Thinking With New Materialism in Qualitative Case Studies

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Abstract
In this article, we discuss challenges and implications of thinking with new materialisms and the Deleuzian philosophy of immanence in qualitative case studies. The aim is to establish a terrain and language of “minor case studies.” Deleuze denies two-world ontologies and the ontologically status of single bodies, emphasizing instead how assemblages of human and non-human bodies together produce the world. In this terrain, cases are not objects of inquiry, but life-giving forces that create movement. This in turn changes the premises for how we can approach and explore cases. Rather than represent, comment and explain what cases are, we illustrate how a case-assemblage creates possibilities for event-based thinking regarding interesting phenomena (cases), and how these cases are twisted, stretched and pulled out of a conventional case study design. We conclude by discussing epistemological consequences of new materialist ontology.

Keywords
philosophy of science, social justice, virtual environments, dialectic critique, case study

Introduction
In recent decades, new materialisms and the turn to matter have gained popularity as a philosophical framework for qualitative case study research in the social sciences of sport. Informed by post-structuralist, feminist, post-colonialist and queer theories they reject the earlier historical materialism of Hegel and Marx, which focused on the development of social institutions and practices within a broad economic and political context of material production and consumption (Fox & Alldred 2017). By assessing such economic and structuralist determinism as insufficient to question rationalism, patriarchy, modernism and science, the new materialisms have become a critical stance for researchers who find materiality of great importance but do not want to prioritize one stratum over another in order to explore various sport related phenomena.

More specifically, the philosophical framework of new materialisms entails a Deleuzian idea of immanence which means that there are no structures, mechanisms or systems at work governing the world from the outside. Instead, there are events comprising affective flows between various bodies (human and non-human), and within which the realms of nature and culture together produce the world (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). To deal with this unstratified terrain, some efforts have been made to make use of traditional case study designs within which data sources provide researchers with the ability to analytically move beyond dichotomies like agency/structure and animate/inanimate, and instead map affective flows, relations and territorializations in assemblages (see e.g. Enright & Gard, 2016; Hordvik et al., 2019; Thorpe & Clark, 2020).

Hence, one way to address the philosophy of new materialism is that any and all case study designs are appropriate as long as they provide the researcher with suitable data. In our view, however, this is an awkward combination of the idea of immanence and data-driven approaches to research that indicates an ontological confusion (cf. Fullagar, 2017; Giardina, 2017; cf. Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2014). Rather than relying on the ontology of immanence as research design, this is a way to privilege pragmatic choices of method as starting places for new materialist case studies. While method-driven approaches may be useful in order to map the processes of change going on in various events without referring to stratified orders, a crucial problem is that we make use of
methodological conceptions that are ready-made and already at work when we start to think. As researchers, we simply rely on a methodological common sense (Hein, 2017, p. 659). At the same time, we treat research design as a transcendental, i.e. an independent process separated from the event it attempts to make into data (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 361). Method-driven approaches simply do not challenge the established body of traditional methodology as the privileged locus where the design of a case study appears (cf. Hein, 2017). The very idea of using a predetermined method forces us into a prescribed order that preclude all other bodies in the research process to participate in the case study design.

Such reflections about the prioritized status of the methodological body of traditional case study research, and hence predefined cases, have generated an increased interest in “minor science” and how continuities, fluxes and affects in an event produce cases (cf. Fox & Alldred, 2015; Jackson, 2017; St. Pierre, 2017). Instead of strengthening the status of established case study methodologies, minor science promotes all components (human and non-human bodies) included in an event to come together and produce cases. In this paper, we wish to explore what happens to a case study when we take this ontological step; establish a terrain and a language for Deleuzian-inspired “minor case studies”; and discuss how this may bring new epistemological conditions within which infinite learning is produced. This approach entails a radical shift that moves our thinking about cases away from predefined study objects toward performativity and cases as live-giving forces. Thereby, it also changes the premises for how we can approach and explore cases.

