Queer Methods and Methodologies: An Introduction

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Introduction: What we thought this book would be about

When we first envisaged this book, we anticipated that those reflecting on queer methods and methodologies might experience similar possibilities, tensions and anxieties to those we encountered in our own work. A major impetus for producing this book was our own awareness of how often we ignored or skimmed over thinking about how some methodologies and methods might not neatly fit the ‘queer’ conceptual frames we use in our research. Queer researchers are in good company with other scholars drawing on poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches such as some feminist, anti-racist and postcolonial scholars, in consciously seeking to articulate their ontologies and epistemologies but who are seemingly less inclined to consider the implications of these approaches to methodologies and methods (or at least in print). Many scholars who use queer theorisations can use undefined notions of what they mean by ‘queer research’ and rarely undertake a sustained consideration of how queer approaches might sit with (particularly social scientific) methodological choices. In research deemed ‘queer’, the methods we use often let us speak to or interact with people, usually on the basis of sexual/gender identities and within anti-normative frameworks – again, a focus shared with many scholars including feminist, gay/lesbian, anti-racist and postcolonial. If, as queer thinking argues, subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming, how can we gather ‘data’ from those tenuous and fleeting subjects using the standard methods of data collection such as interviews or questionnaires? What meanings can we draw from, and what use can we make of, such data when it is only momentarily fixed and certain? And what does this mean for our thinking about ourselves as researchers? How does this perpetual destabilising position us as researchers and what can we make of this destabilisation? We found it disconcerting that we often do not apply our queer re-theorising, re-considering and re-conceptualising to our social science methodologies and choice of methods. As queer approaches to research proliferate across the social sciences, we argue there is a certain ‘sweeping under the carpet’ of how we actually ‘do’ research as ‘social scientists’ given our attractions, and attachments, to queer theory. We believe it is timely to grapple more formally with these concerns.
Just as we were putting this collection together, the Graduate Journal of Social Science (GJSS) published two special editions entitled ‘Queer studies: methodological approaches’, focusing on the meanings and functions of the word ‘queer’ (Liinason and Kulpa 2008, Kulpa and Liinason 2009). Understanding queer as a contested and locationally contingent term, the articles in these special issues offered intriguing insights into queer thinking in relation to a number of important and ongoing debates in the Social Sciences. However, whilst ‘queer as method’ held pride of place in the GJSS articles, there was little sustained consideration about methodologies themselves. Rather, the implicit understanding seemed to be that queer can be a method or perhaps a mode of theoretical or conceptual engagement. While this is, of course, an important endeavour, we are convinced we also need to engage overtly with questions that intersect these workings of ‘queer’ together with (social science) methodologies, that is, those sets of logical organising principles that link our ontological and epistemological perspectives with the actual methods we use to gather data. As Tom Boellstorff argues (this volume): theory, data and method cannot be understood in isolation from each other and the ‘relationship between theory and data is a methodological problem’ (210). When we think of this intersection, persistent and unresolved questions emerge: What impact, if any, could (or should) queer conceptualisations have on our methodological choices and in what ways? Can social science methods be ‘queered’ or even made ‘queer enough’? How can social science methodologies feed into and question queer epistemological paradigms? How are social science methodologies, and the knowledges created by them, addressed in queer theories? If methodologies are meant to coherently link ontological and epistemological positions to our choice of methods, are methodologies automatically queer if queer conceptualisations are used? Can we have queer knowledges if our methodologies are not queer? Is there such a thing as queer method/methodology/research? These sorts of questions often overlooked in the excitement of new revelations and insights gained by queer interventions into empirical data are the types of questions we hoped might be addressed in a volume such as this, and work that emerges from it. We want to promote overt consideration of the implications underlying the use of queer approaches in research design and/or its execution, as well as on the research and writing process. This book offers a range of critical engagements with these largely unaddressed concerns lurking at the intersections between the range of queer ontological and epistemological approaches and the methodological choices made in social science research. Many of the chapters here explicitly acknowledge the parallels between this work and that of other scholars, and the debt owed to feminist scholars in particular, who have also turned their attention to these issues. One of the main objectives of this book is to have those engaged in queer research wrestle with how and in what way ‘queer’ might operate in concert with social science methodologies and methods.¹ Neither ‘queer’ nor ‘social science’ is left

¹ More general discussions about methods and methodologies can be found in both social science and textual/humanities research texts. Although this book necessarily focuses
untouched in this engagement – not only is social science research queried (as in ‘made strange’ or prodded for guiding and exclusionary normativities), but so are the limitations and possibilities of ‘queer’ approaches in social science research.

