Article

Orientating to Assembling: Qualitative Inquiry for More-Than-Human Worlds

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Abstract

A key concern for qualitative inquiry is finding ways to account for nonhuman and emergent forms of life. Toward this, researchers are experimenting with research practices that decenter the human subject. Deleuze's (1977) assemblage concept has proved a useful resource for these methodological experiments. Most often, the assemblage concept has informed analysis and writing processes. This article puts the assemblage concept to work during each stage of an empirical research project exploring how people experience antidepressant use. It details seven ways that assemblages are used during concrete research processes across the span of the project. This strategy generates a sensibility toward qualitative inquiry described as *orientating to assembling*. The sensibility decenters the human as the focus of qualitative research. It enables the presence of nonhuman objects, not as acted-upon, but agents in the research processes. The article contributes to the challenges posed to human-centered qualitative research by reframing the focus entirely. It shows how using a sensibility that consistently decenters the human across all stages of empirical research projects, is a way that qualitative inquiry can account for more-than-human worlds.

Keywords: assemblages, Deleuze, research methodology, qualitative inquiry, antidepressants

Postmodern, poststructural, and posthuman analyses have posed challenges to Western Enlightenment humanism and its key actor—the authentic, rational individual. In response, a range of conceptual frames have been developed to account for the material world, nonhuman and emergent forms of life. Examples include the following: Donna Harraway's (1991) cyborg, Karan Barad's (2003) agential realism, Jane Bennett's (2010) vibrant matter, Graham Harman's (2002) object-oriented ontology, Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-networks, and Ian Bogost's (2012) alien phenomology. Diverse in many ways, these approaches share discarding the idea that humans are central. They conceive of a flat ontology where all elements, including nonhuman elements, are given equal status. In addition, matter is considered active—in other words, things can act. Predominantly, qualitative inquiry has not engaged with these conceptual shifts. It remains underpinned by concepts consistent with Enlightenment humanism. Aligned with this conceptual base, qualitative data is understood as coherent, rational accounts of experience from authentic individuals. Such data is then best analyzed using positivist data analysis coding practices.

Increasingly, qualitative researchers are questioning the disjuncture between contemporary theoretical paradigms and qualitative inquiry. Nearly a decade ago Adele Clarke (2005) called for an analytic focus in qualitative research "that goes beyond 'the knowing subject'" (p. xxviii). More recent years have seen a growing body of methodological experiments concerned with decentering the human during the research processes. The experiments include approaching research as an event or encounter (McCoy, 2012; Michael, 2012). This approach acknowledges that "'things' can only come into 'being' through an ongoing process of be(com)ing together" (Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Bawaka Country, 2013, pp. 185–186). Research projects, then, are designed to be sensitive to the activity of elements and how associations form between them (Demant, 2009; Duff, 2013; Vitellone, 2013). Particular attention is given to how nonhuman objects as diverse as milk (Nimmo, 2010), and "animals, wind, dirt, sunset, songs, and troop carriers" (Wright et al., 2012, p. 185), are active coparticipants in research encounters. The researcher and researched, like all other subjects, coparticipate and emerge from the research event (Evers, 2009; Fitzgerald, 1998; Game, 2001; McCormack, 2003). Some studies do not refer back to a "subject" at all, but attend primarily to energy processes across research encounters (Dewsbury, 2010; Henriques, 2010; Merchant, 2011).

Deleuze's (1977) concept of the assemblage has proved a resource for exploring methodological practices. For Deleuze (1977) an assemblage is a series of heterogeneous elements that are organised and held together through temporary relations (p. 52). The potential of the concept for doing qualitative inquiry is pointed to by Mirka Koro-Ljungberg and Tim Barko (2012), who note the concept "evocates emergence of the heterogeneous within and from out data of inquiry; it attempts to remove the finality of the object of our research" (p. 258). Researchers have engaged with the assemblage concept mostly during analysis and writing processes (for examples see de Freitas, 2012; Hofsess & Sonenberg, 2013). The assemblage concept supports researchers to explore and experiment with the connections between different aspects of analysis and writing practices. In doing so, new connections form, which in turn generate findings in the form of new assemblages. Although not drawing extensively on Deleuze's concept of assemblage, John Law (2004) advocates for a more comprehensive deployment of *method assemblages* across research processes. Law describes a method assemblage as composed by inscription devices that record the activity of different agents in the network, in a process of research that attends to the "making of relations" (p. 84). As Cameron Duff (2012) notes, however, Law's method assemblage "fails to provide a sufficiently robust sense of where one might start in constructing a method assemblage of one's own" (p. 273). Limited attention has been given to using assemblages across all stages of research projects that involve people. This article uses the assemblage concept during seven stages of a research project, in order to contribute towards a posthuman qualitative research that can explain itself consistently across epistemology, methodology, and methods (Carter &

Little, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009).

