Reflexivity has been recommended as a critical practice, but my suspicion is that reflexivity, like reflection, **only displaces the same elsewhere...** Diffraction is an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world... **[it records] the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference.**
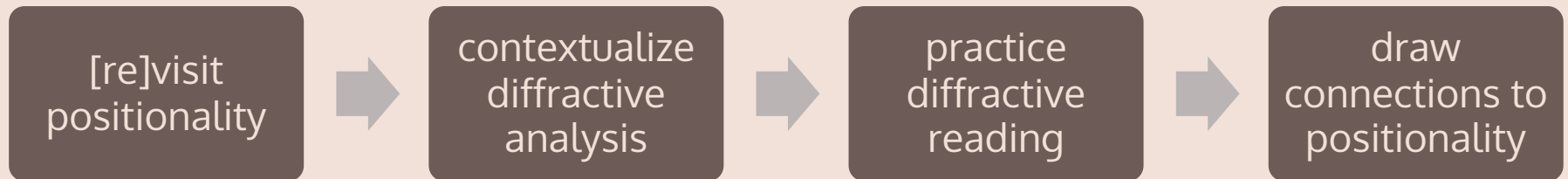
- Donna Haraway -

Accessing and Exploring Researcher Positionality through Diffractive Analysis: A Workshop

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Approach

To invite qualitative inquirers to explore positionality through the lens of **diffractive analysis**[1]—a *difference seeking* approach that may crystallize our conceptions of the interwoven, shifting entanglements among self, others, and context.

| [re]visit positionality | → | contextualize diffractive analysis | → | practice diffractive reading | → | draw connections to positionality |

[1] Barad, 2007; Dixon-Román, 2017; Hill, 2017; Lenz-Taguchi, 2012

POSITION*ALITY*

- Each of us has multiple, overlapping, and intersectional identities (e.g., social location, history, character, etc.).

- The "deconstruction of power subtleties, the recognition of implicit bias, and the legitimization of others' lived experiences all constitute processes in which researchers must be willing to engage and self-criticize."

(Meixner & Spitzner, 2020, p. 16)

# Positionality Tools: Reflection & Reflexivity

Reflection
- Looking back, at, or into.

Reflexivity
- Akin to "trying to look at yourself looking in the mirror" (Markham, 2017, np); a "self-scrutiny... a self-conscious awareness" (Bourke, 2014, p. 2).
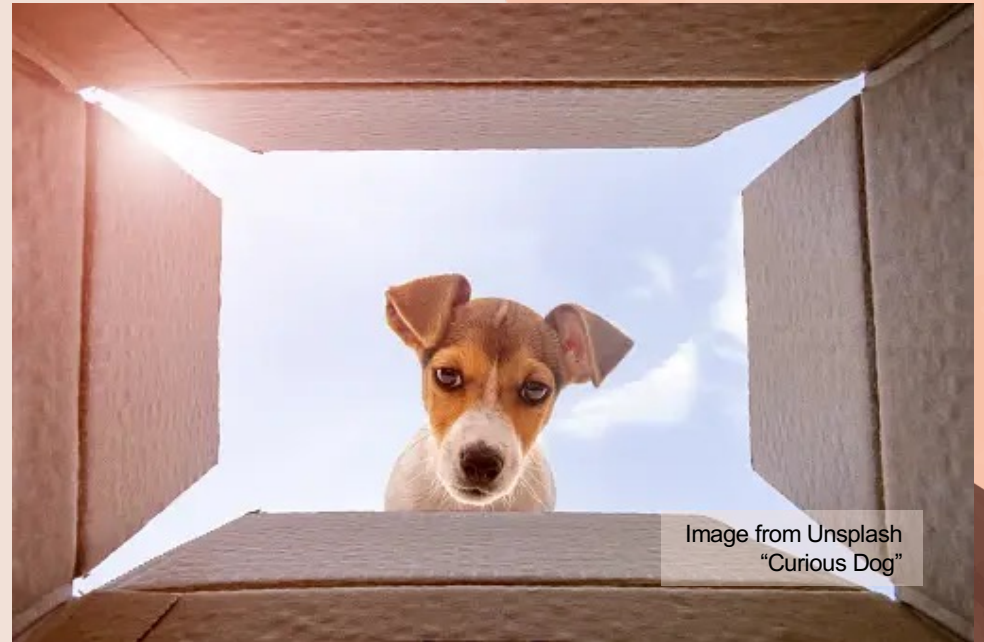
Used to explore and situate our biases (insider/outsider), make decisions transparent, convey trustworthiness, etc.

