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How is qualitative data? An interrogation and puppet show dream

“Dreams are transparently meaningful, chock full of emotional salience.”

-- J. Allan Hobson, *Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School* (Goode, 1999)

Dreams present a unique and under-scrutinized territory for understanding complex social phenomena. In this chapter, we explore the question “*how* is data in contemporary qualitative inquiry?” We offer non-representational theory (Vannini, 2015) along with an approach for excavating raw (*brut*) dream data absent of reference and meaning (Koro-Ljungberg, Carlson, Tesar, & Anderson, 2015). We suggest that, by thinking of dreams as post-qualitative data, where data is messy, organic, probabilistic, post-critical, rhizomatic, or non-anthropocentric (Koro-Ljungberg, Löytönen, & Tesar, 2017; St. Pierre, 2014), we can speculate a praxis for social justice and transformation, one that moves “post inquiry” to a discomfiting space of ambiguity for radically generating interconnectivity between people’s differences and similarities.

This essay opens with a brief recounting of a nightmare experienced by the second author, Corey Reutlinger, followed by a discussion of what data snoozing, dreaming, awakening, and speculating might provide. The heart of the chapter is a recounting of a dream by the first author which speculates about the possibilities and constraints of post-qualitative research, and a discussion of the ways datadreaming may be valuable, even in situations that aim toward social

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justice and transformation. The chapter concludes where it began, with a prelude to another dream.

A Prelude to Datadreaming: in Second Author Corey's Voice

I have a recurring dream that has haunted me since early childhood. I am standing in the backyard of my childhood home in Nebraska. As summer turns to night, I hide in a thick grove of fruit trees, watching the dimly lit windows of my house. I am fleeing from the boogiemán – or rather, a black shape with a pale white and blank expression, who looks like Michael Myers from Hill and Carpenter's (1978) film *Halloween*. My goal is to hide and escape—to sneak past my house without the boogiemán spotting me, so that I can run to my neighbors for help. The boogiemán always catches me, usually by the time I reach my neighbor's yard, but before I can reach their house. Only recently did the ending of the dream change. I confronted the boogiemán face-to-face. We had a showdown around the back corner of my house on a life-size chess board. I shouted aloud a chess gambit: "Knight to D4..." The chess move was enough to banish the boogiemán permanently. I used to always wake up from this dream feeling dread. But after this final encounter, I woke feeling calm. The dream never returned.

Contemporary Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis would attribute many of the dream elements here — such as summertime, fruit trees, houses, chessboards, dusk, and demons — to deeper symbolic archetypes and unprocessed psychic "shadows" (Aziz, 2007). The boogiemán represents running away from fears; the house resembles personal insecurities; the chessboard depicts new ideas for conquering anxieties, etc. (Adams, 1998). Yet, before the rise of psychotherapeutic techniques, many early cultures thought of dreams as prophecies, instructions for healing, or as extensions of reality. For example, the Iroquois believed reenacting their dreams through a ritual would purify the body of mental and emotional duress; the Egyptians

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relied on interpreters and their “dream books” to predict natural phenomena (Knock Knock, 2004).

Dreams may not be considered “real”, but the data that composes them provides a particular simulation for conjuring up the Truth of reality as well as the many truths, half-truths, and lies we often encounter when awake (Aziz, 2007). Reinertsen and Otterstad (2013) explore the creation of dream data through *datadreaming*, a generative, nonlinear process that includes numerous sleep states such as precursory thoughts, snoozings, rapid eye movement (REM) sleeps, deep sleeps, awakenings, and re-cyclings. Dreams are not only a wishful thinking about the living world as if were a better place, but they are also a way of expressing the emotions, sensations, and bodily knowledges that are unspeakable, uncodable, perplexing, fragmented, and have a life of their own (Reinertsen & Otterstad, 2013).

