



A diffractive and Deleuzian approach to analysing interview data

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Abstract

This article explores the possibilities of considering how ‘matter and meaning are mutually constituted’ in the production of knowledge (Barad, 2007: 152) through presenting a diffractive analysis of a piece of interview data with a six-year-old boy in a preschool class. Inspired by Donna Haraway’s (1997) and Karen Barad’s (2007) theorising, I understand diffractive analysis as an embodied engagement with the materiality of research data: a *becoming-with* the data as researcher. Understanding the body as a space of transit, a series of open-ended systems in interaction with the material-discursive ‘environment’, diffractive analyses constitute transcorporeal engagements with data. Stacy Alaimo’s (2010) theorisation of the transcorporeal is put to work diffractively with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (1987) thinking on the process of becoming minor or minoritarian. This implies a reconceptualisation of the very act of thinking as a transcorporeal process of engagement, going beyond the idea of reflexivity and interpretation as inner mental activities taking place in the mind of the researcher understood as separated from the data. Through my example, I argue that diffractive analysis can make visible new kinds of material-discursive realities that can have transformative and political consequences.

Keywords

Barad, Deleuze, diffractive analysis, material-discursive, postconstructionism, transcorporeal

Feminists argue that the body and material reality are discursively constituted. This has been immensely productive for feminist and other researchers in the social sciences and humanities and has also led to societal change. Discourse has, however, not been understood as being mutually constituted with matter from such a perspective. It has been argued that research that can be put under

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the umbrella term of feminist *de/constructionism* (Lykke, 2010: 126) has not adequately addressed the material real, including the agency of matter in relation to sexed bodies and bodily differences (e.g. Hird, 2009: 332; Lykke, 2010: 107–122). Feminist theory's most revolutionary concept – *gender* – has not only been productive, but has also turned out to become a problematic distinction from biological sex, predicated on a sharp opposition between nature and culture (Alaimo, 2008: 239). However, since the early establishment of the concept of gender, a number of feminists have sought ways to avoid getting stuck in yet another power-producing binary, by understanding *gender/sex* as a mixed and entangled cultural-natural phenomenon (Lykke, 2010: 25). Haraway's invention of the hybrid cyborg (1991) and her insistence on 'material-semiotics' as an epistemological presupposition (1997) have inspired a steadily growing number of feminist researchers in various fields to explore the agency of the body and how it is possible to understand materiality as co-constitutive with discourse in the production of the body, gender and sexuality (e.g. Alaimo, 2010; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Åsberg et al., 2011; Barad, 1998; Braidotti, 2003, 2006; Cole and Frost, 2010; Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2005; Fox Keller, 1989; Grosz, 1994; Hird, 2003, 2004; Hird and Roberts, 2011; Mol, 2002; Wilson, 2004). These studies seek to 'theorize bodily and transcorporeal materialities in ways that neither push feminist thought back into the traps of biological determinism or cultural essentialism, nor make feminist theorizing leave bodily matter and biologies "behind" in a critically under-theorized limbo', as Lykke writes (2011: 131–132). She suggests another wide umbrella term under which to put these converging trends in contemporary feminist theorising – *postconstructionism* (Lykke, 2010: 126; 2011: 132). In her genealogy of the last sixty years of feminist studies, Lykke (2010) carefully seeks to avoid identifying what might become yet another dichotomy between *de/constructionist* and *post-constructionist* feminist theorising. Along with many other feminist theorists (Åsberg et al., 2011; Hekman, 2010; Hird and Roberts, 2011; Rahman and Witz, 2003), she argues that *postconstructionist* feminisms can only claim to displace and transgress the *de/constructionist* stance by acknowledging the inevitable continuities with theories such as feminist Marxism, psychoanalysis, social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism, queer theory and symbolic interactionism. It is precisely because they are *post* theories that *postconstructionist* theories might be able to bring the sexed body and prediscursive facticities of materiality back on to the agenda (Lykke, 2010: 107). A most crucial aim of *postconstructionist* feminist research is thus to undertake research where the mutual entailment of discourse and matter is explored. Barad explains this intertwined and co-constitutive relationship: 'Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other. Neither is articulated or articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated' (Barad, 2007: 152).