Critiqued for superficiality and essentialism.

Image from Unsplash @Vince Fleming
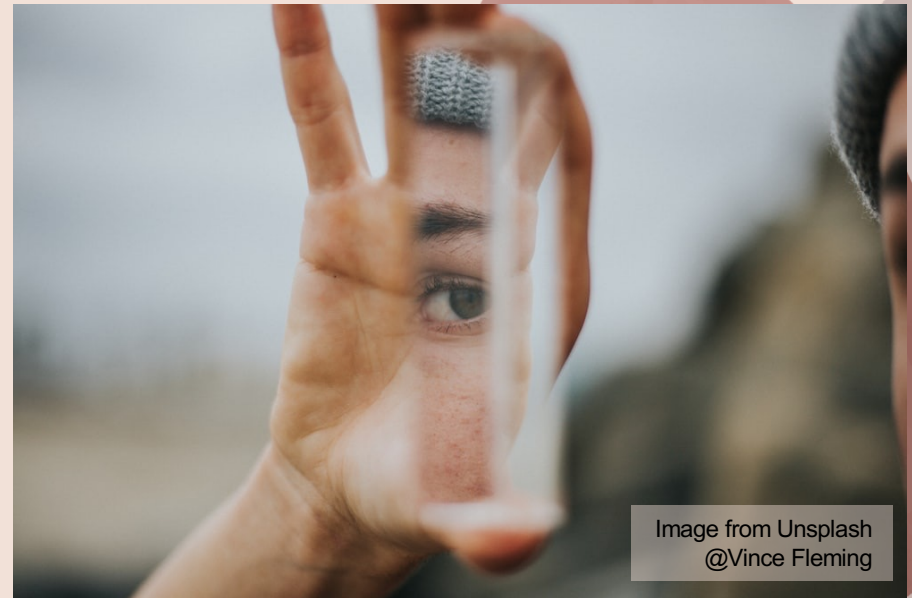
Hmm...

Q: Is there another approach that methodologists can utilize to examine their positionality?

Diffractive Analysis (DA)

Seminally, DA is "a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter, and for whom" (Barad, p. 90).

- DA is a way of meeting data differently—"reading insights through one another" (Barad, p. 71), and focusing on what they do (versus what they mean).
- DA inquirers enter "the assemblage" and seek "multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity" (Mazzei, p. 743).

Key terms: entanglements, interferences, differences

Seminal Scholars

Karen Barad (2007)
Ezekiel Dixon-Román (2017)
Donna Haraway (1997)
Cher Hill (2017)
Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2012)
Lisa Mazzei (2014)

DA & new materialism

DA is rooted in **new materialism**, which eschews binaries and attends to matter and substance as vibrant, moving, and *doing* (Barad, 2007).

New materialists **problematize constructivist orientations**.

Example: a piece of fruit becoming known to us "as it is examined by our hands or mouth when eating" (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 271).


Above: key scholars of new materialism; see this summary of approaches by Deborah Lupton, Ph.D.