An affective, pre-psychoanalytic perspective of a dream’s data opens space for understanding the hidden ontologies of the body, absent of the need for interpretation and representation in inquiry. That is, exploring our bodies’ uncharted emotional territories through datadreaming has a unique implication. At the heart of dream data lies a key for engaging social justice and transformation—the rawness of emotions, when understood fully, provides a pathway for radically engaging with and advocating for those in society seeking humanization (Huffman, 2014). We explore the possibility for social justice through various sleep states that can produce dream data, starting with snoozing.

SnooZZZZZing: Non-Representational Theory and a Speculative Method

Snoozing is a space of “in-betweenness”: between wake and sleep, thought and dream, tiredness and rest, or conflict and peace. Cycling through “in-betweenness” opens possibility for exploring the death of the old and the creation of the new. Metaphorically, snoozing can release

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pre-established methods of data collection and analysis and for embracing the ambiguity of research-creation (Manning, 2016). It is a place where method no longer requires a prescriptive step-by-step way to gather qualitative materials (which are often whimsical and evasive) nor does analysis have to engage in interpretation. Data can just be itself, coming and going.

Non-representational theory, or NRT (Vannini, 2015), pulls from a variety of disciplines and ideologies to emphasize the creation of a method as a generative and mosaic assemblage. NRT is the successor of postmodern theory, the logical development of poststructuralism, and a turn away from cognition, symbolic meaning, and textuality (Vannini, 2015). Seven core tenets guide the development of non-representational methodology. These include that NRT (1) examines instinctive, precognitive components of life, such as emotions; (2) is anti-biographical and pre-individual; (3) concerns itself with bodily habits, actions, and performances; (4) focuses on the relation between material, body, and structures; (5) stresses experimental originality; (6) emphasizes affect as a force and concept for driving inquiry; and, (7) encourages an ethic novelty (Vannini, 2015). With NRT as a guide, we are interested in exploring how dream data can become something beyond a representation of what is happening in our everyday empirical reality. We are interested in dream data for what it provokes rather than what it contains.

Do we reject the psychoanalytic approaches developed for dream interpretation? No. We are simply curious about nonsensical dreamscapes, truths and doubts hiding in our affective territories, and potentialities for generating reimagination. We understand that ‘dream logic’ unfurls our psychic turmoil, suggests options for radical self-inquiry that may result in healing, and points to extensions of what we may assume is real. For datadreaming, this could mean using a non-methodology like *methodogenesis*, an inventive research process created by Gale (2018) to move beyond fixing and signifying data through representation. Methodogenesis can work inside

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dream domains of non-sense-ness; it keeps inquiry playful, curious, and processual (Wolgemuth et al., 2017), and nurtures a probabilistic, event/ful, complex, and non-subjugating gathering of data (i.e., data gets to decide what and how it wants to be gathered inside and out of inquiry).

So, what about coding and analyzing? Certainly we can place dream data alongside criteria for qualitative goodness that help us choose the path of our inquiry (Tracy, 2010). But what if data wants to distort our criteria, codebooks, and assumptions of what and how data should be? Dream data is nonsensical, and dream logic can be either/neither/both deductive and/or inductive. Abductive reasoning helps point to what datadreaming can become, interpreted as, or represent. Abduction does not rely on a prior theory like deduction or a posterior verification like induction; rather, it sits with the incompleteness of research and opens many unforeseen possibilities of what it can become (Parisi, 2012). A speculative method relies on imagination – it does not consider data necessarily as determined or emergent. In other words, a speculative method pushes dream data to be felt, to be transformative, and to be gathered by using multiple senses other than just our eyes for observations (Parisi, 2012). It presses social researchers to toss aside codebooks and meaning-making procedures and to become comfortable with the unknown so as to consider impossible methods for understanding data. Indeed, such a process might not only create quality in the resultant text, but may also serve to tune the human instrument of inquiry (Lopez & Tracy, In Press).