**Traditional Case Studies**

Given that immanence is not dependent of anything outside itself, it could perhaps be considered an ontological divergence to even mention traditional case studies at this moment. But, since we are trained in traditional research methodology, and interested in what the ontology of immanence may do to a traditional case study, and among other things wish to communicate with a field where traditional case study methodology undoubtedly is practiced within new materialist inquiries (see e.g. Enright & Gard, 2016; Hordvik et al., 2019; Thorpe & Clark, 2020), it would be quite unethical to pretend that traditional case study methodology does not exist. It would be both dishonest and disrespectful to explore what happens to a traditional case study within an immanent ontology without inviting traditional case study methodology to the inquiry. Instead, we suggest that we need to understand the situation where traditional case study methodology encounter immanence through all the components involved in the event, and not decide in advance what really matters and what does not.

Overall, case studies have a long tradition in qualitative research (Andrews, 2017; Gerring, 2011), and has contributed to a numerous research projects across a broad range of social science fields (Yin, 2014). In general, case studies are conducted as contextually located empirical in-depth investigations of phenomenon that are of a specific interest to the researchers (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014; Longhofer et al., 2017; Yin, 2009) and do not include the idea of having a formal design. A case may be successfully created out of any phenomena as long as it has identifiable boundaries and comprises the primary object of a study. Yet, every type of case study involves the desire to analyze the case in relation to contextual conditions and some of the cases may even include embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2014). While the boundaries between each key term (context, case and embedded units of analysis) are defined in relation to each other and thus not likely to be sharp, traditional case study researchers often attempt to enforce stable definitions and boundaries in order to prevent the case from growing too large (Andrews, 2017; Gerring, 2011). When it comes to defining the key terms of a case study, spatial- and activity driven boundaries are more apparent than temporal boundaries (cf. Creswell, 2003; Gerring, 2011; Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). Traditional case study researchers tend to be confident about what is going on within a case and where the geographical area of a case begins and ends, but have less interest in determining how, when and why a case begins and ends.

Another reason for creating stable definitions of the key terms of a case study is to achieve transparency. This is one of the most fundamental characteristics of qualitative research (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). In order to evaluate the quality of an argument, the logic that generates the conclusion as well as the premises that supports it need to be accessible. Hence, credible case studies need to be detailed regarding both how the studies are framed and how the analyses are conducted (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014; Yin, 2014). Overall, the credibility of case research is established by the duality of being situationally grounded and seeking a sense of generality. Case studies need to be empirically disciplined and take account of contextual particularities already in the data collection phase. A sense of generality, then, appears when the researcher goes beyond the empirical findings and seeks broader theoretical understandings through abstraction (e.g. Gioia et al., 2013). For example, a case study about how young people’s health is produced within a specific learning event cannot be just about how young people’s health is produced within a specific learning event. It needs to address more general questions like for instance the relational production of agental capacities that make young people change position from not knowing to knowing within the learning event. Hence, generality within qualitative case studies is not a question about the possibility to generalize the results to other empirical contexts or cases, but rather the extent to which a sense of generality can be found in terms of theory (Yin, 2014).

The essence of traditional case studies is thus to create local empirical knowledge as well as general theoretical knowledge. To this end, case study researchers distinguish between at least three methodological practices, induction, deduction and abduction by which they proceed from a set of grounds to a set of claims (Toulmin, 2003). Briefly, inductive case studies (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989) entail an option to generate general...
theoretical knowledge by conducting empirical analysis. The approach proceeds from a number of empirical results and assumes that the connection that has been observed in all these results is also generally valid. In contrast, deductive case studies proceed from a pre-selected theory that works as a general rule, and asserts that this theory explains the case. By explicitly contextualizing the selected theory before subjecting it to empirical tests, the researcher’s claims become situationally grounded. In addition to induction and deduction, many case studies are based on abduction where a single case is interpreted through a hypothetic overarching pattern (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Unlike deduction, the researcher does not make use of the theory as if it was “true.” Rather the researcher investigates the theory and the context simultaneously and elaborates the theory with the aim to make it compatible with the empirical material. In establishing a sense of generality, abductive case studies have connections to a perspectival approach wherein empirical facts are always theory laden (Hanson, 1958).