If one problem is that feminist research has not adequately addressed the real in its material-discursive co-constitutive complexity, a subsequent problem is how

to produce research from within an ontology and epistemology where ‘matter and meaning are mutually articulated’, as suggested by Barad in the quote above. For feminist research, this means that we not only want to do research from the perspective of particular bodies, but that we also attempt to read the data from our own bodies as researchers. If we are to take the postconstructionist challenge seriously, we need also to address the question of agency of these bodies and how this agency is articulated in our data, including the agency of bodies that we do not understand as ‘human’, but as ‘non-human’ or ‘more-than-human’ (Alaimo, 2010; Åsberg et al., 2011; Hird and Roberts, 2011). Moreover, understanding discourse and matter as co-constitutive, how can we construct knowledge in a research process together with these ‘minoritarian’ (or ‘minor’) material bodies, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept? The expression ‘becoming minoritarian’ defines the very process of escape from ‘majoritarian’ norms, subject positions, and habits of mind and practice. It is this process, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 276–277), that makes it possible for the hu(M)an rational subject to disrupt hierarchical thinking and to think instead through zigzagging networks of minoritarian differences that move beyond constituting and stabilising dichotomies. Such a process requires another kind of thinking, writes Deleuze (1994), using all of our bodily faculties and our imaginary. Or, to use Merrell’s (2003) concept, we need all of our *bodymind* to explore the co-constitutive relationships between discourse and matter in order to transgress what we already know as we extend knowing into other potential realities but also, as Barad puts it, to responsibly engage in shaping the future, for humans, non-humans and the material environment in a co-existent relationship (Barad, 1999: 7–8).

In this article, I explore the possibilities of considering the agency of the material in the production of knowledge. I experiment by performing a diffractive analysis of a piece of interview data with a six-year-old boy in a preschool class. Inspired by Donna Haraway’s (1997, 2008) and Karen Barad’s (1995, 1999, 2007) writings, I develop my own take on a diffractive analysis. Based on Barad’s thinking on material-discursive intra-activity, I also put to work Alaimo’s (2008, 2010) concept of the transcorporeal together with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987: 272ff.) thinking on the process of becoming-minoritarian. In this transcorporeal process of becoming-minoritarian with the data, the researcher is attentive to those bodymind faculties that register smell, touch, level, temperature, pressure, tension and force in the interconnections emerging in between different matter, matter and discourse, in the event of engagement with data. This process of transcorporeal engagements, involving other bodily faculties than the mind, constitutes a rethinking of the very act of thinking that goes beyond the idea of reflexivity and interpretation as inner mental activities in the separate mind of the researcher. Diffractive analysis also relies on the researcher’s ability to make matter intelligible in new ways and to imagine other possible realities presented in the data: a real *beyond* those produced by processes of recognition and identification in reflexive interpretations or discursive perspectives or positionings.

Although the theorising of Barad and Deleuze emerges from very different academic traditions, one important aim of this article is to demonstrate the possibilities of reading texts from different traditions *diffractively* into each other, to produce something new together (Barad, 2007: 30; Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: 11). Such a practice corresponds to the way that both feminists and Deleuze have understood the work of theorising and doing philosophy. The central project for feminist poststructuralists and feminist technoscience studies scholars alike has been to avoid the interpretive question ‘what does it mean?’ when reading theory or analysing data, and instead ask: ‘how does it work?’ and ‘what does this text or data produce?’ (Colebrook, 2000: 8; Åsberg, 2010; Barad, 2007; Law, 2004; Mol, 2002; St. Pierre, 2001). Deleuze writes in his ‘Letter to a Harsh Critic’ that the only question to put to a book is: “‘Does it work, and how does it work?’ . . . There is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It is like plugging in to an electric circuit’ (Deleuze, 1995: 8). For me, ‘plugging in to’ and reading diffractively into each other texts by Deleuze, Barad and other feminist theorists has produced new ways of theorising and performing my research practices. It is this way of thinking and reading diffractively that this article aims to illustrate.¹

In the following section I discuss diffractive analysis and how it relates to some other feminist epistemological strategies in more detail. This section also includes plugging in some of my readings of Deleuze’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s texts that productively overlap with Barad’s thinking. These readings concern how to understand difference, the act of thinking and the process of becoming-minoritarian. I then introduce the interview data and present my experimental diffractive analysis of this data.