We are tired now. We let the dreaming commence. We enter into the first author's dream data. We ask our readers to imagine the retelling of the dream through the faces of two puppets—first author Sarah, with the moniker of Sally, and Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, with the moniker of Mooka (Figure 1). First author Sarah narrates the dream in a professional conference room at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI)—giving voice to and trying to

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perform the dream through each puppet. Sarah is both excited and nervous to be invited to speak with people who she perceives as experts in post-qualitative approaches. Mirka has titled the panel, “How is Data.”

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Caption: A data dream addressing the question, “How is data?” Sarah Tracy (aka Sally Straightlace) on left. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg (aka Kewl Kid Mooka) on right. Photo courtesy of Sarah J. Tracy.

As you read, we invite playfulness and the welcoming of uncertainty. Perhaps we will remember what we dream. Perhaps we can wake up in time to jot a few notes down. Perhaps we simply enjoy where our imaginations can lead us.

“How is Data” – in First Author Sarah’s Voice

So, I had a dream last night about data, and it unfolded in a playful conversation between myself—or at least some version of myself--and I think it was Mirka, or at least a version of her.

We were talking about data, and what it was, and how we should think about it. Specifically she asked, “*How* is data in contemporary qualitative inquiry?”

I thought to myself: *How* is data? Huh. That’s not a question I’ve considered before.

Sure, I’ve thought a lot about *what* is data. But, “*how*” is data? I said, “Isn’t the “how” question related to analysis...like how do you analyze the data?” I thought that might end the conversation.

But Mirka was persistent. She said, “Hey, I’m talking to you Sarah Tracy. I want YOU to pay attention.” I want you to think about “HOW is data,” and “what are its main issues and problematics.”

So, I stuck with her. I thought, why not?

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I gotta sleep, and this dream is way more interesting than the typical night before a conference presentation dream. You know the one, where you show up an hour late and realize that you got the time wrong?

But I digress. Here's my best re-enactment of our dream conversation. Keep in mind that both characters are just dreamed up versions...which you may or may not think is "real" data.

Dialogue Delivered by Puppet "Sally"

Dialogue Delivered by Puppet "Mooka"

<p>Hi, I'm Sally Straightlace. Or at least that's how I think people consider me at QI. In other environments, I'm "edgy." Here in Champaign, not so much. I'll admit it. I like research questions, I like to code, and I even use qualitative software every once in a while. Also, I'm author of a "big-tent" model for creating qualitative quality (Tracy, 2010).</p> <p>Yes, I read Koro-Ljungberg, M., MacLure, M., & Ulmer, J. (2018). D...a...t...a..., data++, data, and some problematics. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), <i>The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research, 5th ed.</i> (pp. 462-484). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.</p> <p>Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2013). "Data" as vital illusion. <i>Cultural Studies↔Critical Methodologies</i>, 13(4), 274-278. doi:10.1177/1532708613487873</p> <p>St. Pierre, E. S. (2014). A brief and personal history of post qualitative research: Toward "post inquiry". <i>Journal of Curriculum Theorizing</i>, 30(2), 2-19.</p> <p>Yes, but if nothing else, talking to me will give you an idea of how a newbie to this post-qual stuff is trying to make sense of it.</p>	<p>Hi, I'm Mooka. I've been writing a lot on post-qualitative research lately. People like Sally think I'm in the cool kids club these days. Well, some of the ideas are pretty new, and it's about time that the straight-laced types like Sally started paying attention. So, let's see...</p> <p>So, Sally, first of all, did you read any of the articles I sent you?</p> <p>You do realize that there's a lot more out there besides those, don't you?</p>
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It's funny, because at first I was really kind of scared to read it.

Yeah, maybe. But, it was almost like I thought, "everything is going well in my world without my knowing or thinking about these ideas." Maybe I don't want to think about them because then I'll have to go and rethink all the stuff that my career is built on.