There was a political imperative behind the experiment. The depressed individual—or what we would recognize as the familiar sovereign subject—is central to broader cultural debate about antidepressants. In debates featuring the depressed individual, antidepressants can work in two ways. First, as a chemical remedy for neurochemical insufficiencies in the brain (Beyondblue: The National Depression Initiative, 2014), or second, by producing inauthentic or contaminated states of being (Elliott, 2000; The President's Council on Bioethics, 2003). The associated positions for people taking antidepressants are problematic for many—of living with the stigma of a mental illness, inappropriately masking their everyday sadness, or limiting the chance to optimize their human capacities. I wanted to explore antidepressant use in ways that did not further entrench negative renderings of those who take them.

Qualitative inquiry into how people experience antidepressants mostly uses humanistic research practices. The human is the subject and focus of research processes. Research participants are engaged with as agentic, rational individuals who narrate and give meaning to their experiences about antidepressants. Qualitative studies are concerned with articulating how the specifically human capacities of thinking and feeling can mediate the experience of antidepressant use. They explore how individuals attribute meaning to the medication (Galloway, 2009; Garfield, Smith, & Francis, 2003; Malpass et al., 2009), and how taking an antidepressant instigates changes to self-identity (see for example Karp, 2006; Smardon, 2008). These studies have articulated important dimensions of their research participants' experiences with antidepressants. However, they also repeat and perpetuate the humanist notion of authentic individual life and enact a person who is negotiating being "remedied" or "polluted" by their medication. This knowledge elaborates, but does not challenge, the frames of reference of the broader cultural debate and the associated, potentially negative, positions available to people who take antidepressants. In addition, by retaining a focus on human meanings, identity, and experience, these studies configure the antidepressant as a passive entity upon which meanings are inscribed and identities negotiated. This inadvertently lends support to the binary notion that antidepressants work either through a pharmacological action or through activating human agency.

In this project, I wanted to expand understandings about how antidepressants work, in ways that did not contribute toward a politics of blame. The key strategy was to explore finding ways to "not" enact the depressed individual throughout the project. The article details seven ways the assemblage concept was used to consistently destabilize the sovereign subject across the research processes. The seven sections of the article are described as *orientations to assembling* to suggest a sensibility toward the different stages of a qualitative research project. Each section describes how the assemblage concept informed the orientation by decentering the human and repositioning nonhuman objects as agents in the research process. The article then details how *orientating to assembling* generated a more complicated understanding of the antidepressant object and how it affects humans. The article concludes with a discussion about the methodological, political, and ethical implications of orientating to assembling.

First Orientation to Assembling: Think With Deleuze's Assemblage

The first orientation is to "think with" Deleuze's assemblage concept. The concept was selected for this experiment because it comprehensively destabilizes the sovereign subject. This first orientation will detail three key ways the human is decentered in Deleuze's assemblage. It is these aspects of the concept that inform the orientations to follow. First, in assemblages, the emphasis shifts from the authentic human individual to the formation of a collective body. The focus is on how elements have configured from a milieu and organized into a formation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 406). Human elements do not take precedence. Instead, equal regard is given to all proximate and coparticipating elements. In assemblages, relations form, decompose, and reform

between human and nonhuman elements to produce temporary collective formations (Anderson, Kearnes, McFarlane, & Swanton, 2012; McFarlane, 2011). An assemblage will endure if it is associated with habit and repetition. For Deleuze, however, assemblages are provisional and able to transform into something else. This means assemblages are both contingent and structured (Marcus & Saka, 2006).

The second key way the assemblage concept decenters the human is by shifting agency away from a capacity that resides within people. In contrast, all nonhuman and human elements are deemed to have agency, agentic capacity, or the ability to act and make things happen (Bennett, 2010). In assemblages the characteristic properties of an element and its capacity to act—its agency—change depending on the place it takes up in the assemblage it is configured with (Anderson et al., 2012; Duff, 2013). This means the work to enact action is not limited to that deployed by rational agentic humans. In assemblages, work is the energy expenditure required to assemble the collective body. Tania Murray Li (2007) describes this work as "the on-going labour of bringing disparate elements together and forging connections between them" (p. 263). It is individuals in their contexts, for Murray Li, who expend energy to create the associations between elements. Consistent with matter having the capacity to act in assemblages, nonhuman entities can also expend energy to form connections, in a form of work described as "collaborative connective labour" (McLeod, 2014, p. 118).