When it comes to the interplay between context, theory and empirical data, the methodological practices of induction, deduction and abduction include different ways of thinking. They simply assign different roles to the context, theory and empirical data and thus include different plans of action in order to meet the conventional requirements of credibility in case study research, i.e. the duality of being situationally grounded and seeking a sense of generality. However, an attempt from our part to broaden the definition of qualitative case study design by moving toward new materialist theory would unavoidably struggle with these methodological practices. Not least with the stratified orders between theory/empirical analyses, researchers/data and context/case/units of analysis. But, our point here is not so much an argument in favor of the ontological step toward immanence when it comes to case study design. Instead, we wish to discuss what it means to encounter and address such an ontology and hence consider what the turn toward immanence may do to a traditional case study.

**The Idea of Immanence, Minor Science and Assemblages**

Immanence is a pivotal principle in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, and a starting place for much new materialist theory (see e.g. Fox & Alldred, 2015, 2018). Drawing on Spinoza’s monist rejection of a transcendental level independent of the everyday world of material interactions, Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 45) describe immanence as something boundless and to which there is no previous or beyond. Thereby, Deleuze and Guattari reject two-world ontologies and their transcendent perspectives that acknowledges privileged standpoints. For Deleuze and Guattari, immanence first and foremost means the denial of vertical orders, and hence the existence of underlying and overlying realities. In that sense, immanence is discussed as an absolute immanence and a plane (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 47). Important, though, is that the plane of immanence cannot be considered the uppermost layer of something nor an enclosed volume. Rather it is “a virtual, an open whole that (ontologically) prevents absolute closure” (Hein, 2019, p. 84).

Deleuze, distinguishes the virtual from the actual (Deleuze, 1994, p. 272). This does not mean that neither one is independent of the other, but their relation is asymmetrical and with continuous exchange. In terms of reciprocal relationship, the virtual becomes actual in relation to the actual and the actual becomes virtual in relation to the virtual. Simultaneously, both the virtual and the actual includes an irreducible pluralism which means that the virtual-actual movement is anything but linear and do not proceed step by step toward a predefined goal. Hence, the actual has no consistency with the virtual it embodies. It simply does not follow the rule of being alike. In relation to the aforementioned sociocultural approaches of case study research this means that the plane of immanence establishes unstable situations, i.e. their ability to create, diverge and move in different directions. In that sense, the plane of immanence adds creativity to traditional case study research in actual situations.

Even if the plane of immanence is present through the entire work of Deleuze, it is not until “What is Philosophy?” that it is examined more specifically. In this work, the plane of immanence is described as the horizon of thought (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 37–38), and thereby a foundation of thought. What emerges from this is a radical critique of a dogmatic image of thought (Hein, 2017, p. 657), i.e. thinking as a process of recognition and representation of the already known that has its basis in common sense. Instead, Deleuze (1994, p. xvi) argues that the plane of immanence require us to replace this kind of thinking with a more genuine thinking and thus a non-representational image of thought where the thought is not predetermined by mainstream knowledge. In fact, genuine thinking is not an element of knowledge but that of infinite learning. Learning, then, means composing singular points of our own bodies with elements of other bodies, to tear apart but also to be pushed forward into the unknown (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 251–252). However, living this kind of thinking-learning is not an easy task. It requires us to become something new and not repeat the already known. What complicates the situation, though, is that genuine thinking is not a natural capacity that everyone possesses. For Deleuze (1994) we are born into a conformist mode of thinking. Our thoughts are restricted by the conventional and involve processes of recognition and representation (Hein, 2017, p. 656). Generally, we are only capable of thinking that which is already recognized and recognizable and we actively need to engage in processes of thought that draws thought out of its self, to become something new. As Deleuze (1972, p. 108) explains,

Thought never thinks alone and by itself...Thinking as an activity, is always a second power of thought, not the neutral exercise of a faculty, but an extraordinary event in thought itself, for thought itself. Thinking is the n-th power of thought...But it will never attain this power if forces not do violence to it. Violence must be done to it as thought, a power, the force of thinking, must throw it into a becoming-active.
For our thoughts to become active and accordingly genuine, we need to be confronted with something that disturbs common sense (Jackson, 2017), and that forces us to produce new thoughts. Specific to genuine thinking is thus the un/conscious production of concepts that correspond to real and singular problems. Conceptual innovation, then, is an act of thought (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 21). Concepts produced by genuine thinking are not essences that determine the intrinsic nature and quality of something, nor are they things or objects distinct from living sentient beings. Rather, they are intense events consisting of an infinite number of elements which assemblage at a certain point. In this sense, concepts are relative to the elements they are composed of, but absolute in terms of their affects. Since concepts are productive forces consisting of non-constant elements, there is no reason to make use of or even discover existing concepts. Instead, the plane of immanence entails that “new” concepts have to be produced by their own distinct but inseparable components. However, it is important to remember that these productions are not processes of cause-and-effect or gradually development. Rather they are open-ended in regard to the ways they shape and reshape concepts.