Diffractive analysis as a transcorporeal act of thinking

‘The physical phenomenon of reflection is a common metaphor for thinking’, writes Barad (2007: 29) with reference to Haraway, who first suggested diffraction as a useful counterpoint to reflection. Whereas reflexivity or reflection invites the illusion of mirroring of essential or fixed positions, diffraction entails the processing of ongoing differences. For Haraway (1997: 268–274) and Barad (2007: 73–94) diffractive analysis constitutes an alternative methodology to critical reflection. Although there has been some reference to diffractive methodology in feminist literature in recent years (e.g. Lykke, 2010), there are, to my knowledge, only a few published empirical studies claiming to put it to work (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Jackson and Mazzei, 2012; Palmer, 2011). Here I want to explore what it might mean to do research where discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing in a flow of continuous differentiation. To unfold the ways in which I have elaborated these strategies, I present them in relation to some features in more familiar feminist epistemologies. Since the data I use here is interview-based, I have limited my discussion to a few general traits of reflexive and interpretive methodologies that have been successfully used in both early feminist standpoint epistemologies (Harding, 1991, 1993;

Hartstock, 1987) and contemporary versions of what has been called multiple standpoint analysis (Lykke, 2010: 133).

From interpretivism and self-reflexivity to diffractive transgressions

Without taking 'The God trick' (Haraway, 1991) position of the knower of classic positivist empiricism, but rather meticulously reflecting on the situatedness of the knower, a feminist standpoint researcher nevertheless produces her/his self-reflexive interpretations (ontologically speaking) as separate from the data. As Harding points out (1993: 64), while data cannot be conceived as untouched by the researcher who is considered part of its production, data is often treated as passive matter to be interpreted by an ontologically separate researcher in a self-reflexive way. Analysis is therefore understood to emerge from the data as a mental process to be named, structured and represented. Interviewing, as a traditional methodological research practice, is based on the assumption that 'voice makes present the truth and *reflects* the meaning of an experience', as Mazzei and Jackson write (2009: 4, emphasis in original). Voice, from such a perspective, is treated as the presence of consciousness itself, and narration is sought as a desire to recover a lost origin or truthful discourse, writes St. Pierre in her critique of what she calls the phonocentrism of qualitative research (2009: 223–226). Interpretation thus falls into the representational trap of trying to figure out what the interviewee really means. It is a process of sense-making and positioning the subject of research as the source of meaning that enables the researcher to construct a coherent and interesting narrative, bound by themes and patterns understood to emerge from the data (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: viii).

As an act of thinking, interpretation in reflexive analysis is about reflecting sameness (as in mirroring), or identifying differences from something previously identified and acknowledged; a thing, an identity, a category, a discursive theme or a subject position. For example, woman as different from man, working-class from middle-class, ethnic 'coloured' from ethnic 'white', etc. Difference relies on an ontological separateness between identified categories, positions or identities, most often in an asymmetrical relation to each other (cf. Barad, 2007: 86–87). In this strategy of thinking, writes Deleuze (1994), difference is always a construct of the negative: a difference *from* in a system of separation and division. Contrary to this, difference as *positive* emerges as an effect of connections and relations within and between different bodies, affecting and being affected by each other. Positive difference, in Deleuze's relational ontology, is like life itself: a continuum and a multiplicity in a constant state of becoming or differentiation in relation to each singular body, as it affects other bodies and is itself affected (Deleuze, 1994: 163). Embracing a Deleuzian understanding of difference as a positive force of differentiation and transformation, Braidotti (2008) writes that feminisms need to move away from the logic of negativity built into the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics of consciousness in critical theory (on which various standpoint feminisms are based) as well as in the central notion of lack in psychoanalysis. This negative

logic, she writes, will always require experiences of material, discursive or sexual oppression, marginality, injury or trauma, as a condition of resistance, counteraction and overturning (Braidotti, 2008: 15). Research methodologies that rely on these hidden and naturalised assumptions (Law, 2004: 5) deny the possibility of understanding reality as a processing of differences with various material effects (Barad, 2007: 29). Moreover, as postmodern feminist critics have pointed out, the practice of identifying distinctive categories, identities and positionings always risks fixing and confirming them in the very same process (Butler, 1990).