The third key way Deleuze's assemblage concept destabilizes the human subject is through the notion of the emergent agency of assemblages. In addition to specific elements across an assemblage having different capacities to act, an overall assemblage also has agentic capacity (Deleuze, 1992b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The kinds of associations that form between elements determine the shape and structure of an assemblage. If an assemblage has organized, secure, and stable relations between entities, the overall assemblage will have a sharp boundary. The assemblage will have a limited capacity to enter into relations with other collective bodies and a finite capacity to affect other bodies and be affected by them. The overall assemblage will have a small degree of affective capacity. The power of this capacity or action is called *affect* and is an intensity or force that exceeds the subject (Massumi, 2002). In contrast, an assemblage that is mostly in a process of transformation has disordered relations between elements. It is characterized by an increased openness to interaction with other assemblages and a high degree of affective capacity. Following Deleuze's thinking, an assemblage's agency—the action the assemblage can undertake, the relations it can enter into—is a property emergent from the formation of the overall assemblage. Drawing on this dimension of assemblage thinking provides a way to discern the connections between the relational structure of an assemblage and its emergent collective formations—which can take the form of subject positions, affects, and collectives.

The assemblage concept shifts the emphasis away from the sovereign individual to a collective body or assemblage with distributed labor and emergent agency. I drew on the assemblage concept throughout the experiments I undertook for this research project, which are detailed in the orientations to assembling that follow. The assemblage concept resourced how I approached being a researcher in the project. Specifically, it informed how I orientated my body toward the research processes. The second orientation to assembling outlines a sensibility toward how the body of the researcher is used during research encounters.

Second Orientation to Assembling: Attune Body to Human and Nonhuman Elements

In human-centred qualitative research, the focus is on the human research participant and their experiences and narratives. But, it is noted by Elizabeth St. Pierre (2011) that "if we no longer believe in the disentangled humanist self, individual, person, we have to rethink qualitative methods (interviewing and observation) grounded in that human being as well as humanist

representation" (p. 620). The assemblage concept supports shifting the emphasis away from the human research participant and onto attending to the research encounter as an "event" where assemblages configure. This means all elements (nonhuman and human) proximate to the research event coparticipate in relational formations or assemblages. The researcher and researched are not enacted as intact authentic individuals, but produced from always-already entangled and relational processes during the research events (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 266). Nor do the researcher and researched take up static positions—like all elements they will be modified through their reconfiguring (Stengers, 2000; Thrift, 2003). Forms of talk and narrative are not understood as grounded in human beings, but coproduced with other elements, including bodily responses, ideas, objects, and atmospheres (Ezzy, 2010; Pink, 2009).

I was accustomed to qualitative interviews where the focus was on interacting with individual research participants. Approaching the research encounter as an event where assemblages configure demanded a different kind of researcher participation. It called for sensitivity toward the action of a range of elements. Toward this, I experimented with attuning my body to the relational life of both nonhuman and human elements. Jamie Lorimer (2013) notes the range of embodied techniques developed by researchers who are interested in witnessing human-nonhuman interactions (p. 63). They include autobiographical reflections on processes of becoming affected, and creative techniques for sensing the world differently through the body of another. In this project, I approached my body as an instrument for research (Giardina & Newman, 2011; Pink, 2009), an instrument that could sense as well as think what was happening moment-to-moment during research encounters. I drew on my body trainings in yoga, meditation, dance, and Feldenkrais to cultivate attuning to how things as well as people can act in an encounter. These body practices involve making bodily postures and movements that facilitate the functioning of a person as an integrated whole. In the process, bodily awareness is developed, and an enhanced capacity to read and perceive other bodies (Shusterman, 2006). Bogost (2012) purports the experience of objects is only accessible to humans via speculation about how objects are interacting with each other. Toward speculative possibilities, I extended my bodily sensitivity purposefully toward the action of things, anticipating that the nonhuman elements proximate to the research encounters might speak back and be noncompliant (Stengers, 1997, p. 87; Vitellone, 2008).