For Deleuze and Guattari there is a close relationship between the plane of immanence and the production of concepts. More specifically, they are mutually interdependent. No concepts can be produced without the texture that the plane of immanence forms, and the plane of immanence cannot be thought without the concepts that populates it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 21). Their relation constitutes the internal condition for thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 44). Thinking consists of infinitive movement. Infinitive movement is what constitutes thinking and hence, what thinking has to deal with when producing concepts. This is also why the plane of immanence cannot be confused with being a concept that underlies all other concepts, i.e. dealt with as a transcendence or transcendent of anything (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 44–45). Rather, the plane of immanence is a territory which enables the texture that makes genuine thinking viable.

When it comes to case study research, the plane of immanence involves attending to a territory that is in infinitive change and becoming, and not accepting anything given whether it is about thoughts or concepts. The understanding of concepts as performative forces rather challenges the traditional understanding of words and their power to represent pre-existing things. As researchers, we can no longer position ourselves as subjects who are able to design case studies and define data in advance, nor can we make use of theoretical perspectives to order and homogenize the data. For Deleuze, this would be severe limitations of both cases and data and is illustrative of the aforementioned problem with stratified orders between researchers and objects of knowledge in traditional case study research. Deleuze explicitly rejects any idea of predetermined subjects who are transcendent or capable of transcending anything. Within an immanent terrain, researchers are not separate entities that make decisions outside the event under study or separated from data. Rather all bodies (human and non-human) are regarded as relational having no ontological status outside the assemblage that constitutes the event. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 361) emphasize a “minor science.” In contrast to royal science and its attempt to order research processes as well as data in controllable ways and prepare it to fit in a theoretical model, minor science works to maintain variation as well as the existence of heterogeneous spaces. In this sense, minor science adds force to the singularities and the turbulent flows of data that royal science is so dedicated to prevent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 362). Instead of designing a case study upon pre-existing and established methodologies, minor science therefore encourages us to start elsewhere and thus make room for the assembled entities in the event to produce something new.

At this point, we want to mark the assemblage as an important terrain where new materialist research designs emerge. Within assemblages there are amounts of relations that interact and produce various capacities in bodies to do, feel and desire (Deleuze, 1988, p. 256). Important to remember though, is that these movements of bodies are not based on cognitive decision making. Rather, affective flows within assemblages produce various desires that bodies do. In this perspective desire is not a representation of a gap or a lack of something waiting to be addressed by some acquisition activities, but a pushing and performative force that moves bodies in various directions. Desire is thus productive and includes creative capacities of bodies to engage with other bodies and consequently affect them to move in different directions. Such flows of desire replace the conventional conception of agency (as well as its conceptual opposite: social structure). Agency is simply the capacity to affect or be affected and become something else. Becomings, represent changes of capacities and states of both human and non-human bodies (Deleuze, 1988, p. 258).

Within assemblages there are at least two processes of change within which capacities, states and movements of bodies may alter: territorialization and aggregation. Territorialization refers to affects that establish bodies’ capacities to produce specific qualities, and hence clearly set out and shape their capacities to affect other bodies in the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984, p. 273). At the same time as bodies become territorialized, their possibilities to affect other bodies in the assemblage are established. However, in this flow of changes not all affects are territorializing affects. Some affects deterritorialize and reterritorialize bodies, and hence reshape both possibilities and limitations of what bodies can do.