As queer has come to be central in much theorising regarding sexual and gendered lives, we begin by considering the emergence of ‘queer’ as a scholarly conceptual or theoretical approach, a political perspective and a form of self-identification or assemblage of practices of the self. While some might argue that ‘queer’ has its historical roots in forms of political activism linked to the North American AIDS epidemic in 1980s and 1990s, in this text, the focus is on how queer conceptualisations gained admittance as a form of scholarly research and, most importantly, how queer might be related to methodologies and methods. We sketch out recently emerging questions about the place of conventional research techniques in examinations of messy and unstable subjectivities and social lives and consider the place of queer approaches in these debates. We conclude with a discussion of the contributions made in this book and the rationale for its overall structure.

In organising this collection, we initially envisioned writing a more traditional concluding chapter; one committed to drawing out the common themes, approaches and ideas emerging from the collection and proposing productive possibilities for further queer and/or social science research. It became clear in the editing process that the search for or creation of such ‘common themes, approaches and ideas’ would undoubtedly be a rather forced and artificial affair highlighted by the constructed ‘finding’ of arbitrary coherences and illogical ‘logical’ connections. Given the diversity of arguments, perspectives and approaches, we had to admit it was impossible to push and prod different chapters into some sort of categorical relationship with each other. Likewise, we also determined we were not comfortable offering a pronouncement of ‘ways forward’ in a conclusion, given the multiple possibilities suggested in these chapters. Reflecting our desire to retain fluidity and diversity, as well as our recognition that there are multiple ways that a project like this could be framed, we became increasingly comfortable with the idea that the text would remain riddled with questions and uncertainties and we deliberately backed away from framing conclusive endings. Here we do not present a definitive overview or literature review or singular modes of engaging with the complex fields, concepts and methodological engagements located at the intersection with queer approaches. Rather, in this introduction, we offer the reader some contextualisation and insight into the possibilities for queering methodologies and methods.

on the expanse of social sciences, we hope that it will open spaces to articulate the tensions and possibilities of queer methods and methodologies in the broadest sense.
So, What is ‘Queer’?

While we do not adhere to any specific school of thought about what it might mean to ‘queer’ methodologies and methods, we do want to provide some background or context for the chapters that follow. Charting a route through the various bodies of literature engaging with queer approaches in search of a coherent lineage for ‘queer’ thinking is a perilous and not necessarily useful undertaking. ‘Queer research’ can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations. Queer inflected perspectives, approaches and conceptualisations have been taken up, disputed and reworked in different disciplinary contexts, reflecting the traditions of knowledge production in those disciplines. Genealogies of queer theory reveal considerable disagreement over its relationship with and debt to philosophy, women’s and lesbian studies, second wave and postmodern feminism and gay and lesbian studies (e.g. Jagose 1996a, b, Richardson et al. 2006, Sedgwick 1990, Turner 2000, Warner 1993, Weed and Schor 1997, Sullivan 2003). Whatever one’s stance on queer theory’s historical lineage, contemporary queer theory remains in continuous conversation with innumerable bodies of scholarship, however contested or collegial such exchanges might be. What is important for present purposes is how queer conceptualisations have intersected in a general sense with the research design and knowledge production in the social sciences. As the chapters in this book demonstrate, queerly crafted scholarship in both the humanities and the social sciences has pushed analyses in new and exhilarating directions.