I also drew on my training in vocal improvisation to attune my body to nonhuman-human relations. In this practice, I coparticipated in the creation of improvised vocal compositions with other people. I developed insight into how a variety of vocal elements create a collective form and the ways that a partial vocal contribution is modified when it joins the group production. These experimental practices helped me to attune to research encounters as places where relations between elements create assemblages. My improvisation training sensitized me to consider the relations I was contributing toward the assemblages that formed during the research encounters. This positioning aligns with the "diffractive" (p. 88) researcher described by Karan Barad (2003) who seeks a way of understanding the world from within and as part of it. In addition, improvisation fosters an experimental orientation—a capacity to be open to what happens, to enter into the unknown and see what emerges. A key skill in improvisation is spontaneity, or "the notion of an adequate response, a readiness for action and the ability to meet the demands of the moment in a fresh way" (Knottenbelt, 2001, p. 52). Anderson et al (2012) suggest the assemblage concept can inform a disposition that is open toward how relations form between elements in ongoing compositions and has a particular regard for how elements have the capacity to be expressive. My training in vocal improvisation helped me to cultivate this kind of disposition towards the research processes.

There was an additional component to shifting the focus away from research practices grounded in human beings. The eight research participants for this project were recruited through

Melbourne mental health advocacy organizations, took antidepressants, and came from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, income brackets, and ages. As a group they, and I, shared some key characteristics. They all held professional work roles and most were tertiary educated. They were articulate about their feelings and well resourced in relation to their emotional well-being. I attuned to the human characteristics of myself and the research participants, not as intact features within us, but as elements that could assemble in different ways in a variety of assemblages. But, the focus of my bodily orientation was to discern human-nonhuman relations during the research encounters. I made some materials central to the research encounters, to ensure the experiment was attentive to how nonhuman objects were agents in research. This strategy formed the basis of the third orientation to assembling.

Third Orientation to Assembling: Make Materials Central

The third orientation extends the assemblage concept into the research design. Here, materials—or nonhuman objects—were made central to research processes in order to trouble the centrality of interactions between humans in qualitative research. I hoped the presence of materials would direct my attention to nonhuman action and assist me to attune my body to the action of both nonhuman and human elements. Charts were added to the first encounter with each research participant and photos to our second encounter. Objects have the capacity to act in unexpected ways in research encounters (Michael, 2012). I selected contrasting materials, anticipating that comparisons between the materials would facilitate an experimental orientation toward their action. Wright et al. (2012) acknowledge Bawaka (a part of North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia) as a coauthor of their research project. The human coauthors acknowledge "the agency of Country and nonhumans, as they actively shaped our research, encouraging certain connections, suggesting themes, propelling activities, opening possibilities, and sometimes closing them off " (Wright et al., 2012, p. 41). Adding materials to this project was a way of taking nonhuman agency seriously in the research encounters.

The first material introduced to the research encounters was a "well-being chart" generated by the research participants. The research participants shared a story about their well-being, and how it may or may not have changed over time. They depicted their well-being levels using a line on a chart. The research participants easily engaged with this task. They quickly drew a line to show their well-being levels during a time period of their choosing. The nonhuman agent of the line affected what was configured during the research encounter. In conjunction with drawing the line, the research participants gave a fluent commentary about the life events and strategies they attributed to their changing well-being levels. The action of the line invited the organizing of memories and experiences into a logical account that made sense over time. "Storylines" can encourage a temporal sense of change (Williams & Keady, 2012). In turn, chronological time is connected to certain kinds of narratives, particularly those that feature an autonomous individual who negotiates the world in a unique way (Desjarlais, 1994; Sermijn, 2008). The fluctuating line, visible to us both, invited the research participants to construct a logical account about how life events and well-being strategies mediated their well-being over time. The line did not encourage a departure from the depressed individual that is enacted by humanistic qualitative research. Instead, the line encouraged a telling of experience that is selectively interpreted and where the subject is "centered" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262; Stephenson, 2005, p. 34). Participants described how their identities changed in relation to taking antidepressants in a way that was similar to the accounts of antidepressant use generated by the humanistic qualitative studies discussed in the introduction.