Image: Unsplash
@Marek Studzinski

Diffractive Analysis' Critique of Reflexive Practice

| Reflective Practice	Diffractive Practice
Humans and other entities are discrete and contained beings (Hill).	Bodies are "open systems with fluid boundaries" (Hill, p. 7; see Barad).
Subject-object binary creates "geometries of sameness" (Barad, p. 72).	New patterns are created by differences (see Barad, Dixon-Román, Hill).
Invites "the illusion of mirroring of essential or fixed positions" (Lenz Taguchi, p. 268).	Encompasses "the processing of ongoing differences" (Lenz-Taguchi, p. 268).
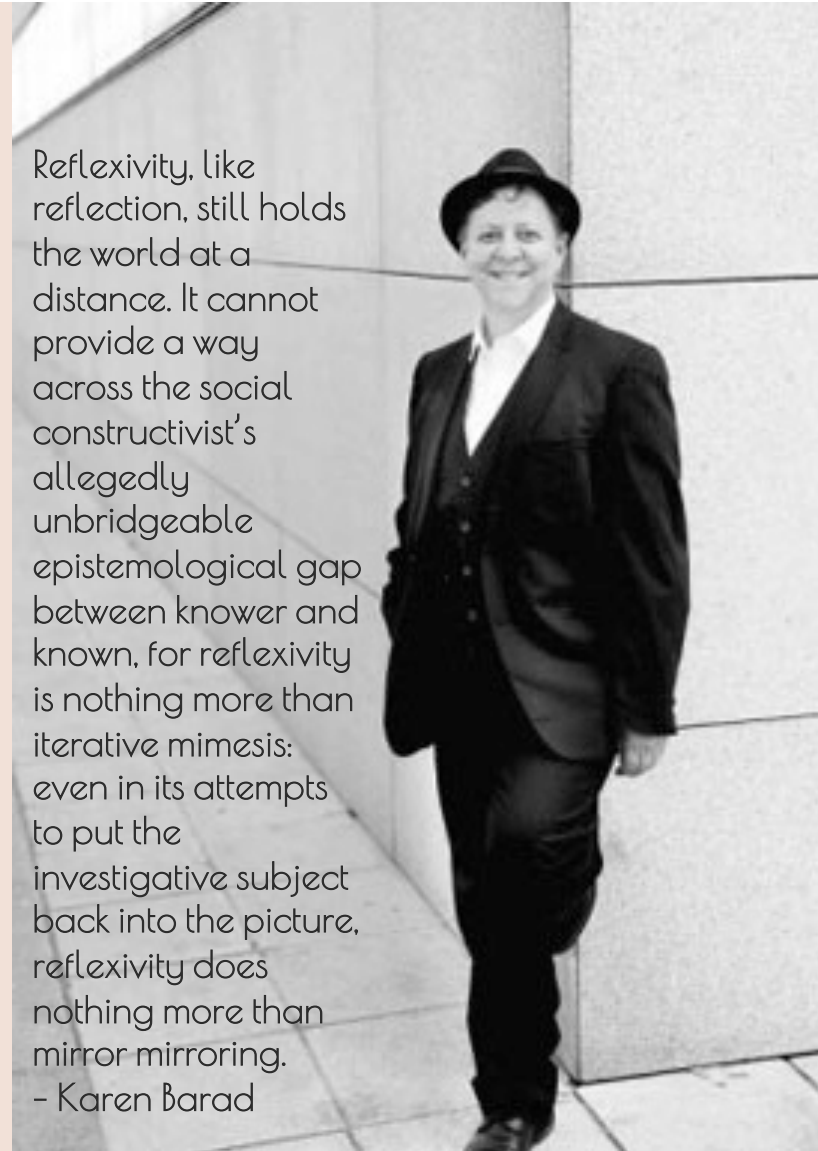
Reflexivity, like reflection, still holds the world at a distance. It cannot provide a way across the social constructivist's allegedly unbridgeable epistemological gap between knower and known, for reflexivity is nothing more than iterative mimesis: even in its attempts to put the investigative subject back into the picture, reflexivity does nothing more than mirror mirroring.
– Karen Barad

