I'm not dancing, I'm zigzagging

Nick Emmel

A methodological investigation considering the metaphors we use to describe qualitative researching and the metaphors participants use to describe their experiences. My intention is to move from a metaphor of dance to a metaphor of zigzagging to more precisely explain the methodologies of realist (qualitative) research.
For this talk, a metaphor of dance, not a metaphor of the dramaturgical


For Janesick 'dance is about lived experience, the perfect metaphor for qualitative research design' (210)
Janesick contends that 'the qualitative researcher is very much like an artist at various stages in the design process, in terms of situating and re-contextualising the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participant in the study' (210)

Dance is an interpretative art form, qualitative research design is interpretative as well.
Like dance, qualitative research is a materially situated practice, methods are selected to get at accounts of events.

Design is the core strength of the research.

Trust, rapport, and a willingness to 'share everything', an authentic communication with participants is essential.

As with (post)modern dance reflexivity is key, self-reflection of 'ideological position', 'conceptual frame', and 'biases' in the research.
Constructivist **INDUCTIVE** grounded theory—after Charmaz (2014; 2006)

- Design to answer questions
- Provisional concepts, no theoretical categories **and** reflexive about actions and decisions
- Theoretical saturation
  - Theory matches data
- Theoretical sampling
-Comparing incidents
- Symbolic interaction: **retroduction**
- Memo writing, coding
- Agnostic about theory
- Constructivist **INDUCTIVE** grounded theory—after Charmaz (2014; 2006)
The (discovered / emergent) constructed theories from research are limited to descriptive empirical generalisations from observable materially apprehended regularities / practices / interactions / experiences, often (but not always) positioned in particular contexts.

This is an empiricist flat ontology, which looks a bit like this…
The flat ontology of inductive inference, which gives no guidance as to how we move from something observable to make claims for knowledge about the structures and mechanisms that led to a particular outcome.
Realism—getting at the real

The real exists independent of our knowing it.

But we can lay claim to know the real, albeit recognising the limitations of our explanations.

We set about knowing the real through recognising its depth ontology, which looks a bit like this ...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of the Empirical</th>
<th>Domain of the Actual</th>
<th>Domain of the Real</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td></td>
<td>😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td></td>
<td>😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>😊</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘ugly circumlocution’ of the CMO configuration—after Pawson (2013: 21)
Realist research does not start with questions, it starts with theories.

Theories are partial and fragile accounts of how something or other works in some particular context, at a particular time, and why.

We relate these theories—a bundle of hypotheses—in some way to segregated observations.

While feeble, these theories carry enough weight to tell us how we will do the research, and with whom or what.
We bring these theories into some relation with evidence to refine theories, which in turn allows us to decide on the next engagement with evidence.
The schema of the zigzag of realist (qualitative) research

Fragile ideas

Propose the internal relations (mechanisms) that makes experiences what they are

Evidence

Brought into relation with

Creatively re-describe / re-contextualise

ABDUCTION

To test, judge, refine

Ideas

—choose cases, choose methods

Evidence

Fallible model

RESOURCES
And so to an example

Since 1999 we* have been conducting research in a low income neighbourhood in Leeds, investigating aspects of social exclusion, vulnerability, inequalities, inequities, and access to services

* Andrew Clark, Nick Emmel, Joanne Greenhalgh, Kahryn Hughes, Lou Hemmerman, Becky Malby, Adam Sales
Welcome to GSFIL

GSFIL (Gipton Supported Independent Living) provides support, including housing and related advice, to people who are vulnerable and in need, in the belief that this is crucial to their success in becoming independent and realizing their full potential. We pride ourselves in ‘going the extra mile’, as this strengthens our relationship with young people and support in the community.

History

GSFIL originated from local resident action to address the housing and support needs of young people on the Gipton estate in response to anti-social behaviour and was first registered as a voluntary organization in 1992. This community led culture remains at the forefront of GSFIL’s work. GSFIL’s management committee still includes a mix of local community members including current and ex-service users. This
Thirtysomething grandparents need social services to adapt, says study
Research has led to calls for changes in government policy and a remodelling of provision to help this vulnerable group

Amelia Hill
The Guardian, Sunday 12 June 2011 18.33 BST
Reliance on services that deliver and don’t deliver, listen and don’t listen

The social conscience of time

Entitlement—a bundle of legitimate ownership rights

Resilience—the ability to respond as ‘experience walks through the door’

(The Toblerone model of vulnerability
Emmel and Hughes, 2010; 2013)
The schema of the zigzag of realist (qualitative) research

Powerlessness / relation to service providers

The temporal dynamics of powerlessness / relation to service providers

Fallible model

RESOURCES
Causal claims cannot be read-off the empirical world
Participants narrate accounts of experiences, often these are very well rehearsed metaphors. They are always authentic.

The underlying powers, liabilities and dispositions that shape these descriptions of experiences are occasionally woven into these narratives.

But explanation of the causal generative mechanisms between agency and structures that explain social processes is the (social) scientist’s responsibility.
In any programme of research we don't satisfy ourselves with that which can be materially apprehended.

Co-production will only ever get us part of the way.

Ideas, sifted, winnowed and refined through being brought into some kind of relation with empirical events, are the currency of realist research.
Our claims are causal and fallible. They lay claim, albeit with considerable care, for real mechanisms shaping regularities in particular contexts to bring about particular outcomes.

In short, we don't dance an inductive dance, we zigzag between theory and evidence.
Interested in these ideas:

#RealismLeeds

An interdisciplinary network of realist researchers across the University of Leeds

Realism@Leeds.ac.uk
@Realism_Leeds

@NickEmmel n.d.emmel@leeds.ac.uk
Photograph sources

Sebastian Luczywo at
http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2014/jul/03/photography-family-poland-sebastian-luczywo-in-pictures
References