The action of the line contributed to how relations assembled across the research encounters. A proliferation of stable and logical relations formed between experiences, memories, ideas, and time. The research encounters had a calm and measured atmosphere and the emergent affective

intensity across the encounter was low. Our positions as researched and researcher were modified by the encounter with the line. The research participants emerged as stable, reflective subjects who understood antidepressants as working within them as either a biochemical remedy or a contaminant to optimal existence. The position I moved to as the researcher was similarly affected by the line. I followed the line with them, acknowledging the logical accounts of experience over time. My coparticipation moved toward being centered too, as a kind of health professional/researcher who can understand and share in these ways of categorizing experience. These modifications indicated the "interweaving and co-construction of humans and nonhumans" (Wright et al., 2012, p. 56) in the research encounters. In our second encounter, different materials were proximate, resulting in the emergence of contrasting formations.

Fourth Orientation to Assembling: Include Nonhuman Connectivity

The fourth orientation, include nonhuman connectivity, emerged from experimenting with another dimension of how objects can actively shape research. One of the ways objects act is to evoke affective reactions. In this way, they coparticipate in the formation of collaborative relations between things and people (McLeod, 2014). At our second encounter, the research participants shared the photos they had taken to visually communicate what was happening in their lives at different points in time on the chart. They planned, took, and edited their photos in their own time. Overall, this was an affectively intense process for the research participants. Memories and feelings were provoked by visiting places and handling objects to take the photos. The research participants directed the second encounter, showing the photos to me on a laptop while delivering a rehearsed narrative about each photo. All the research participants used the photos to communicate times of extreme joy and intense despair. These affectively charged and partial states differed starkly to the ordered experiences of the depressed individual evoked by the line on the chart. Photos can enable research participants to communicate dimensions of experience that might have remained unsaid in verbal interviews (Guillemin & Drew, 2010; Padgett, Smith, Derejko, Henwood, & Tiderington, 2013). The research participants were active in their unspoken communication. They used visual effects in their photos to shape the communication of affective states. Some photos used exaggerated brightness and darkness to communicate times of high and low levels of well-being. In others, certain viewing positions were built into the composition of the photo (Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 88; Rose, 2007, p. 41). For example, one photo looked into the darkness of a receding train line at night, inviting me to orientate to the photo in a particular way. The visual effects intensified the communicative capacity of the photos to convey affectively intense states—ranging from being despairing and immobilized, to the utter joy of falling in love.

The research participants accompanied their photo show with a preplanned narrative. However, the photos were the key communicative device in the encounter. The research participants made clear they did not require any verbal commentary from me. The position I moved to in these encounters was simply to be present and witness the affective force or sensation of the photos (Csordas, 1994; Massumi, 2002, p. 25). The position was far removed from my familiar, stable-researcher identity, where I speak, reflect, and ask questions. The action of the visual elements of the photos was intensified in those moments because I was not a unified subject, but taking up a more partial witnessing position. In addition to the action of the visual effects described above, many of the photos shared affective states of transformation. These states were recalled from times when the research participants emerged from assemblages with disordered relations between elements. This kind of assemblage is open to encounters with other bodies, and has a high degree of affective intensity. Encountering the expression of an assemblage with charged affective intensity evoked my imagination. I was moved and transformed throughout the viewing. The research participants were also enacted in a way that contrasted to the chart encounters.

Unlike the chart encounters, the research participants were not produced as depressed individuals when their photos were proximate. There was little reference to a depression diagnosis or a depressed sense of self. The decentering of the unified depressed position enabled the antidepressant object to act in the research processes. The few photos that included the antidepressant object highlighted the affective reactions evoked by the pill, including: positive aesthetic responses; comfort and relief. They showed how the pill object cocreated the connections of habit and attachment that formed in the moment of encountering the pill each day. This contrasts to the conventional rendering of the antidepressant in humanistic qualitative research as a passive object upon which the depressed individual inscribes meanings.

The second, third, and fourth orientations to assembling have shown how the assemblage concept informed the design of the encounters with research participants. The doing of the research encounters reflected an overall shift in emphasis away from the human onto the assembling body. Toward this, materials were made central and attention given to nonhuman-human relations. In addition, the capacities of the emergent formations were accounted for, including the modification of the researcher and researched. I will go on to show how the action of photos continued on a larger scale outside the research encounters. These unplanned happenings made possible the formulation of the fifth orientation, allow researcher reassembling.