To get away from the interpretive imperatives that limit analysis to coding, categorising, identifying themes and naming identities from narrated data in interviews or interpersonal interaction, or simply letting the voices in the data 'speak for themselves', Jackson and Mazzei (2012: vii–viii) have outlined a *methodology-against-interpretivism*. Such a methodology disrupts the 'centering compulsion of traditional qualitative research' that assumes that the interviewee can voice coherent narratives that represent the self in the very telling of their experiences (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: ix; MacLure, 2009: 97–99). Even when the interviewees give voice to 'the subject of feminist knowledge as multiple, heterogeneous, and frequently contradictory', as Harding puts it, this is simply understood 'to mirror the situation for women as a group or class' (1993: 65). Women and the oppressed, in both early and contemporary reconceptualised forms of standpoint feminist research, are claimed to have 'epistemic privilege' (Hekman, 2010: 104). Moreover, this centring compulsion limits interpretations to *human* voices and interpersonal interactions. Such anthropocentrism omits acknowledging the constitutive force of matter and materiality in the social and cultural sphere (Haraway, 2008; Law, 2004; Mol, 2002). Jackson and Mazzei exhort us to resist this centring compulsion and think of 'the interview as an already failed practice' (2012: viii–ix). They suggest that we use interview data instead to work the limitations of doing research analysis: to understand data as partial and incomplete, where the telling of one story has always been told in place of another possible story. If *data* can be 'something else', then *analysis* will also become 'something else' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: ix, 130–135). They encourage feminist researchers to open up data, to *diffract* it, and to imagine what newness might be incited from it.

What does it mean to think diffractively and do diffractive analysis?

So, what does it mean to think in terms of diffraction in doing research analysis as suggested by Jackson and Mazzei above? Let us reconnect to the early writings on diffractive analysis by Barad (1995, 2007) and Donna Haraway (1997). For physicists, diffraction is understood as the result of the superposition (the combining effects when waves overlap) or interferences of waves (Barad, 2007: 78). This can be illustrated with the rolling, pushing and transformation of waves in the sea. Barad writes that 'diffraction has to do with the way waves combine

when they overlap, and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction' (2007: 74). It is this movement of overlapping, where the waves change in intra-action with an obstacle and with each wave accumulating, which signifies diffraction. Diffraction effects are effects of interferences, where the original wave partly remains within the new after its transformation (Barad, 2007: 71–83). Diffraction as a methodology then is about studying how differences get made in such a process and the effects that differences make; what is excluded and how these differences and exclusions matter (Barad, 2007: 30). But what does this mean in relation to the act of thinking when doing research analysis?

To understand this we need to move, ontologically, from identifying bodies as separate entities with distinct borders to think in terms of processes of entanglements and interdependences in processes of an ongoing co-constitutive co-existence of different kinds of bodies (human as well as non-human or more-than-humans) (Alaimo, 2010; Barad, 2007). Thinking diffractively, in short, means thinking as a process of co-constitution, investigating the entanglement of ideas and other materialities in ways that reflexive methodologies do not (Barad, 2007: 74). The bodymind of the researcher in this process is understood to engage and interfere with the data in a process of transcorporeality (Alaimo, 2008, 2010). In order to understand thinking as a transcorporeal act (as will be further elaborated below), I need to link the process of diffractive thinking ontologically to an *onto-epistemology*. Developed from her readings of the work of physicist Niels Bohr, this concept of onto-epistemology is defined by Barad as 'the study of practices of knowing *in being*' (Barad, 2007: 185, my emphasis). In this practice, where becoming and knowing are understood as in a state of interdependence, 'knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part of the world' (Barad, 2007: 185). This goes for any material body – a stone or a fruit – when making itself intelligible to our bodyminds as it is examined by our hands or mouth when eating; as this goes for our hands or our mouth, teeth and saliva, etc. that are simultaneously making themselves intelligible to the material body in the encounter (cf. Mol, 2008). This activity of one body making itself intelligible to another, is an example of what Barad calls material-discursive *intra-activity* (Barad, 1998, 1999, 2007).

Intra-activity differs from *inter-activity*. The latter and more familiar concept refers to a relationship between bodies that are taken to be separate entities, including an interpersonal relationship between two humans. The term *intra-activity* comes from physics, referring to relationships between multiple bodies (both human and non-human) that are understood *not* to have clear or distinct boundaries from one another: rather, they are always affecting or being affected by each other in an interdependent and mutual relationship as a condition for their existence (Barad, 2007: 152). Such thinking brings to feminist research recognition of the agency of material bodies in the processes of *intra-activity*; bodies that in our anthropocentric ontologies have been understood as merely passive tools (Barad, 2007: 109).