Yeah, yeah. That is great to hear. And, like I said, I have been thinking about these ideas for a bit. Here's what I'm pulling from the arguments in terms of the question of "how is data".

I think you're right that I and many other qualitative researchers have just thought about data as this *inert* and *lifeless* thing. Then we as researchers get to swoop in, wave a magic analysis wand, and be the ultimate meaning-makers. And I can see your point that, in this story, the researcher is this all powerful guru, and the data kinda gets used. We actually say, "how are you going to *use* this data," and in the process, it kind of gets abused, and scrunched and sorted in all kinds of ways.

Yeah, yeah, about that odor. I loved reading about positivist odor. That's vivid. You really got me thinking about what positivism smells like. Like, what is the odor of positivism?

"Post-qual *stuff*?" Okay, I guess that's better than calling it "post-qual data." Well what are your initial reactions?

Scared? You've got to be kidding me. They're ideas, and it's not like you—with your book, your consulting, your criteria model—have a lot to be scared of.

Well, that might be true. But, seriously, I want to hear from you about what you think. As we said in our chapter, "We are not proposing a *critique* against past or existing qualitative research practices but are putting forward a call for action to expand data and consider...inquiry outside the grip of normative data (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2018, p. 470)."

Great. Go on.

Yeah, many researchers treat data like it's just sitting there, waiting to be "collected" and "processed." Like it's half dead or not at all useful until it's "awakened" by specialist, methodical procedures. We really think this lends itself to as we said the chapter "a lingering positivist odor" (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2018, p. 463).