Fifth Orientation to Assembling: Allow Researcher Reassembling

In the second orientation to assembling, I described a purposeful mode of attention toward the research processes. In contrast, the fifth orientation emerged from being affected by nonhuman agents in unexpected and unplanned ways. The first research participant showed a photo to me to share a time and place he associated with piercing despair. At the time of viewing, I had a sensation of quicksilver movement through me. It was a shift of blink-like speed that passed so quickly I was not sure what there was to register. In retrospect, I can see this as a moment of being acted on by a photo, due to the capacity of images to disturb or move the viewer in unexpected ways (Barthes, 1981). Following this encounter, I experienced the cumulative effort of taking up a witness position with all eight of the research participants and their photos. The silent but active position of witnessing demands a particular kind of work. It requires both the openness to receive and be moved by the affective states being communicated and enough stability to resist actively interpreting or trying to alleviate the states that are being shared. The cumulative labor of witnessing and the exposure to the affective extremes of joy and despair began to affect me.

This period was characterized by a low-grade state of breath holding in relation to the project. I shared some of the participant-generated photos with others, who would express their immediate responses to the affective force of the photos. But, I would remain still and nonreactive. I noticed, but could not explain, this disjuncture. The idea of seeking more contact with additional research participants felt increasingly beyond my capacity. In retrospect, I can see how the encounters with the participant-generated photos had sufficient force to decompose the relations composing my life. In these instances Deleuze (1992a) notes how an assemblage becomes focused on repelling, or expelling, the "bad" encounter, such that all its force of existence is immobilized (p. 225). This describes the state I found myself in, expending all my energy toward repelling the force of the encounter.

Quite abruptly, I could not hold myself together as a researcher. During this period of time memories emerged with vivid precision, interrupting other tasks I was engaged with. These flashes of memory took me back to the photo encounter with the "quicksilver moment" right at the outset of the research encounters. This led to spontaneous states of feeling overwhelmed, and my own connecting memories to the photo became present. In terms of assemblages, the relations between different aspects of my life at this time were in a process of breaking down. I became

closed off from the world, a happening that Deleuze (1997) equates with illness. Fortunately, I was sufficiently resourced to find receptive and supportive places to bring my decomposing state into new forms of relation—with myself and with others. I found it problematic and challenging to require this kind of help. I sensed that it was only by seeking help and being relational that I was going to find some movement from a place I did not know how to navigate alone. These resources included encounters with individuals in personal, academic, therapeutic, and creative contexts. I had gone through a process all my research participants shared with me, of breaking down and finding different ways of assembling into a variety of forms and subject positions. I became more alert to how my changing subject positions emerged from different assemblages. This led to an increased capacity to imagine each stage of the research process as alive to the ongoing configuring of relations between things.

The processes of "researcher reassembling" became a productive dimension of the research project as I was led through a comprehensive decentering of the "sovereign researcher" position. The research encounters included "accidents" which forced me to assemble in a different way (Koro-Ljungberg & Barko, 2012). It was clear it was not an intact, sovereign researcher identity that instigated these processes. I could no longer relate to the story of the research project describing myself as a rational human with conscious control over research objects and interactions. Instead, I now appreciated to a greater degree how agency was not located within me as a researcher. Assemblages had moved through what I did not know and what I could not connect, foregrounding to me an always-already tangle of relations. I had experienced how the encounters themselves generated connections, and the breaking down of connections. They became the site from which knowledge could be generated.

My analytic focus and interest moved toward wanting to articulate the relational reconfiguring during the research encounters. Researcher reassembling instigated different analytic processes, which will be described in the sixth and seventh orientations to assembling.

Sixth Orientation to Assembling: Make Maps

Prior to allowing researcher reassembling, I used constructivist research analysis tools (Charmaz, 2006) to engage with the materials from the research encounters. In this method the researcher leads an iterative movement between processes of data collection, coding, and memoing. After "research reassembling" it seemed the research encounters themselves were the site of agency. This insight was gleaned from emerging from research encounters with different kinds of materials in contrasting ways. This experience also impressed upon me the extent to which configurations are temporally emergent in real time. It was no longer congruent with the project to take up the position of the researcher undertaking coding processes "on" the data. I was pushed by researcher reassembling toward analyzing in the mode suggested by Alecia Youngblood Jackson (2013), who proposes that analysis should show the shape of how human and material elements transform together.