Reconceptualising the act of thinking – thinking diffractively and as positive differentiation

Deleuze (1994) writes that we can never reflect upon something on our own. To reflect always means to interconnect with something: ‘Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object *not of recognition* but of a fundamental encounter’ (Deleuze, 1994: 139, emphasis added). Recognition gives rise to thinking in terms of representations. The problem is that recognition and representation are characterised by constructing distinct differences between objects and identities to constitute dichotomising oppositions and hierarchies of values. So, instead of identifying differences *from* or *between* bodies to produce codes and categories, thinking diffractively is a process of interference and overlapping and studying the effects of what Deleuze would understand as positive differences. Diffractive analysis requires us to engage in an event of reading and *becoming-with* (Haraway, 2008) the data, rather than reading it from a distance and as separate or apart from it. In the event that emerges, the data is itself understood as a co-constitutive force, working with and upon the researcher, as the researcher is working with the data. We must activate the sensibility of all our embodied faculties in the event of thinking, as Deleuze and Guattari argue (1994: 144–145). In this event, the bodymind of the researcher becomes a space of transit in the encounter with data. The event of analysis thus becomes a *transcorporeal engagement* (Alaimo, 2008, 2010), in which the researcher is attentive to those bodymind faculties that register the flows of smell and the intensities of touch, level, temperature, pressure, tension and force in the interconnections that emerge in the engagement. We try to register how the data *interferes* with the sensibilities of our bodyminds and what this brings to the event of reading the data. This is where Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) understanding of the process of *becoming-minoritarian* in the event becomes a productive aspect of diffractive analysis. As previously stated, this is a process of escape from taken-for-granted normalised thinking aimed at transformation and change (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 272–291). *Becoming-minoritarian* is about thinking otherwise and away from norms and rigid power-producing habits of thinking by ways of new encounters and engagements. It is these aspects of embodied involvement, transformation and the capacity for change that make a diffractive methodology both feminist and political.

Talking with a boy who made a bark-boat by the stream

The data presented below consists of a short excerpt from a pilot study of what would later become a larger body of data collected by Lottie Lofors-Nyblom (2009) for her PhD project in education. The subsequent study examined the construction of becoming a successful or less successful school pupil, analysed discursively from different kinds of data: curricula texts and data collected from ‘conversations’ (as opposed to formal interviewing) with six groups of 2–4

nine-year-old pupils in the school setting (Lofors-Nyblom, 2009: 106). In the excerpt presented by the researcher, she understands herself as a 'conversation-leader' and a 'different kind of grown-up' than a teacher (2009: 107). The aim of these conversations was to have the children tell narratives about becoming a school pupil, focussing on 'expressions of power and control, mastering your body and controlling your feelings, praise and appreciation, managing oneself and being nice, friends and games, decision-making, making mistakes, uncertainty about rules, punishment, force, challenging the discourse, significance of gender and rules' (Lofors-Nyblom, 2009: 108). This pilot data was initially brought to a PhD course on deconstructive methodologies in 2007, where Lottie Lofors-Nyblom was a participant. Each doctoral student, and I as the lecturer, offered a piece of anonymous data to be collaboratively deconstructed. Written permission was obtained from all participants, with the understanding that any of the data brought to the group could be used in the future by any of the ten participating PhD students or myself as part of my research (Lenz Taguchi, 2010a). The data presented below begins with field notes written by the interviewer describing the context preceding her interview with a six-year-old boy, referred to as Eric. Eric is a boy who is suspected to have some kind of special needs, according to the information given by this participant via an e-mail accompanying the data. Following the introductory notes is a transcript of the interview conducted in the context of the pilot study. The data ends with a short field note, commenting on the researcher's initial understanding of the interview.

- (1) I sit in a room with Eric who is a pupil in the pre-school class in this school.
- (2) pre-school class is small, five girls and three boys. I have conversations with one
- (3) child at a time. It's the end of May and the previous day the children went to the
- (4) stream with their teacher and an elderly lady from the village. They made boats out of
- (5) bark. I chose not to be present that day. My intention is to hear what the children have
- (6) to tell from the day by the stream, to be able to know more about what the children
- (7) find interesting in this particular situation. I want to focus on how children construct
- (8) themselves, and are constructed by their environment, as pupils, and how they
- (9) understand themselves as pupils. /.../
- (10) I: OK. Here I sit with you Eric and a while ago I sat here with M. How are you feeling?
- (11) E: I am OK.
- (12) I: Do you like being interviewed?
- (13) E: Yes, a little.
- (14) I: Today I was thinking we should just talk for a little while, and you will decide what we
- (15) should talk about. But I have a question for you, since I wasn't here yesterday. I missed
- (16) out on that day because I had other things to do. How was yesterday? What happened?
- (17) E: Well, it was . . . [A grown up person walks by to get something. E stops talking. He
- (18) snuffles, is quiet for a while and then continues talking with a weak voice.]
- (19) I: What did you say?
- (20) E: It was good.
- (21) I: What was good?