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<p>[chuckle] So what you're saying is that positivism definitely does NOT smell like chocolate chip cookies.</p> <p>Okay, alright with the odor. But anyway, your work is also really helpful for pointing out some disconnects between using poststructural theories of the subject – for example, treating people as crystallized selves (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005) and then in the methods section treating people as essentialized individuals waiting to be emancipated. That disconnect is a really good point.</p> <p>I'm also getting that it's important to question how or why qualitative researchers elevate some texts (like interview transcripts; fieldnotes) over others (like policy documents or movie scripts).</p> <p>Yeah, good point. But I'm not sure what this means when I go to write my article. I'm a big fan of headers and subheaders. I'm not sure if the ones we are using (like "findings") are the right ones, but my brain likes a bit of organization.</p> <p>Okay, I'll try to figure that out. In the meantime... What I'm also hearing from your work is this: If reality is impossible to represent, then why do people like me have this urge to delineate what equals rigorous data collection. In my big tent qualitative model (Tracy, 2010), I lay out rules of thumb for high quality data collection and I also encourage people to seek out what is typical in whatever journal they are seeking to publish in.</p>	<p>Huh. I like that question. Maybe like rotten eggs. Like, the eggs smelled good at one point, and everyone said they smelled good, but if you really sat with the eggs long enough, you realized they stunk.</p> <p>No way. [smile]</p> <p>Well, glad you found that useful.</p> <p>Yes, yes, as St. Pierre (2014) said, "If one thinks with post ontologies, it makes no sense to separate our analysis of words found in existing documents into a section called "literature review" from our analysis of interview and fieldnote words in a section called "findings." (p. 12).</p> <p>I want you to think bigger. Don't be a slave of traditional subheadings.</p> <p>Yes, and where did these rules come from? If we believe that reality is unknowable, more data might get us even further away from what we typically think of as "objective truth" than closer to it. It's like one representation on top of</p>
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<p>Yes, yes, I love that example, and wrote two kick-ass sentences about Jack example and the problems with data in my 2nd edition book (Tracy, 2020).</p> <p>Um, yes. Um maybe? Uhh, I'm still working on it. I actually wrote two more paragraphs on post-qual earlier this week prompted by this dream.</p> <p>Okay, so in your handbook with Maggie and Jasmine, I see that we really need to be thinking about all the different <i>types</i> of data.</p> <p>Like, maybe this whole puppet show dream sequence? Like this is data too? Response data?</p> <p>Okay, great. But I have to point out, all these different types (like "response data") still use the word "data". So what would it be without that word? So, what word would you use instead?</p> <p>Seriously, I just don't know what else to call it so I'm asking.</p> <p>Ahhh, Mooka, yeah maybe.</p>	<p>the other... and that's why trying to capture a single truth is problematic. Case in point, let's think about my class assignment where I asked students to document their relationship with data. My student, Jack, ate pieces of his interview transcriptions (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2018). Now, at this point, this example has gotten really well known. People keep re(presenting) it and every representation creates another meaning—which may or may not have much to do with what he did in class that day.</p> <p>You boiled it down to two sentences?</p> <p>Okay, never mind. Fine, fine. Go on, what else do you think?</p> <p>Yeah, there's really not just simple data, but as St. Pierre says, there's dream data, emotional data, and response data. Like, what is it that people say or do in response to your work?</p> <p>Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>Ahhh, the "what else would I call it then" trump card. [Have you been talking to Janet Morse?]</p> <p>Just because we're showing issues and problems with the concept of data doesn't mean it's <i>our</i> responsibility to solve the issue or come up with a new word. We're not the ones with a preoccupation with coding and categorizing. Indeed, what we're saying is that maybe this whole qualitative</p>
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<p>[to audience] Why does she have to be so gosh dang SMART??</p> <p>Okay, okay. Why don't we just call data, "stuff" for now, but I don't think that's going to cut it when I'm trying to publish in management journals.</p> <p>Uhhh, that's the flagship journal for my main content area of organizational communication!.</p> <p>Uhhh, yeah!</p> <p>That makes sense.</p> <p>Great.</p> <p>Fine.</p> <p>Okay, you're also asking people to rethink a reliance on linearity (which may come in the form of time-stamped chronological fieldnotes) and measuring (like counting the number of certain codes through content analysis).</p> <p>Yes, that sounds awesome, but what does that mean? I can't figure out how this would look in life as lived.</p>	<p>enterprise can't be addressed with methodological strategies and criteria. Maybe there <i>isn't</i> a good word for data. Isn't that better than kidding ourselves that there is some easy answer?</p> <p>Well, you could just stop trying to publish there.</p> <p>Wow, I guess I can see the conundrum.</p> <p>I guess I would say that you don't have to abandon the notion of data all together. Certainly, some scholars have, but others continue using the word d...a...t...a... while acknowledging its problematic status."</p> <p>We just want people to acknowledge this problematic status.</p> <p>Great</p> <p>Fine.</p> <p>Okay, go on...</p> <p>Yeah, we recommend that people experiment with non-linearity through things like data pulses, data frequencies, data intensities, heterotemporalities (Koro-Ljungberg, 2013). And then, document and reflect on oneself and others in relation to continuously changing time. Basically, we are saying that there is a lot of value in following data in different time dimensions.</p> <p>Well, if we said what it was exactly, wouldn't we be falling into the same trap of strategies and linearity again? You're</p>