I was propelled toward exploring analytic processes that could account for the research encounters as assemblages. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of "mapping" (pp.12-13) assemblages informed my developing orientation to analysis. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), mapping involves working at the surface to connect exterior objects to the forces related to them, and exploring open connections and multiple entryways (pp.12-13). I experimented with sketching maps of the research encounters to articulate elements, explore connections between proximate entities, and discern emergent formations. I revisited the encounters, alert for the coparticipation of all the elements and wrote an extended account of my responses and observations. I also drew on my diary accounts of the time, to make the encounters come affectively alive for me. The map making was informed by the idea that connections form in assemblages, through "the art of multiple things held together by logical conjunctions prior and

irreducible to predication or identification" (Rajchman, 2000, p. 4). In addition, I drew on the consistent notion of contiguity relations—identifying the actual connections between things—to further consolidate a connective approach that contrasted to the similarity-based relations that are predominantly used in qualitative research coding strategies (Maxwell & Miller, 2010). Maxwell and Miller (2010) suggest contiguity relations can be identified among data in their context. In this instance I defined the context as the possible totality of relations across the research encounters.

The make maps orientation also drew on modified versions of the mapping techniques developed by Clarke (2005). For each encounter, I made a version of Clarke's (2005) situational map, which she suggests should include all the elements in the wider situation of study, including the nonhuman entities (pp. 83–109). I modified this map by limiting the coparticipating elements—human and nonhuman—to those in the research encounters. I included in the maps elements of my coparticipation, drawing on the notes I took after every encounter, the extended reflections I wrote about each interaction, and my diary entries from the time. I also emphasized all the materials in the encounters: charts, notes, and photos. To this map, I added an additional layer of mapping, which explored how the relations between each element in the map related to other elements, following Clarke's (2005) advice for making relational maps (pp. 102–108). I brought to this mapping process a particular regard for the relationships between nonhuman and human elements (Barad, 2007; Phillips & Larson, 2012; Shusterman, 2006) and the kinds of affective intensities and flows connected to different entities. I also drew on the analytic device of Clarke's (2005) positional map, which is designed to show the positions taken up, and not taken up, in the data (pp. 125–136). This map helped to alert me to all the different positions that were taken up by different elements within and across the encounters. Making maps based on a connective analytic strategy allowed me to identify the key elements in the encounters, including the antidepressant object and articulate the coproduction of relations between things. In addition to making maps based on the research encounters, I extended the assemblage concept into another scale of analysis.

Seventh Orientation to Assembling: Craft Assemblages

I drew on the assemblage concept to inform the analytic processes on another scale. I did not limit the proximate elements to those associated with the research encounters, but included all components of the research processes: narratives, photos, charts, diary entries, specific encounters, memories of research reassembling, and maps of research encounters and theory. I brought an affirmative orientation to this stage of the project, which is a trust that the experimentation will lead to something being produced (St. Pierre, 2013). I understood the movement between all the components of the research project as producing connections with potential to create an assembled formation. Augustine (2014) points to the productivity of this orientation, describing how "data analysis became writing to connect and experiment with connections that fuelled more movement and thought away from my original literature review" (p. 750). In the movement between components of the research, I tried to be sensitive to what the research materials can do, approaching the research components as materials which can "speak back to us; they may resist our analyses; they may push us in new directions" (Crang, 2003, p. 143).

Writing practices became a crucial way to explore and articulate the connections generated by the movement between the research components. I needed to write my way into finding a vocabulary for the composition and decomposition of assemblages. In addition, writing enabled the assembling of my coparticipation in the research processes. I found I could "bring to bear on writing, in writing, what one has read and lived" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 621). Writing generated connections that became recognizable as assemblages. Jackson and Mazzei (2013) suggest:

An assemblage isn't a thing—it is the *process* of making and unmaking the thing. It is the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together. So to see it at work, we have to ask not only how things are connected but also what territory is claimed in that connection. (p. 262)

In this project the "territory" claimed was four assemblages, which each represent different affective capacities and different responses to the challenges of everyday life faced by those experiencing depression. One of the assemblages featured the antidepressant object. Because orientating to assembling does not bestow agency on the human participant, it generated an understanding of antidepressant action that does not refer back to, or exist within, the depressed individual. Instead, it suggests antidepressants work through a range of relations and that the work to make these associations is collaboratively undertaken by nonhuman and human coparticipants (McLeod, 2014). I was able to show how the relations proliferating around the antidepressant element create an assemblage that is increasingly organized and stable. In this assemblage, the antidepressant object works as an "operator" or "assemblage convertor" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 324-5); that is, as an element with an unusual capacity to contribute toward an assemblage's trajectory. The emergent formations from the assemblage included a unified depressed subject who is functional and can communicate—a desired temporary position after a time of despair.