- (22) E: [Somewhat irritated] The whole day was good.
 (23) I: You made boats out of bark?
 (24) E: Hmm.
 (25) I: Did you have fun?
 (26) E: Yes, I did.
 (27) I: Did you get to carve the boat yourself?
 (28) E: Yes, we did.
 (29) I: And then you put it into the water? [E seems embarrassed.]
 (30) E: Hmm.
 (31) I: Did you have a competition?
 (32) E: Hmm. But my boat sank. It jumped . . . and landed upside down.
 (33) I: So, you had . . .
 (34) E: We had a rather nice funeral for it 'cause Susan threw flowers on the boat.
 (35) I: So did it sink or did it turn over first?
 (36) E: OK listen! [In a loud voice, then continuing more quietly.] It turned over and I had
 (37) made a man sitting on it who died, and it floated upside down . . . S threw flowers on it
 (38) so everything turned out well [the last sentence is almost inaudible]
 (39) I: What did you do then?
 (40) E: I went away and shouted [changes his voice to yell], 'Leave the ship, the boat is
 (41) sinking!' Then I went away.
 (42) I: So, you didn't get angry?
 (43) E: No. [With a firm voice.]
 /.../
 (44) . . . Eric struggles with himself and has difficulties to be in a good relationship with
 (45) the children around him. He has difficulties in handling his subjectivity as a good
 (46) school boy, which is what is expected of him in school. Susan is supporting
 (47) him and helps him overcome his defeat./.../Eric accepts Susan's support, which is a
 (48) step in the right direction for him, but he is still unsure of Susan being a friend . . .

A diffractive reading and becoming-minoritarian in a reading of the event

How can I work the limitations of this partial and incomplete data, to open it up and diffract the analysis to become 'something else', as Jackson and Mazzei (2012: ix, 120–123) have challenged me to do? When reading diffractively I want to read *with* the data, understanding it as a constitutive force, working with and upon me in the event of reading it. I open up my bodymind faculties to experience the entanglement of discourse and matter in the event of reading the data. I process the effects of differences that emerge in the material-discursive intra-actions taking place in my reading (Barad, 2007: 30). I produce readings with the data that might, in a specific sense, 'disclose' another reality from the thickness and dense multiplicity of intra-activities that any event constitutes (Hekman, 2010: 87–93). This is not about uncovering the essence or truth of the data. This is an uncovering of *a* reality that

already exists among the multiple realities being enacted in an event, but which has not been previously 'disclosed'.

In the first engagement with these excerpts, I install myself in the space where the adult interviewer brings one child at a time to a table to perform an interview. In this space, the table and chairs enact a space of interviewing. An event of *sitting* is enacted, where talking becomes formal rather than the informal talking that was the intention of the interviewer (see lines 5–7 and lines 14–15). The table actively separates and distances the adult from the child. The table can be felt to agentially enact distance, formality and seriousness together with the adults' material-discursively performed talking. The interview situation becomes part of enacting a space in schooling, where performing and being judged by 'good' or 'bad' sitting, or 'good' or 'bad' answers, is bound to take place. The event is discursively determined as the adult asks a question to relax the situation: 'Do you like being interviewed?' (line 12). The physical space does, however, not provide a space that permits relaxation, confidentiality or integrity. From the transcript we learn that: '[A grown up person walks by to get something. E stops talking. He snuffles, is quiet for a while and then continues talking with a weak voice.]' (lines 17–18). The sudden presence and interference of another adult becomes a strong agent in the intra-actions now taking place, causing new differences that evoke in me (and perhaps Eric) an even stronger feeling of vulnerability. How is the adult body of the interviewer in front of Eric any different from the body of the adult (teacher) passing by? The material-discursive condition of this space of the interview is difficult to separate from any other event of talking involving a child and an adult that takes place in school. In the event of reading the data and *becoming-with-Eric*, becoming-minoritarian child in Deleuze's and Guattari's thinking, I want to argue that a reality of this event is that there actually *was* no interview (compare Jones and Jenkins, 2008). At least not of the kind with the benevolent aim of simply 'hear[ing] what the children have to tell from the day by the stream, to be able to know more about what the children find interesting in this particular situation' (lines 5–7). Rather, this reality is saturated with the material-discursive conditions that compose virtually all kinds of talking initiated by adults' enactments of monitoring assessments; where the achievements and normality of children are incessantly judged.