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<p>I'm not trying to lure you. I'm just trying to figure out how to do this stuff myself, and teach my students.</p> <p>Yep, that's what I'm going to tell my undergrad Arizona State University students next semester. Just read several books by Foucault and Derrida and you'll figure it out. Start reading and I'll see you in a few weeks!</p> <p>Awesome. So what might that <i>look like</i>?</p> <p>Okay, what's the question?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>[look around, pause for a moment]. In an academic conference room. That's obvious.</p> <p>Well, that's what comes to mind. What would you say to the same question... "where are we standing right now?"</p> <p>Ha, ha. Yeah, that's pretty good.</p> <p>Okay, yeah, that's true, and it's also a lot more playful and interesting than my first answer.</p> <p>Hmmm, okay, okay, I got it, "Where we are NOT is on the quad having a picnic and playing frisbee."</p>	<p>not going to lure me there so easy Sally Sraightlace.</p> <p>Well, I think a place to begin is this. Don't teach them strategy. Have them read the theory, and they'll get there.</p> <p>Okay, now you're just being sarcastic. I happen to work at the same university as you, so I know about ASU undergrads, and there ARE ways to make this work.</p> <p>Hmmm... why don't I ask a question and see how we might answer within the traditional view of data versus how we might answer with this problematized view of data.</p> <p>Ready?</p> <p>Where are we standing right now?</p> <p>But is it obvious? Is that for sure where we are? Is that the only right answer?</p> <p>Couldn't it be just as true that the location of this conference is [in a movie voice], "In an academic halfway house... somewhere between a) striving for legitimacy, and b) diddling our academic egos via puppets."</p> <p>I'm not saying that it's TRUE, but I think it's just as true as the first answer. We want people to play with space and time. Indeed, it may be that we are in between spaces as much as we are really in a conference room.</p> <p>Great. So, let's practice. I'll ask the question again Sally, and just play with me. "where are we?"</p>
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<p>Yeah, that's super interesting. Something else that I was struck by in your article is that you all also have this thing called, well I promise I'm not going to eat it, but this is what it looks like... [hold up sign with Data] (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2018). I don't know how to say it, well, let me try, I'll call it Data. [Darth Vader voice]</p> <p>Okay, I get that conceptually, but can you give me an example?</p> <p>Hello, an example?</p> <p>Really, Mooka, now you're just going to ignore me?</p> <p>Do you need a tissue?</p> <p>Why are you singing? Am I losing my mind here?</p> <p>Well, I'm not sure, but I think I saw Johnny Saldaña around here somewhere. I suspect he would have some ideas on how to code it.</p> <p>Sure, you know, all kidding aside, another thing I really appreciate that you're asking us to consider <i>who</i> gets to define what data is and to consider the</p>	<p>Awesome. You're getting there. The point is to avoid fixing data in space, and to see how the same space has multiple purposes and overlaps with other spaces, and how spaces are disagreed on.</p> <p>Okay, that's kind of a weird way to say it, but sure. Our point is, that rather than the interviews, observations, extant texts, and visual forms of documentation that comprise the majority of data, Data occupy the space of everything else</p> <p>[no response... silence]</p> <p>[more silence with dancing]</p> <p>[sneeze]</p> <p>[lalalalalala singing noise]</p> <p>No, the point is those ARE my examples of Data. Silence, sneezes, noise, affect. Those ARE Data. What we're saying is all this kind of stuff is important, but right now, it's ignored and how the heck would you even code that?</p> <p>True, true, he probably does have a section in his best-selling (what is it now) 3rd edition(?) coding manual that would help with that (Saldaña, 2016). But [sigh], that's not my point. My colleagues and I just want people to think about data another way. Not as something simple, or given, but also as something that is wrapped up in politics and power.</p>
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<p>consequences—intended or unintended--of defining it one way rather than another.</p> <p>So leaving your readers with uncertainty is the <i>point</i>?</p> <p>Okay, well, you definitely reached that goal. Uncertainty, accomplished!! [pause] But what I don't want to feel is stopped.</p> <p>[accusing] In your conclusion of the SAGE handbook piece, you indicate that this approach to data can “bring understanding and interpretation to a standstill” (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2018, p. 479).</p> <p>I guess, though, all of it feels a bit paralyzing. Like, I'm not sure what to do next. I want to <i>solve</i> problems. I want to be <i>helpful</i> to other scholars. I want to create research and practice qualitative methods in ways that might create <i>social justice</i>. It seems that people, more so today than ever, are searching for tools to do this. How do we engage this approach to data and still aim for wellbeing and justice in the world?</p> <p>So, I guess I want to have a better idea of—if this approach was being used to create change and promote awareness—what would that <i>look like</i>? Like, if I were watching a movie, or show, what would the researchers and participants be doing? What would they be writing? How would they be acting differently?</p> <p>Well, I wouldn't mind those things. If nothing else, I'm asking for a story of what it looks like in life as lived? And perhaps a picture that helps me see the connection between viewing data in this way, and then how this connects up with creating change and awareness.</p>	<p>And we'd actually go another step. Instead of providing simple definitions, we hope to leave readers with the open prospect of unsettlement, discomfort, and uncertainty.</p> <p>One of them.</p> <p>Okay.</p> <p>Yes, we think this approach can encourage researchers to reconsider their actions, plans, and future directions.</p> <p>Well, I think we're on the same page regarding action. As Lather and Smithies discuss, data can create change and advocate for awareness (Lather & Smithies, 1997). So, this view isn't so different than <i>your</i> interest. I think we actually have that in common.</p> <p>Are you asking me for guidelines? Or Tips?</p>
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<p>Yes.</p> <p>Um, no.</p> <p>Hmmm.... Yes, I think so.</p> <p>[To audience] And maybe, just maybe, this dream is one answer to “<i>How</i> is data in contemporary qualitative inquiry?”</p>	<p>Okay, okay, I will think about it. But I guess I would close with this. Presumably, your musings on this material created this dream. Yes?</p> <p>Have you ever presented a dream via puppet show as a conference presentation before?</p> <p>Did you learn or discover something about data and its limits along the way?</p> <p>Well, for being “paralyzed” you sure did come up with one fantastic dream. If that’s what paralyzed looks like, I’ll take it.</p>
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Awakening (?): Post-Data Dreaming [Method Assemblage].

