by reflexive, flexible and emerging kinds of analytical movements, replacing the predefined and fixed with curiosity in relation to complexities, instability and new perspectives, new thinking technologies – and allowing analytical movements to emerge and change directions (Kofoed, 2007).

Consequently, data would emerge in multiple forms.⁶ As we write, the data contain: approx. 100 interviews with schoolchildren (aged 8-13), observations from after-school childcare programs with children playing computer games, observations from an Internet café, interviews with childcare professionals from 50 different after-school programs across the country, interviews with the parents of bullied and bullying children, interviews with teachers, school headmasters and teachers employed specifically to take care of behaviour, communication and welfare among the schoolchildren, observations from meetings concerning bullying with parents held in schools and in an after-school program, interviews with computer game-playing adults, and observations from a gaming fair. The data have expanded in volume and character throughout the research process.

The design would send the observant gazes out to focus on a variety of phenomena: The material frames and artefacts which the children would move by and among – in virtual as well as real life; bodily effects in the intra-actions among real and virtual life, e.g. physical reactions and movements while children play typical shooting games – such as reactions to pain played out in real life as effects of occurrences in virtual life. Or children's accumulation of experiences in relation to the manoeuvring of tanks and war flights in virtual life reused in real life scenarios involving play with tanks and other war machines. Or bodily performance 'brought out' of the intra-action among

⁶ The research project is part of a more comprehensive research project entitled *eXbus: Exploring Bullying in School*, containing seven different projects on bullying and involving eight researchers from DPU, Aarhus University. eXbus is financed by TrygFonden. Altogether, the eXbus projects contain large amounts of empirical data and they provide extraordinary potential for Søndergaard's project for reflecting and trying out analytic ideas.

real and virtual practices – and into the kitchen where cookies and juice would be consumed in extension of the defeat of the enemy and the routine handling of AK47s, shotguns and helicopters.

Mixed into and inseparable from all of this, the focus would also include the meaning-making systems, which the children accessed together and together with adults: the narratives and positionings available in the material-discursive environment inhabited by the children. The focus would be their negotiations and how they assumed routines, handled matter and artefacts, and relating to the discourses of masculinity saturating virtual weapons and figures, the weapons and figures saturating the discourses of masculinity, discourses concerning the smart, the nerds, the snobs, the cool, intra-acting and mattering in bodily performativity, outfits and movements, particular kinds of trousers and underwear, low-necked blouses, bare shoulders, T-shirts with sparkles, worn-out Kawasakis, narrow or broad jeans displayed in classrooms and in the school hallway etc.

Here, the material-discursive emerges in intricate ways, which call for access to insider knowledge if the relational, subjective and social effects are to be grasped and the perspectives of all of these material-discursive enactments are to be traced further (when would connotations of which kinds of outfit tilt from cool to loser? Where? Among whom? With which effects for whom? Within which frames of material-discursive performativity? etc).

The interview would likewise be focused on matter as well as discourse through invitations to describe e.g. the practices and preferences of gaming/games, experiences of practicing as a gamer, dreams about games (and other themes) through sleep at night, practices of relating in real life around games etc.⁷ Or in narrations about how interactions and conflicts in school, in the afternoon over the computer, etc would be restaged and re-enacted in new ways in a game such as Sims – where friends, teachers and family, boy- and girlfriends, pets etc can be formed as virtual actors and manoeuvre in virtual houses and scenarios.

By means of all this, it became interesting to observe how 10-12 year old boys in after-school programs moved, played and interacted in front of their screens with Counter Strike as their common ground: How they would enter the game as first-person shooters and encounter other children from the computer room – either as friends or enemies in virtual space; how they would see their virtual reality and the other figures through telescopic sights, seeing their own hands in extension of the weapons they had chosen, while the rest of their bodies would remain invisible. Because you ARE your

⁷ In the project, this does not narrowly pertain to video games, but media products in the broader sense, i.e. also television (series, reality shows, music videos, soaps), films, books etc that are of interest. In the present article, the gaming dimension is mentioned as the predominant example.

virtual figure. You become a cyborg as you enter the game: man and weapon meld together in the visual presentation as well as the possibilities of action and identity of the gamer.