Aggregation, on the other hand, refers to molar affects that aggregate bodies into groups by assigning those converging identities and capacities. These affects act unifying on multiple bodies at the same time and organize what often appear to be scattered bodies in specific ways. Against these processes of aggregation, Deleuze and Guattari (1984, p. 273) contrast molecular affects that produce singular outcomes. In these processes bodies are cut loose from constraining identities, categories and clusters. By ascribing bodies no significance beyond themselves, these processes of singularization may also be driving forces of deterritorialization processes simultaneously.
giving bodies capacities to resist constraining and gathering forces and opening up bodies’ capacities to do, feel and desire, that at least sometimes lead to a “line of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 216). And, even if there is no guarantee that molecular flows produce lines of flight it is important to note that molecular flows and the molar often seem to “interfere with each other and while this brings some flexibility to the molar it also brings some rigidity to the molecular” (Andersson et al., in press). Politically, they simply operate as two extremes in a continuum. While the molar include standardizations of cultural norms, categorizations and systems of organization, molecular flows enable bodies to resist these limiting forces.

Along with the conceptualization of desire as a productive force, these two processes of change (territorialization and aggregation) play an important part in our further exploration of what an ontological shift toward immanence may do to a case study. In this perspective, the emergence of new materialist case studies has everything to do with how human and non-human bodies, ideas and social institutions fold and unfold in the event under study. Affective flows within the event produce, connect and territorialize these entities, and also produce their capacities to act and desire. In relation to traditional case study methodology, this establishes a fundamental change by inviting every entity in the event under study to contribute to the design of the case study. Instead of the traditional approaches where researchers as sense-making human agents make use of already established case study methodology in order to design a case study, new materialist case studies need to emerge from the event under study, and thus from the affective flow within a case-assemblage.

**Case-Assemblage**

At a first glance, it might seem a bit awkward to combine “case” and “assemblage” in the conception of case-assemblage, and that we perhaps tend to repeat the same mistake that we initially accuse many of us of doing by starting with ready-made concepts and methods in new materialist case studies. As mentioned above, however, assemblages connect numerous elements. And, the flows of affects between these elements produce bodily desire and capacities. Case-assemblages may thus be understood as “machines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 333) that produce desire to explore various phenomena. There is simply a virtual-actual flow within case-assemblages that establishes the internal conditions of case productions—that is infinite movement. Infinite movement is also what has to be handled by our thoughts when they crystalize into specific conceptualizations of cases. However, conceptualizations of cases do not only respond to specific thoughts, they also work as life-giving forces and make possible various developments of our thoughts. Within an immanent milieu, it is not that actual cases and virtualities in/of assemblages are opposed binary forces. Rather, they presuppose each other and co-exist as different forms of investigational segmentarities fully comparable to the aforementioned molar and molecular lines of relations (cf. Deleuze & Guattari’s, 1987, pp. 199–200), and where the emergence of cases is anything but linear and do not proceed step by step out of some predefined methodology.

To provide an example of a case-assemblage, we will make use of an emerging “case” (the event of a swimming lesson within which young people become confident in mutual learning situations) and explore the mix of relations and affects that produced it. The “case” grew out of a swimming event in elementary schools in Gothenburg, Sweden, 2018–2019. We have written about this swimming event before (Andersson et al., in press), and occasionally we return to this event because it tends to interfere with our conventional thinking. The “case” turned up in our thoughts for the very first time during a turbulent encounter with some activities going on in the pool. While we were sitting on a bench beside the pool, we noticed that a girl would learn to float and that the swimming-instructor habitually hold her hands under the girl’s shoulders. At first, this act did not seem to turn out very well but after a moment of panic and fear, the girl placed her hands on the swimming-instructor’s arms, and as a response to that movement the swimming instructor moved her whole body closer to the girl’s shoulders. This in turn made the girl relax and rely on the swimming-instructor, the water and finally herself. And, after a short while she also learned how to float.