Queer approaches of various sorts not only became visible in the HIV/AIDS activism in North America in the 1970s and early 1980s, it also surfaced across a number of disciplines receptive to the problematic of postmodern thinking – architecture, literary theory and criticism, film studies as well as sociology, philosophy and geography (cf. Bell and Valentine 1995, Butler 1990a, b, 1993, De Lauretis 1991, Reed 1997). Most scholars would concede that queer theorising initially gained greater visibility more quickly in the humanities than the social sciences. Work in the humanities challenges the conceptualisation of the modern Enlightenment subject as rational, unified and stable. Within postmodernist theorising, broadly conceptualised, scholars took critical aim at claims about a universal human condition and the linear tale of a progressive human history as artificial, improbable and unduly homogenising of the human experience. The philosophy of science literature in particular turned its critique to the notion of the supposedly unassailable ‘objective researcher’ inexorably uncovering a knowable reality through reliance on a relational theory of truth – a critique becoming increasingly visible across disciplinary boundaries (Jagose 1996b, Law 2004, Sullivan 2005). Further, the nature of the ‘subject’ of research, previously envisioned as a unified, coherent and self-knowledgeable individual, is redrawn as contingent, multiple and unstable; constituted within historically, geographically and socially specific social relations. Seemingly fixed attributes of
the self, such as sexuality and gender, are re-imagined as social constructs rather than biological certainties and their contingent appearance and interconnection taken as a matter of analysis and investigation (Jackson 2001). For many, queer theory takes up these realignments and works specifically to unwrap the commonly taken-for-granted and normalised connections between sexuality and gender in order to render visible their contingent connections. As Gorman-Murray et al. argue (this volume), ‘the notion of queer asserts the multiplicity and fluidity of sexual subjects ... and seeks to challenge the processes which normalise and/or homogenise certain sexual and gender practices, relationships and subjectivities’ (99).

Queer theory challenges the normative social ordering of identities and subjectivities along the heterosexual/homosexual binary as well as the privileging of heterosexuality as ‘natural’ and homosexuality as its deviant and abhorrent ‘other’. Many queer theorists argue, in concert with various feminist, gay, and lesbian scholars that normative understandings of sexuality (and gender) are central, organising principles of society, social relations and social institutions and are designed to preserve this hegemonic ordering (Sedgwick 1990, Sullivan 2006). While queer scholarship is most often interested in examining the experiences of sexual/gender minorities, some scholars argue for a ‘queering’ of heterosexual relations as well as including a rigorous analyses of the category of heterosexuality, its disciplinary processes and the heterosexist assumptions embedded in much social science scholarship (e.g. Hubbard 2007, Sullivan 2003, Thomas 2000).

Much queer scholarship has made good use of the interdisciplinary debates on Michael Foucault’s work detailing how sexuality itself is a historically specific concept as well as a regime of disciplinary knowledge structuring society and social relations (Foucault 1978). His attention to teasing out the available knowledges and systems of meaning in circulation in any one historical period (and place, one might add) shifted research foci from a consideration of the constitution of subjects and their subjectivities to a focus on ‘discourses’, institutions and practices that discipline and reinforce certain understandings about gender and sexuality. For many queer scholars, the disciplinary effects of the heterosexual/homosexual, man/woman binary understandings of sexuality and gender and a consideration of alternative practices that do not fit into hetero/homo categories are central. A growing body of multi- and interdisciplinary scholarship explores desires, practices and identities that defy the dualities of social categories and unsettle the epistemological and methodological assumptions underpinning much of the work on gender and sexualities – that there is a ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘homosexual’ to be studied as the object of research (e.g. Browne, Brown and Lim 2007, Butler 1990a, b, Corber and Valocchi 2003, Fuss 1989, Garber 2001, Giffney 2004, Halberstam 1998). Queer scholars can argue for the ‘playful’ possibilities of unstable and indeterminate subjectivities and for transgressive practices that challenge heteronormative sexual and gender assumptions.

Not everyone is enamoured with queer theories deconstructive tendencies and critiques have emerged from numerous quarters. Those involved in forms
of identity politics such as second wave women’s or gay and lesbian and trans movements argue that denying the stability of the subject (women or lesbian) undercuts the ground on which political activism is built by denying the existence of a viable political subject (e.g. Hartsock 1990, Richardson et al. 2006). While identities may be unstable and shifting over the course of a lifetime (as Gorman-Murray et al. discuss in Chapter 6), great comfort is found in these identities given they serve a central organising stability in many lives.