Blink the eyes. The mind is still dizzy. What happened? How did puppets enter into the dream? When sleepers awake from REM sleep, dreams are often vivid and lifelike; but, when awoken during non-REM sleep, dreams are more conceptual and thoughtlike (Knock Knock, 2004). Perhaps this is a mixture of sleeps. So, where do we begin to make sense of this dream data? *Should* we “make sense” of it?

Contemporary psychoanalysis of a dream starts with free associations: images, elements, emotions, experiences, or words (Knock Knock, 2004). Silence. Puppets. **Data**. Positivistic odor. Justice. Darth Vader. What do we do now? How do we work with this data? Dream analysis suggests breaking these elements down, bit by bit, to make data manageable and comprehensible for understanding unconscious meaning (Knock Knock, 2004). But what if this data wants to be raw (*brut*) and messy (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015)?

This is where being awake is a problem. How do we understand truths of human phenomena, hiding in our subconscious minds, if dreams are non-sensical and incomplete? What

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methods do we use to understand dreams? Non-representational theory suggests we create a methodogenesis, an assemblage, of our waking madness and our dream logic (Gale, 2018; Vannini, 2015): What “day residue,” or activity in our real lives, corresponds to the dreams we have? What “dream messages” are explicitly arriving and leaving through the characters, images, locations, and emotions in dreams? We feel excitement, frustration, paralysis, confusion, and playfulness. Can this dream simply be a dream, or must we connect the dream “meaningfully” to our emotions or something happening in our daily encounters?

Early cultures would turn to dream circles to orally narrate, perform, and commune over what unfolded in the dreams. Once the dream was spoken aloud, each person would take a turn in the circle and re-narrate/re-enact the dream as if it were their own (Knock Knock, 2004). Perhaps this is one approach. Perhaps it is through making a “Dream Machine” that uses story, poetry, art, dance, play, song, and/or pantomime to observe, think and write through data (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). A method for datadreaming could be a photograph, a drawing, scribbles and doodles of notetaking, a mosaic, or puppets; each disrupts the need for representation. Rather than viewing interpretation as a process of codifying and cleaning qualitative data (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2015), perhaps it is better to simply play and create. The drawing below, created by the second author, is a methodogenesis of dream data (Figure 2). It can also be an access point for engaging with social justice since the drawing blends listening, empathizing, and acceptance of the emotions being shared by the first author. Differing hues, shades, colors, shapes, angles, and elements (such as puppets, **data**, Darth Vader, rhizome, “big-tent” etc.) each intermix to express the ambiguity of emotions and nonsensicality of dream logic. Essentially, the drawing acts as a surrealist collage and non-representational method with links to Dadaism, an art movement that emphasized absurdity in order to understand a Freudian