As researchers trained in traditional methodology, we had of course another predefined case in focus (the event of a swimming lesson within which people become healthy). This is also the reason why we initially entered the swimming event at all. However, the activities in the pool inserted themselves like a set of cutting edges into our predefined case and drew mutations and variations out of it. As we see it, this was also the moment when our predefined case was taken up by a case-assemblage and its deterritorializing movement, and hence encountered the ontology of immanence. The effects were produced in a situation where various bodies (human and non-human) met each other and where at the simplest one body created a flow that was broken by another body. As we sat on the stand and focused on the swimming lesson as an event in which people become healthy, the actions of the student and the swimming instructor did not resemble that of our predefined case. Even if the swimming instructor and the student had no intentions to cause difficulties, the activities going on in the pool did not make any sense to us. The student did not develop swimming skills in the way we expected her to do, and the swimming instructor was far more humble when it came to sharing the expert role with the student than we could ever have imagined. So, we were hit by new thoughts and were hitting new thoughts in quite uncontrollable ways. Simultaneously, our desire to explore various phenomenon within the swimming event changed rapidly in various directions. All at once, we wished to explore both how teacher-student expertise evolved in the swimming event and how the teacher and the student became confident in the water.

However, even if this was a liminoid moment that more or less seduced us with its charm of co-produced expertise and safety, our desire to explore how teacher-student expertise
evolved in the swimming event and how young people become confident by swimming lessons did not emerge without resistance. By reminding us of the importance of our predefined case and its potential to fill various predefined gaps of knowledge, previous research, textbooks of traditional case study methodology, colleagues at our department and the City of Gothenburg as the responsible organization of the swimming event came to act as territorilizing forces that not only produced effects that further territorialized our research interest, but also kept us aggregated as traditional case study researchers exploring a predefined case. For a brief moment, we even got stuck in what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 334) call a “black hole” within which we became isolated from all other elements in the swimming event and were just spinning around in circles and explored nothing more than the echo of ourselves.

However, while the territorial forces of traditional case study methodology, previous research, our colleagues and the City of Gothenburg produced effects of closure that kept our predefined case in its original position, both the student’s and the swimming instructor’s actions also broke with our preconception that it should be the swimming-instructor who produces safety in children, and not the other way around. Yet, the echo of ourselves, and hence the idea of a one-directional process and its straight transfer of knowledge from a knowing body to a non-knowing body did its best to keep us territorialized in this view. And, we had to return to our notes repeatedly before we realized that this process was not about knowledge at all. Rather, this was a two-directional, or even multi-directional process of learning. Once again, our desire to explore changed. This time we wished to explore how young people become confident in situations of mutual learning within the swimming event. Together with the turbulent ruptures where the student did not learn in the way we expected and where the teacher was overwhelmingly humble sharing her expert role with the student, this brought some molecular lines of relations that extracted themselves from the aforementioned molar lines of relations, and while producing the reciprocal destruction of each other’s segmentarity, a complex line of flight including various singularities was produced. In this process we were not only cut loose from our identities as researchers and the right to authoritatively define cases, we were also equated with all other entities within the swimming event.

For us, this situation is important to bring up because it certainly increased our understanding of inhibition and innovation in case production, and where phases that made us self-conscious and unable to follow the flow in the swimming event suddenly became associated with the release of our crossroad behavior. At the same time as we could not explore anything but our own echo, we also had a complex relation to the effects of our notes. At this moment, senses of frustration and curiosity appeared simultaneously in our researching bodies and we started to ask ourselves what was really going on in the pool. We also started to question our ability to predefine cases and stay focused to them. Was it even possible to hold on to a predefined case when the data told us otherwise? And if so, for what reason? In retrospect, we understand that this was the situation where we opened up for assembled entities in the event to produce cases. This was also the situation where we entered an immanent case study that was (and still is) in infinite change and becoming, and before we knew it, a “minor-case study” took shape.

At its simplest, we were dealing with a learning event in the water that involved two bodies. The one who learned and the one who taught. While the affects within this assemblage were in part physical, stimulated specific movements and swimming techniques, perhaps produced trust and self-confidence, there were typically many more relations in the case-assemblage we became a part of than just the two bodies. Except other relations linked to the physical learning event such as personal and cultural contexts, past events, water, codes of conduct, memories and experiences and so forth, there were at least three other bodies involved in the case-assemblage, namely the two bodies of the researchers and the body of traditional case study methodology. If the former relation was in part physical, the latter was for the most part sociocultural and psychological and created anxiety, curiosity, prouidness, distance, uncertainty and so forth among the researchers. Consequently, the case-assemblage comprised at least five bodies, the learner, the teacher, the two researchers and the body of traditional qualitative research. Moreover, it comprised physical elements such as water, social norms, past experiences and circumstances, personalities and expectations (not least from colleagues, previous research and the City of Gothenburg).