Q: How do I start to "do" DA?
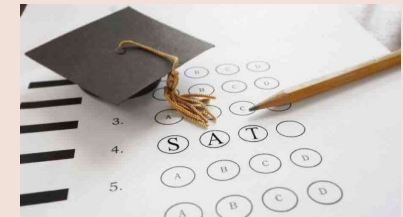# A: You attune to interferences and entanglements
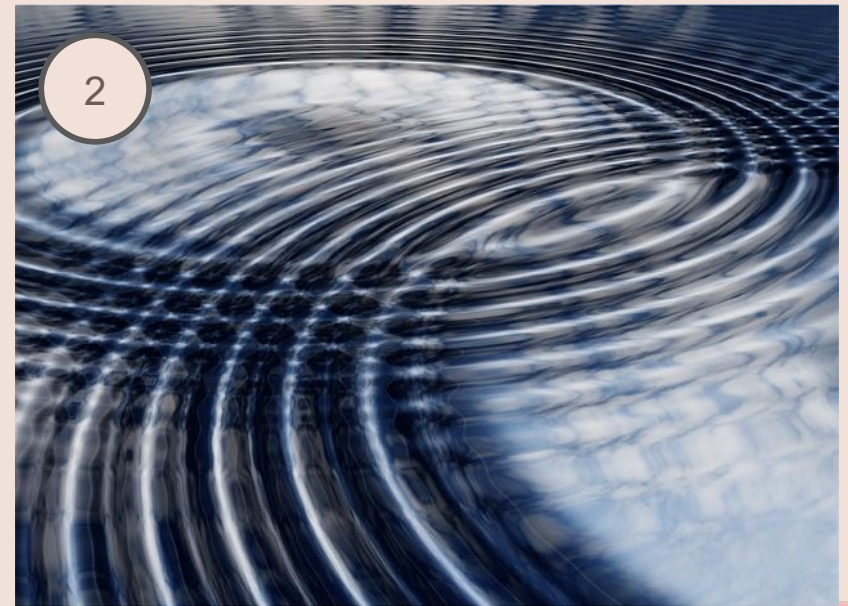
The driftwood (fig. 1) or surface (fig. 2) create an *interference*. The waves *entangle* as the water is *diffracted* through the gap (fig. 1) or under conditions caused by stones dropping (fig. B). The new half circles, made through interference, create a **superposition**.

Think | Pair | Share:
The wounded bird (Hill, 2017)

1. How might a reflective accounting, for Hill, differ from a diffractive analysis of the pedagogical situation?
2. Name the interference(s) and entanglement(s).
3. What does a diffractive analysis offer that a reflexive undertaking may miss?
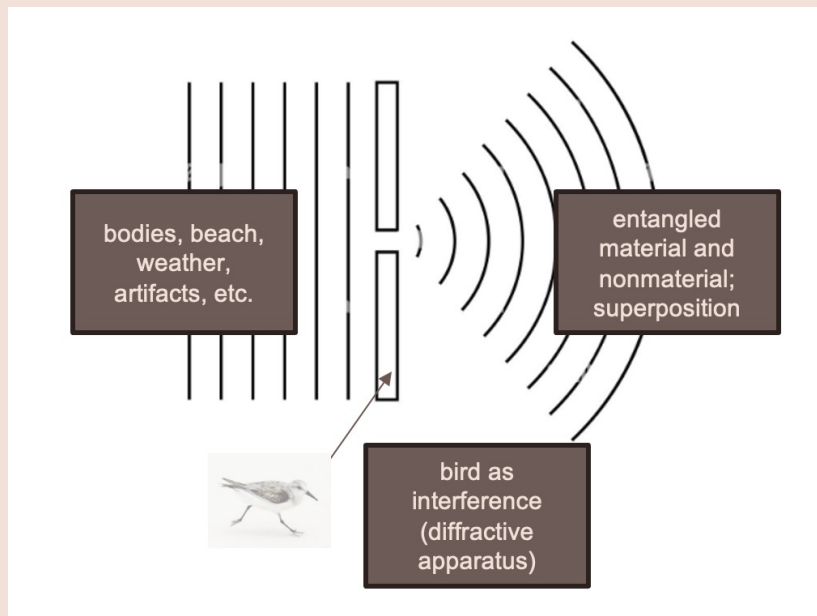
More-than-reflective practice: Becoming a diffractive practitioner