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analysis of the unconscious mind (Vannini, 2015). Surrealist artwork keeps us as researchers from speaking *for* the dream data and attempting to interpret what it all means.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Caption: A methodogenesis for datadreaming: A dream mosaic of images, elements, emotions, and words from “How is Data”. Drawing courtesy of Corey Reutlinger.

We would argue that the drawing is powerful as qualitative **data** in so much that it provokes, creates, and points. Being beautiful or meaningful, as a text itself, is the consolation prize.

Speculating: A Conjecture for Social Justice and Transformation

We are still looking for an answer to the question, “*How* is data in contemporary qualitative inquiry?” Is an answer needed, or can the question simply be enough for a meaningful and important journey? Speculation is a key aspect to abduction: it is about possibilities, maintaining mystery, and generative forms of data without a conclusion (Parisi, 2012). Data is probabilistic (Gale, 2018)—neither quantitative or qualitative, but rather indeterminate, unregistered, and incomplete. We cannot begin to determine what data is present (or how it works) UNLESS we impose a scholarly touch upon it: inquiry that wants to “clean up” data is the turning point toward either quantitative or qualitative (to analyze, interpret, codify, operationalize, conceptualize, theorize, etc.). Data is raw (*brut*), experimental, messy, vanishing, offshooting, and becoming (Löytönen, Koro-Ljungberg, Carlson, Orange, & Cruz, 2015). Dream data, especially, shows how our bodies’ inner worlds connect with the physical, outer world.

So, what do we do with dream data? Where do we go, or is it okay to remain lost in the ‘in-between’? One key takeaway from datadreaming is simply noticing our compulsion toward wanting things to be simplistic, interpretable, logical, and meaningful. Certainly, comfort often comes through “making sense” of what’s happening in the world. Re/presentation means to

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create associations, connections, and sensibilities, but it also means to fall back into habituated patterns and categories that may not actually track a preferred path. Sleep has always been a mystery to us. However, “cleaning” dream data in the effort to understand “how” dreams connect with the waking world may implicitly invite us back into a positivistic illusion: the need for an answer as to why we experience various social phenomena such as suffering, anxiety, injustices, fears, heartbreaks, etc. Perhaps systematic qualitative inquiry derails us from the potentialities of what life can become. If dreams are spaces for divine messages or for exploring alternate versions of reality (Knock Knock, 2004), how can we excavate the messiness of dream data without slipping into meaning-making? How do we keep ourselves from feeling compelled to turn to determinism and reductionism for understanding what and how data is? In other words, datadreaming invites us to reconsider, rethink, and reinvent what we think should be science.

Gathering elements of dream data showcases one other speculative possibility: how can humans accept and thrive in a milieu non-sense-ness and uncertainty? Such ambiguity invites infinite possibilities for social justice and transformation. That which is unspoken, invisible, fragmented, forgotten, or incommunicable in and of the body can be expressed through dreams. Those who are invited to witness or co-perform a dream are given a unique opportunity to radically shift their bodily ethics around empathy and compassion as a sort of transmutation. For example, although Corey cannot access the exact vibrancy, actioning, or emotions that compose Sarah’s dream, he can find resonance, or an access point of commonality, to radically engage in and with the dream data.

Likewise, social justice means to do things in everyday interactions (such as listening, watching, or dialoging) to humanize multiple social and material histories and realities for the sake of creating wellbeing (Huffman, 2014; Johnson, 2017). For Corey to let go of his need for

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