It became interesting to see how the virtual figures/the child cyborgs ran, sneaked around, hid, jumped over walls and around corners, shot and were shot, killed and were killed, fled or hunted in the virtual scenarios – and simultaneously shouted, scorned, hovered, helped, commended etc in real life. It was interesting to observe how killings in virtual life could effect scenes of e.g. pain in real life played out through spasms in real bodies, falling on the floor, and sometimes resulting in blows and kicks, swapping keyboards and the other real-life artefacts at hand into ‘weapons’ of apparently same types (taken from how they were held and the performed gestures) as the weapons used immediately previously in virtual life.

Here, the relationship between real life and virtual weapons may be seen as some kind of reflection – virtual weapons pointing at other cyborgs, imitations of weapons in real life pointing at other players. But I would rather see them as a kind of continuity between virtual and real materializations of a “weapon” as a material-discursive phenomenon that somehow questions the definite distinction we use to establish between virtual and real. Maybe it is not that particular distinction which makes most sense or enacts most of the practices among the children. Maybe it is a distinction that mainly makes sense among adults attempting to understand what the kids are doing – and aiming to circulate norms about the appropriateness of these actions.

The description above makes it obvious how the analytical strategies have already been anticipated and made possible by the strategies that focused the production of empirical data. These analytical strategies move across the material (observations, interview etc.) with a Barad’ian intra-activity in mind. The overall analytical questions would be: Which processes and kinds of constitution appear to intra-act in the data? And not least to intra-act in the kinds of school practices that appear to normalize exclusion and the circulation of contempt? Specifications of that kind of analytical question might go like this: How is contempt or affirmation produced and reproduced? By means of which material-discursive intra-actions? How is positioning as victim circulated (Søndergaard, 2008a)? How is humour taken up, materialized and negotiated? How would positioning via social categories (gender, ethnicity, race, class etc and their intersections) saturate eventual processes of abject positioning?

In writing up the analytic points, narrative means would be taken up, precisely as they were in Adrian’s work and in earlier discourse analytic contributions (Søndergaard, 1996, 2002b). Narratives would be mixed with explications of the models of understanding that have produced the narrative and analytical points. No attempts have previously been made in the project to create more material-discursively

communicating contributions – although possibly in terms of drawings produced by the interviewed children. However, that remains a rather modest level of ambition if one were to also consider material-discursive possibilities in the communication of the research results.

Analyzing multimodal constitutive analyses – perspectives offered

The ambition to carry out research with a focus upon many and varied constitutive modalities and e.g. to include the constituting powers of social, discursive, material and subjective character may appear overwhelming if it is considered as a dogmatic approach, setting up premises for which kinds of powers to include; for the extent to which these powers are to be included; and for how the powers are to be granted priority in relation to one another.

Our suggestion, however, is that the ambition be considered an opportunity for expanding analytical fantasy and creativity, to increase the variety, amount and kind of constituting powers to be drawn into the analyses, and simultaneously to increase the variety, amount and kind of interactions which these constituting powers are reflected through. It is in relation to this latter analytic potential that we have introduced Barad's concepts of intra-activity and apparatus.

In this respect, it may also be productive to consider the multimodal constitutive analytics as a space of potentiality which may be opened, starting from a high level of sensitivity in relation to the empirical invitations. With this sensitivity, it will be relevant to make choices and to balance among the constituting powers emphasized in the analyses. Not all empirical data call upon symmetrical analyses among all kinds of constitutive powers. Obligations to all aspects do not automatically bring about stronger or more interesting analytical points and contributions of knowledge. Obligations to all aspects may just as well result in insipid and misty perspectives on the research issue – or in stiff and ritualistic types of analyses which do not necessarily expand our knowledge, exhibiting only the choreography of the ritualization.

The ambition to know more (or obtain different knowledge) in and about a field; to get to know the issue in new and different ways; to know the complicated and complicating movements and patterns that may open into ideas about processes of change – that kind of ambition demands that the researcher makes priorities and places emphasis throughout the research process. Consequently, the idea is that analytical priorities and emphases will change if they emerge on the basis of a more comprehensive, multimodal and complexly attentive space of potentials.

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