At the same time as the affective flow associated with this case-assemblage linked all these relations rhizomically, new capacities were not only produced in the student and the teacher, but also in the researchers and the body of traditional case study methodology. Productive forces made new affects come into existence leading to new research situations, curiosity, desire for new knowledge production (deterritorialization and reterritorialization of research interests), and also some doubts about what is going on in the pool. When it comes to the emerging case, these forces seem to extend the assembling affects beyond the swimming event and gather together various capacities produced in previous academic and non-academic events, cultural codes of academic conduct and experience of swimming-lessons and research. For instance, at the same time as we realized that the data (the teacher and the girl) was not just objects of knowledge letting themselves be understood in a predetermined manner, the traditional body of case study methodology started to make resistance. Reminders of the importance of rigorous and trustworthy research appeared intensively and created hesitation, nervousness and anxiety in our researching bodies. Among other things, we started to think about the immanent terrain of a case-assemblage and how it would impact issues like, the capacities of researchers to explore a case, the production of research interest, the bounding of a case and the emergence of a case. In practice, our thinking about case-assemblages evolved along with the emergent case, but for clarity and as a trivialized review we will draw out four features from its immanent terrain that we found valuable when it comes to establishing a language of new materialist case
studies. It should be mentioned, though, that even if these conceptualizations are situationally created along with the disruption of our conventional thoughts about traditional case study research in a swimming event, we do not consider any of these conceptualizations particularly unique for new materialist case studies in the social sciences of sport.

The Conceptualizations of New Materialist Case Studies

Beginning with the capacities of researchers to explore a case, the analysis above sets out how a case-assemblage comprises both affective forces produced in the present event and accumulative capacities that bring together affective forces from previous events. Hence, it is also an example of how a case-assemblage may link bodies together and how two researchers’ entrance to a swimming event may reterritorialize further research capacities. By re-establishing the researchers’ possibilities to do, feel and desire, the development of a research case is an unpredictable and fluid product of a case-assemblage that may reshape the codes of research conduct, the view of how the world is constituted and consequently how case studies may be performed in various directions. However, it also shows the reverse, namely, how molecular forces within the case-assemblage may deterриториalize the research desire and at least for a moment cut all these positions (including the case definition) loose on a “line of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 277).

The affective flow associated with a case-assemblage reflects one of the most important assumptions in the aforementioned description of traditional case studies, namely that research interests and definitions of specific cases may not emerge solely because of some gap in previous research or that the researcher is fascinated and curious of a specific phenomenon. The desire to explore a case is simply not based on a lack of knowledge or some individualized eagerness. Rather, the desire to explore is based on assembled creative forces that produce research capacities. While the desire to explore affects all other components in the event, it also produces interested bodies. In this perspective, neither research interest nor cases can be understood as pre-existing things, but produced out of the components in a case-assemblage. Researchers are therefore not so much interested in a predefined case, but become interested in relatively unforeseen cases during the process of exploration.

This in turn, troubles the very notion of predefined boundaries as well as the existence of underlying and overlying realities in traditional case studies. A new materialist case study does not begin with predetermined identifiable boundaries between conventional key terms i.e. context, case and embedded units of analysis. Rather, the plane of immanence provides a terrain where the boundaries (if any) are emergent within the event under study. Methodologically, this is a shift toward co-produced case studies and away from transcendental approaches of conventional case study designs. Practically, the key terms of a case study firmly shift from the context, case and embedded units of analysis to case-assemblages. In contrast to conventional case study methodologies, the concern is no longer with what spatial or activity-based boundaries there are, but with the affective flows, interactions, desire, feelings and capacities of action within a case-assemblage that produce research interests, and hence cases (cf. Deleuze, 1988).