With the increasing political and social assimilation of some lesbians and gay men through legislative means such as gay marriage, LGBT human rights legislation, pension benefits and the ability to adopt children, attention is being paid to the notion of ‘homonormativity’. Whilst this term is used in a variety of ways, it is most easily introduced as the privilege (social, economic, political, racial, classed, gendered etc.) that those who were once sexual ‘dissidents’ now are supposed to experience (Duggan 2002, O’Brien 2008). Such legislative ‘gains’, it is argued, in fact privilege certain forms of ‘homosexual’ expression and regulates bodies and practices within neoliberal privatised norms; closing off contestation of normativities themselves. These arguments play out virulently in North America where the institution of ‘gay marriage’ is read as a homonormative institution that regulates, normalises and assimilates same-sex couples, valuing monogamous ‘wealthy’ couples over other forms of queer kinship (Warner 1999). Contestations of homonormativity point out that the homonormative/queer binary often implicit in these critiques, problematically neglects how we are all complicit in the reproduction of power relations (Oswin 2005). Moreover, it can essentialise (and demonise) white gay men who are assumed to experience particular forms of privilege without examining the experiences of those who are presumed to occupy these subjectivities (e.g. Elder 2002, Nast 2002).

Certain strands of queer theorising, in rejecting a representational theory of ‘truth’, use various forms of discourse and textual analyses to consider how power relations are constituted and maintained in the production of social and political meanings. With this initial focus on discourse analysis and cultural critique, some scholars argue that queer approaches, while interesting theoretically, are largely detached from the blood, bricks and mortar of everyday life. Trans scholars, for example, argue that using trans people to illustrate the fluidity of gender/sex is problematic and an appropriation of an assumed lived experience that generally does not actually engage with trans people themselves (Namaste 2000, Prosser 1998, Stryker 2006). Queer theorising arguably does not lead to effective changes around the material inequalities in everyday life (although this could be questioned by the cultural materialist strand of (still textual) queer theory). Such a critique has less purchase in the social sciences where scholars often deploy queer approaches in their examination of the material experiences of their subjects. Further, some scholars contest the supposedly liberating possibilities of queer ‘playful’, ‘fluid’ and transgressive practices and behaviours (Browne 2004, Nash forthcoming). As Yvette Taylor argues (this volume), these playful transgressions are tied up with the material possibilities of everyday life and often left largely unexplained is how
the ability to experience the variability of a self is embedded in power relations that limit and/or open up certain possibilities and not others. Critiques contend that the material possibilities of being need to be firmly linked to the economic, social and historical contexts (Richardson et al. 2006).

Queer scholarship, then, in its contemporary form is anti-normative and seeks to subvert, challenge and critique a host of taken for granted ‘stabilities’ in our social lives. ‘Queer’ is, in Law’s (2004) terms, a way of knowing that is a ‘situated inquiry’ that relates to specific ways of knowing in particular locations. Yet queer rarely recognises its own location and how it travels. Much queer theorising originated in the Global North with its particular social and historical contexts and its uncritical engagement with gendered and sexual lives in other geographical locations is not necessarily appropriate or helpful (Gorman-Murray et al. 2008, Johnston and Longhurst 2008, Liinason and Kulpa 2008, Waitt and Markwell 2006). Social science and queer intersections need to recognise the location of both of their key defining terms and their various ways of knowing (even where they are widely and diversely used). Yet, queer travels in a variety of ways across disciplines, disciplinary fields or places. This is a significant point because although there has been some investigation of how queer travels throughout the world, there has been little attention paid to the reworking and reconfiguring of queer even within the space of one institution (see for example Baldo 2008, Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002, Mertz 2008, Viteri 2008). As these and other writings highlight, there is a geography to queer thinking, theorising and identification that often leaves unrecognised the situatedness of academics from the Global North who become ‘international’, transcendent and adopted, whilst those from ‘elsewhere’ are bound to their location. Acknowledging the geographies of queer thinking can also bring into view the micro-spatialities of an academy that reflect rifts despite the tropes of interdisciplinarity.