Let me now investigate the entanglements of discourse and matter in the events by the stream that emerged in the transcorporeal act of reading the data when making myself aware of my imaginary and bodymind sensibilities. I follow the events by the stream as they unfold and overlap (lines 23–43). I sense the creative energy and imagination as Eric carves what is to become a boat. I sense the intensity of eagerness and anticipation that emerge between Eric, the boat and the stream: What will happen as it is put into the running water? Eric watches the boat sail for a few seconds before it turns over as an effect of the turmoil of the water and the unbalanced construction of the boat, causing Eric to shout to the imagined skipper: 'Leave the ship, the boat is sinking!' (lines 40–41) and then watch it disappear. In the next instance, Eric is drawn into a new event of a funeral of the

boat and skipper, enacted by the girl Susan, who, watching what happens in the stream, suddenly steps forward to throw flowers on to the water where the bark-boat disappeared. One event unfolds and overlaps into the next; involving the entanglements of the children's bodies, their words and imagination, the bark-boat and the running water of the stream.

In my bodymind involvement, becoming-minoritarian and becoming-with-Eric in this event, another reality can be invoked than the one described in the field notes by the adult. These notes are coded with expectations of Eric's emotional 'struggle' (line 44), social 'difficulties' (line 45) and feelings of 'defeat' (line 47). In the reality invoked by my diffractive reading, I do not anticipate that Eric is aspiring to be in competition with the other children (line 31), nor that he is having problems overcoming what the interviewer describes as a defeat (line 47). In this other reality, I do not expect that Eric might need to be on guard with himself to be able to master his feelings and 'handl[e] his subjectivity as a good school boy' (lines 45–46). Instead, what is invoked and disclosed is an event where it is possible to become-with-Eric as taking part in an exciting adventure of intra-activities, where all the performative agents differentiate in relation to themselves as the events unfold. This adventure emerges in the material-discursive intra-activities in-between Eric's hands, the knife, his imagination of a boat, the boat he carves, which jumps around on the water before it lands 'upside down' (line 32). Eric 'made a man sitting on it who died' (line 36) when the boat turned over. But the story 'turned out well' (line 38), as Eric tells the interviewer. Thus, the events are unfolded as a reality of success in narration, creative imagination and intense collaboration. In this reality, Eric is no longer a child who is lacking in social ability, nor is he a child without friends who risks failing himself emotionally, as suggested in the field notes (lines 44–48). In my diffractive analysis he is successfully intra-acting and collaborating with many performative agents, such as the bark-boat, the skipper, Susan and the flowers and is making many new friends.

I encounter the data in an event of becoming-minoritarian. This positions me otherwise than in the taken-for-granted majoritarian position of researcher as the sole subject of knowledge production. *Becoming-with-the-bark-boat* in the event of reading the data can be understood as a transformative passing from one state of becoming to the other, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it; a sensation in a zone of indetermination (1994: 173). I install myself in the data and imagine the intra-activity between the boy, the boat and the water in a relationship of non-hierarchical entangled intra-activities and co-dependences between human and non-human performative agents: the boat swaying, pulling and turning upside down as a result of the force in the intra-action with the water. The weight and height of the somewhat too large and heavy skipper that the boy constructed to put on deck intra-acts with the flowing water and pushes the centre of gravity to a place which made it impossible for it to float right side up. In a transcorporeal imagining of this event, I can imagine the boat and its skipper calling out to Eric and Susan at the shore to organise a rescue or prepare for a funeral (lines 34–41). What emerges in this event of reading the data diffractively is an effect of being affected, where thinking and

imagining *exceed* data and ourselves as researchers. This is because, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 164) argue, the subject and thinking are both an effect of the given forces affecting and being affected by each other and thus transforming and exceeding themselves. A diffractive reading involves me as a researcher in a disclosure of a reality that causes me to differentiate in relation to myself – as in a *difference in itself* as understood by Deleuze (1994: 28).