The traditional idea of a case as closely related to the specific interest of a researcher, research identity and the researcher’s affiliation to a specific research field is thus radically re-conceptualized as a co-produced interest emerging from the flow of affect in a case-assemblage. Following this, new materialist case studies may come into existence in two ways. First, their emergence has to do with the process of deterриториalization. The flow of affect within an event may be nomadic and encourage unforeseen movements. Bodies come together and produce new and unpredictable capacities in each other, different research desires, curiosity, research interests as well as an amount of other capacities not normally related to research at all. These nomadic- and consequently minor case studies has nothing to do with constrained activities like filling out a gap in previous research or satisfying a predetermined research interest. Rather, these studies produce occasional and unexpected cases that are of specific interest to typically many more bodies than the researcher and perhaps the current research field. However, new materialist case studies may also come into existence by molar and aggregating flows of affect. These affects successfully restricts the production of research interests and hence the production of cases. Instead of releasing curiosity and desire to produce occasional cases, these affects tend to organize the case production in agreed and predictable schemas. Thereby, territorialized cases direct research desire toward a narrow range of research capacities, and by doing so they also lose their nomadic character. Deprived of their fluidity, they are no longer able to escape methodological biases such as predefined cases.

In this section, we have tried to explore how the design of traditional case studies change when it is opened up the new materialist ontology of immanence. We also suggest a language and an environment for Deleuzian-inspired “minor case studies” that turn the focus away from researchers as subjects and sole owners of research interests and toward the affective flows within a case-assemblage. Minor cases emerge not as specific interests to the researcher, but as co-produced entities of affective flows between human and non-human bodies. In the last section, we will discuss how minor cases challenge epistemological conditions included in the established body of case study research, along with other challenges raised by the plane of immanence.

Discussion

Our intention in this paper has been to explore how the design of a traditional case study change when it is opened up for the new materialist ontology of immanence. Hence, we shift the focus away from single researchers and their abilities to define proper cases, and toward all components in the event under
study, and pay attention to their relations, how they assemble and produce flows of affects, research desire and consequently new minor cases. To do so, we set out the case-assemblage as the environment where minor cases emerge. This immanent terrain forces us to give up static properties of traditional case study methodology in favor of the analysis of how research desire is produced as well as how it changes in processes of territorialization and aggregation. One of the most prominent consequences of this terrain is that cases may no longer be seen as stable entities possible to define in advance. Rather, cases always emerge from the affective flow between the components in the event under study. This in turn may result in an emergent and unpredictable series of minor case productions (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 361). While the implementation of traditional case studies is characterized by homogeneity, linearity and an academic orientation, the execution of new materialist case studies is characterized by diversity, non-linearity and reflexivity. When it comes to the organization of case study design, traditional case studies are hierarchical and tend to maintain their shape. New materialist case studies on the other hand, are flat and mutant. Moreover, traditional case studies solve problems in a context governed by a specific academic community, while new materialist case studies comprise collaborations between temporary and heterogeneous practitioners on problems defined in specific and localized context of an event.

As a consequence, new materialist case studies avoid to produce knowledge in academic isolation or in advance, but is always a result of bodies coming together in case-assemblages. Hence, the plane of immanence reorients the production of knowledge in case study research to a novel and continuous process of variation and diffusion. Ultimately, this is a call for experimentation constructing a continuum of variation around knowledge production and thus disrupting processes of reterritorialization. At the same time, new materialist case studies step beyond the endeavor of traditional case study research to achieve validity. Rather evaluative categories like linearity and reflexivity. When it comes to the organization of case study design, traditional case studies are hierarchical and tend to maintain their shape. New materialist case studies on the other hand, are flat and mutant. Moreover, traditional case studies solve problems in a context governed by a specific academic community, while new materialist case studies comprise collaborations between temporary and heterogeneous practitioners on problems defined in specific and localized context of an event.

In conclusion, we would suggest that new materialist case studies could advantageously be designed along the features of minor science. Thereby, new materialist case studies would offer new possibilities to discover and explore cases as well as the flows of affects that produce desire to research and hence research interests. The ontology of immanence make case study research infinitely more complex and unpredictable than the traditional approaches discussed above (induction, deduction and abduction). Simultaneously, they are inherently political with an intention to encourage and bring up researcher to let go of predefined methodologies and thus open up for processes of deterritorialization when it comes to research interests and desire to explore various cases. Thereby they challenge methodological territorializations of any kind, and supports lines of flight that put an end to privileges of researchers’ knowledge, in all bodies involved.

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