Queer(ing) in this Collection

Despite being able to recite a somewhat cogent and coherent pedigree for ‘queer’ scholarship, what we mean by queer, we argue, is and should remain unclear, fluid and multiple. The impossibility of foreclosing debate around the meanings of queer is evident in the depth and breadth of its usage in the following chapters. But while we might argue about the impossibility of placing boundaries around a ‘true’ meaning of queer, what is meant by queer is often policed informally in situations where certain forms and approaches are deemed more authentically ‘queer’ than others. Such determinations of ‘the’ authentic approach to what is ‘queer’ work to dictate what ‘queer’ (and in turn ‘queer research’) can and cannot do. The orthodoxies of what queer is, who can write it, how it should be written (what language terms etc.) can go uncontested. Those who challenge the ‘right’ form of ‘queer’ engagement can be dismissed as ‘essentialist’/‘outmoded’/‘simplistic’/‘under-theorised’. Yet keeping queer permanently unclear, unstable and ‘unfit’ to represent any particular sexual identity is the key to maintaining a non-normative
queer position. This is not a simple task in an academy that increasingly embraces ‘queer’ contingencies while simultaneously requiring specific rules of rigour, clarity and truthfulness; all the while generating queer celebrities who supposedly ‘get it right’ (see Heckert, this volume). Wilcox (2006) understands this assertion of, and search for, authenticity as a form of queer fundamentalism, drawing parallels between religious fundamentalism and those who adopt literal and doctrinal views about queer theory. Such fundamentalisms, in our experience, are usually based on texts by (mainly US and UK-based) queer ‘celebrities’, who themselves would mainly reject such dogma (see also Browne, Munt and Yip 2010). The imperative to define ‘the right kind of queer’ is apparent in the academy and in the reviewing procedures for book proposals and articles, in informal discussions and often in conference discussions. Such processes are largely subterranean, neatly side-stepping reflection or engagement, while having the very real effect of proscribing how the term ‘queer’ can be used and understood. We experienced this form of boundary-keeping and authenticity claims in the first round of ‘reviews’ of the proposal for this book. (We were told quite specifically that we needed to both define the term ‘queer’, and define it in a particular way.)

In our initial proposal, we used the term ‘queer/ing’ to highlight the questioning nature of our project and the way in which queering the research process can shift perspectives and ideas (see also Detamore, this volume and Gibson-Graham 1999). In response, one reviewer wrote:

*Queer/ing*: It is not clear from your proposal how you are using the terms ‘queer’ and ‘queering’. I understand that contributors use the terms in a vast array of ways but you need to clarify in a paragraph (300–500 words) how the collection more broadly understands these terms and the questions raised by their usage.

Such a comment reflects the impulse to find commonality and coherence where often there is none. Our response to this comment reflects our commitment to leaving the defining up to the authors, while sensitising us to the impulses of some to seek and enforce certain definitions.

*Our response*: These terms will not be clarified, as to clarify and define these terms is to limit their usage just to these understandings. We are allowing authors to use and define the terms how they choose. Rather than policing queer, we think such a definition is inappropriate. We will not be reifying this slippery concept and its plethora of possible uses and its temporal and spatial contingency within 300–500 words.

The position we have taken for this project is one of not clarifying, and this may be seen by some (more traditional?) scholars as reflecting a lack of ‘theoretical sophistication’ and a failure to neatly box up our thinking. When we realised this, we began to think about the importance of opening up academic processes and discussing reviewing protocols in detail, to explore the internal ‘boundary
policing’ that often takes place, yet is often ignored, overlooked or silenced. Who can speak? How? Using what terms? Our collection both expands on these questions and leaves them permanently unclear. Such a tactic is intended to keep current sets of meanings associated with queer in circulation while also allowing room, we hope, for others that are as yet unknown, unasked or unacknowledged.

For us, queer is a term that can and should be redeployed, fucked with and used in resistant and transgressive ways, even if those ways are resisting what could, and some would argue already has, become a ‘queer orthodoxy’ (Browne et al. 2010, Wilcox 2006). We did not enforce any particular definition onto ‘queer’ or onto the authors included in this collection. Rather we asked each author to enunciate clearly their own understanding of ‘queer’ within their research. Therefore, while there is no common understanding of queer amongst the contributors, one can discern a commonality of approach. The pages of this book testify to the ways that refusing to specify, delimit and define can be queer, and that queer dogmas can be contested by offering other ways of exploring (mainly gender and sexual) difference. In crossing between theory, methods and methodologies, many of the chapters transgress the supposed ‘sophistication’ of queer theorising by questioning its necessary usefulness and offering other ways of knowing and doing.