Orientating to Assembling: Some Implications

The final section of the article will discuss some of the methodological, political, and ethical implications of orientating to assembling. The article has detailed seven ways assemblages were used during the concrete research process of a qualitative research project. The seven orientations to assembling were as follows: think with Deleuze's assemblage; attune body to human and nonhuman elements; make materials central; include nonhuman connectivity; allow researcher reassembling; make maps, and craft assemblages. Together, the seven orientations point to the possibility of decentering the human consistently across the epistemology, methodology, and methods of qualitative research projects. The orientations are not prescriptive methodological steps, but work in the modest register of sensitizing concepts, which "suggest directions along which to look" (Clarke, 2005, p. 28). The seven orientations show how the assemblage concept was used with all the proximate elements encountered during the research project, and over a variety of scales. The utility of the concept for this project points to it being taken up in a diversity of research projects seeking to decenter the human subject.

In human-centered qualitative research, antidepressants are usually depicted as passive to human processes. Antidepressants are enacted as an object inscribed by human meaning, or implicated in changing human identities. Orientating to assembling across the project generated a new way of looking at how antidepressants work to facilitate recovery from depression through a series of collaborative connections or relationships (McLeod, 2014). Research that enacts the depressed individual can be constrained by the associated binary explanation of antidepressant action—that antidepressants work as either a chemical remedy or chemical pollutant inside discrete humans. Earlier in the article, I identified how these explanations of antidepressant action can further entrench negative positions for people who take them. The account of how antidepressants work generated by orientating to assembling does not contribute to a politics of blame. For some drug researchers, disengaging action and agency from the individual human actor is a way of shifting debates about drugs from the moralized realm they are often conducted in (Keane, 2002; Wilton & Moreno, 2012). Orientating to assembling lends methodological support to drug and health research being undertaken with the intention of decentering the sovereign subject.

Orientating to assembling departs from unified subject positions, including a stable researcher identity. The "allow researcher reassembling" section of the article pointed to the modifications

that can happen when the researcher is open to being acted upon by other elements in the research encounters. Dewsbury (2010) suggests that experimental researchers should "get embroiled in the site and allow ourselves to be infected by the effort, investment and craze of the particular practice or experience being investigated" (p. 326). Being affected by nonhuman elements in ways beyond my conscious control was immensely productive for the project. However, an experimental approach did generate what Dewsbury (2010) advocates, that is, something "above all problematic" (p. 322). I found myself living through the breakdown of a unified subject position—which was at times a painful process. I was fortunate in that I could draw on a range of resources and practices to reconfigure what became problematic. A qualitative inquiry that generates problematic moments also needs to ensure sufficient care of both the researcher and the researched. Extensive ethical consideration has been directed toward the participation of research subjects in qualitative research. Less attention has been given to ethical examination of the impact of experimental research practices on researchers. A formalized range of mechanisms to care for researchers doing experimental research is required.

A limitation of this article is that orientating to assembling was not extended to include how the research findings are presented to different audiences. A consistent approach would communicate research findings in ways that are open to new assemblages configuring with the audience. Particular presentation strategies could facilitate sharing the research as an event, including the following: (a) expanding modes of communication to invite the "copresencing" of the audience and a multiplicity of responses (Blaikie, 2007; Dewsbury, 2010); (b) experimenting with writing what is being conceptualized (Henriques, 2010; Probyn, 2010; Stewart, 2007), and using language to convey the affective force of emergent assemblages and subject positions; and (c) drawing on the embodied artistic practices of drama, dance, and creative movement to perform research findings (Barbour, 2012; Lapum, Ruttonsha, Church, Yau, & David, 2012). These strategies would cultivate the possibility of affective responses in addition to the intellectual ones usually evoked in academic contexts (Leavy, 2010, p. 344). These communicative strategies would extend the assemblage process to the audience, continuing the research process iteratively.

Conclusion

This article showed how Deleuze's assemblage concept was used during seven stages of a qualitative research project. Using the assemblage concept made nonhuman elements central and the human peripheral during a range of concrete research processes. From this strategy an overall sensibility towards qualitative inquiry was produced, called orientating to assembling. This approach contributes to the challenges posed to human-centred qualitative research by reframing the focus consistently across all stages of empirical research projects. Orientating to assembling suggests a flexible tool kit for further experimentation by qualitative researchers. Destabilizing the sovereign subject throughout the research practices of this project generated a new way of understanding how antidepressants work. The political implications associated with generating knowledge, in addition to that which speaks to, from, and about the discrete human subject, indicates the importance of finding different ways of orientating to qualitative inquiry.

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