Cher M. Hill *
Simon Fraser University, Canada

The wounded bird (Hill, 2017)

Reflection	Diffraction
Would "focus on the individual students, whether or not they were learning, or how [Hill] might empathize and support the students, or better engage the learners in the task at hand."	The bird is "another body that enters into the assemblage creating an interference pattern that reconfigures the assignment in unanticipated ways." Her positionality was also reconfigured.
The bird is a distraction that violates the stated terms of the assignment, which was to "gather artifacts" like shells, driftwood, and so on. The instructor might reflect on sentiments of frustration, disappointment, etc., or on how they handled the situation.	The bird is a site of learning; boundaries collapse and "the intra-action between the assignment, the wounded bird, the hot sunny day… assembled to produce enacting care." (The assemblage was featured in students' renderings.)

Diffractive Analysis: Another Example

- The researcher body is a "space of transit" (p. 265); Lenz Taguchi "installs herself in the data," writing of the interferences of smell, touch, and sound in the room to apprehend the data in new ways.

- Reading the interview diffractively, Lenz Taguchi also reports on "an effect of being affected, where thinking and imagining *exceed* data and ourselves as researchers" (p. 276-7).

Article

A diffractive and Deleuzian approach to analysing interview data

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fty.sagepub.com
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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.
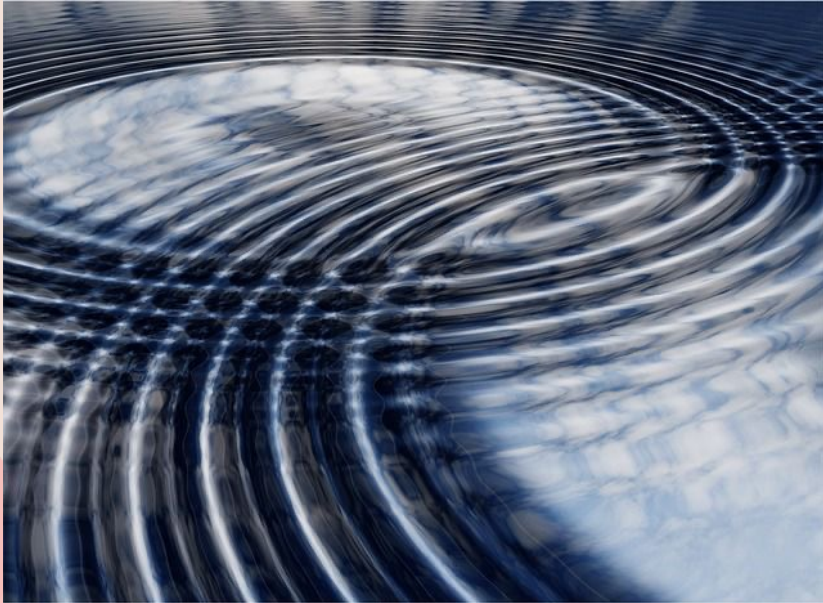
Keywords
Barad, Deleuze, diffractive analysis, material-discursive, postconstructionism, transcorporeal

sound smell touch space

Photo from Unsplash @ Natasha Hall; adapted for use in this presentation.

Summary: Doing DA to encounter & explore positionality

- Move from binary conceptualizations (e.g., present and past self, researcher and participants, human and non-human, subject and object).
- See the self *in and of* the data and the data *in and of* the self. (How are we, like Dixon-Román asserted, constituted by the analysis?)
- Invite material and nonmaterial interferences and entanglements to encounter positionality anew (i.e., "What 'different becomings' are produced?").
- Consider new patterns and differences (i.e., superpositions) drawn through interferences (e.g., self entangled with place, material, persons, etc.).

RESOURCES | Q&A

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THANKS

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