This particular diffractive reading of the data discloses a different reality of this event than would a de/constructivist reading, focussing on interpersonal discursive subject positionings. A diffractive analysis transforms my understanding of how power-production in school can be understood to be a material-discursive intra-activity, involving the force of several material performative agents in an event. It also transforms my understanding of a socially competent child: where social competence is extended to include collaborations with non-human or more-than-human performative agents. This knowledge production, evoked in a transcorporeal engagement with the data, also changes the way I understand myself as a socially competent agent. Moreover, the ‘disclosure’ of this material-discursive reality can also have material consequences for the planning and performing of pedagogical practices in preschools and schools, relying more on understanding the force of material artefacts as performative agents (Lenz Taguchi, 2010b; Palmer, 2011).

Reading in resistance to the normative, as described above, is an aspect of diffractive analysis that builds on and connects it to standpoint feminisms in specific ways. This continuity can also be seen in the ability to make real an event that can undermine the certainty of those who claim to know how to understand who Eric ‘is’ and his behaviour, based on dominant discourses in the context of schooling. However, the diffractive analysis relies on different ontological presuppositions compared to those underpinning de/constructionist research. In the diffractive analysis, the researcher partakes in a process of knowing-in-being (onto-epistemology), and cannot be understood to perform an analysis from a position ontologically separated and at a distance from the data (Barad, 2007).

In conclusion

In a critical de/constructivist analysis, we would be offered readings where Eric in the data above can be understood as both powerless and powerful, depending on from what discursive subject position we read the data. As researchers, we perform these multiple readings from a distanced and basically unaffected position from the data. The events in the data can be understood to be ‘hidden’ behind the researcher’s multiple interpretations of it, which in fact, means that *anyone* can ‘own’ the reality of the event, as Jones and Jenkins remark (2008: 136). Or, as in standpoint feminisms, only those who have ‘epistemic privilege’ can own the reality of the event, although these agents might be multiple and heterogeneous (Harding, 1993: 65; Hekman, 2010: 104). Jones and Jenkins (2008: 135) state that interpretive and multiple discourse analysis merely produces socially constructed alternative points of view, satisfying only for those who have the power to ‘play’ with alternatives.

More than offering just another point of view, *or* the point(s) of view of those with epistemic privilege, material feminist readings aspire to invoke other possible material realities that can have political and material consequences. A different (material-discursive) reality can be invoked when ‘we strategically foreground the material’ and ‘allow the real to re-enter the discussion without retreating to a simpleminded empiricism’ (Jones and Jenkins, 2008: 126–127). Again, a different reality is not *the* reality, but *a* (potential) real.

Claiming that we read from the data another possible material-discursive reality constitutes a feminist resistance and subversiveness. It implies a resistance against foundational, anthropocentric and privileging points of views, to acknowledge our interdependence and co-existence with other bodies in the world. What is produced as knowing in the diffractive analysis is thus a material-discursive reality where that which has been considered passive and minor is now seen as active and forceful in its intra-activities with other bodies. Diffractive analysis makes us aware of our embodied involvement in the materiality of the event of analysing data. The diffractive analysis and Deleuzian approach is simultaneously about *intervention* and *invention*; *responsibility* and *ethics*. A feminist researcher who engages in diffractive analysis is committed to understanding how we as researchers are responsibly engaged in shaping the future for humans, non-humans and the material environment in our production of knowledge (Barad, 1999: 7–8), because productions of knowledge are also productions of reality that will always have specific material consequences.

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Note

1. For discussions on the compatibility and/or incompatibility of feminist theory and Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy, see Buchanan and Colebrook (2000). Feminist theory and Deleuzian philosophy have been productive in the production of new feminist thinking, especially in the work of Rosi Braidotti (1994, 2003, 2006, 2008) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 2005). During the last decade the recent feminist material turn has produced discussion on how Deleuze’s philosophy can be productive for feminist theory and research in different kinds of feminist studies, as for example: Currier (2003); Hird (2003, 2004); Jackson and Mazzei (2009); Ringrose (2010). Only a few feminists have combined Deleuze’s philosophy with Barad’s agential realism (e.g. Lenz Taguchi, 2010b; Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Hird, 2003).

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