Perhaps ironically, in not proscribing how authors should use ‘queer’ in any particular way, there was an assumption by a number of authors that we would do this work in the introduction, again through a search for commonality, coherence and consistent ‘themes’ or meanings. In a traditional sense, a ‘good’ introduction should ‘clarify the terms’, draw out similarities and highlight differences (perhaps even determine ‘errors’) in understandings. Many authors resisted our direction to define ‘queer’, nervous, as we were, of pinning down this concept. We worked hard to be clear that what we wanted was not a definition of queer itself but an understanding of how queer was being deployed by the author. Several authors believe there is a coherency to queer, or a knowledge of the term that connects us all, and used footnotes rather than the main text to outline their use of queer. Most authors use queer to do particular things, to create specific spaces and to open up particular lines of enquiry. The lack of coherence across the collection indicates the diversity of queer theorising and its refusal to be bounded, controlled or defined.

Social Science Methods/Methodologies: The Possibilities and Plethora of Queer Methods and Social Lives

Thinking about social science research involves initially recognising that this field of research can be interrogated in terms of its distinct parts – methods, methodologies and ‘the social’. There is a logical progression in the research process whereby a researcher, in taking up an ontologically theoretical position on the ‘social’ then takes up a set of epistemologies that drive the choices regarding methodologies and methods. Nevertheless, ontological, epistemological, methodological and methods-
related considerations necessarily intersect, overlap and are engaged in mutual and contingent constitution. This is an inter/cross/trans disciplinary conversation, as this book highlights. For some authors, their disciplines are read as ‘queer’ from the outset. Boellstorff (this volume), for example, asserts that anthropology is queer in part because it investigates everyday lives and cultures that are nuanced and complex. Valocchi (2005) argues that ethnography, as a methodology, enables the intersections of sociological and queer theories, because it allows for openness, flexibility and change. Green (2007), however, questions the need to interlink what he understands as the distinct fields of sociologies (concerned with the social) and queer (deconstructionist) theories. These do not have to be integrated or intersected and rather can focus on distinct issues/conceptualisations. Plummer (2005: 371) argues that the differences between critical humanism and queer theory should not be completely reconciled, arguing that ‘contradiction, ambivalence and tension reside in all critical enquiries’. We would contend that across social research, there is the potential to variously deploy and rework ‘queer’, as well as to critically engage with and contest theories, concepts and ideas that have developed in the humanities and through particular forms of textual and linguistic analyses (Gamson 2003, Plummer 2005, Seidman 1995, Valocchi 2005, Warner 1999). However, what forms these engagements might take, or how they might be categorised, necessarily remains permanently blurred, contingent and multiple, and following Plummer, nor do we seek to resolve contradictions or tensions.

We will now move on to consider various strands of methods, methodologies and social research, glancing at huge areas of writing, thinking and critique to give the reader an overview of some of the key issues underlying much of the book. After a brief discussion of methods and methodologies, including feminist and queer engagements with these, the proposal for ‘new social research methods’ will be outlined. We briefly address how contestations of ‘the social’ relate to queer contestations of stabilities and normativities. In this section, we attempt to flag some of the wide ranging areas touched on in discussions of queer methods/methodologies. There is, as always, far more to be said and done.

Methods/Methodologies: Is there a Queer Method?

This book does not offer technical guidance on research design nor is it intended to introduce research methods and methodologies as they are practiced in the social sciences.² We begin our discussion with a consideration of the intersections of methods and queer thinking. Research ‘methods’ can be conceptualised as what is ‘done’, that is, the techniques of collecting data (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, photographs, videos, observation, *inter alia*). By contrast, methodologies are those sets of rules and procedures that guide the design of research to investigate

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² Although, increasingly such texts have explicit references to queer theory, particularly where these address qualitative research. See for example Filax et al. 2005, Gamson 2003, Plummer 2005.
phenomenon or situations; part of which is a decision about what methods will be used and why. Methodology can be understood as the logic that links the project’s ontological and epistemological approaches to the selection and deployment of these methods. Most of the chapters in this book seek to place research techniques and methods, and the underlying epistemologies and ontologies that guide them, into conversation.

In addressing queer and social science research methodologies, we usually refer to qualitative research, making quantitative research notable by its absence (Browne 2008, Gamson 2003, Valocchi 2005). In the 1970s and 1980s, the conceptual distinction between methods and methodologies enabled feminists to address the impasse regarding the existence and desirability of so-called ‘feminist’ methods. Methods understood as feminist were initially qualitative as their take was to recover the reality of women’s lives rendered invisible through the masculinist use of quantitative data (see for example Harding 1987, McCormack 1987, Wilkinson 1998). Nevertheless, feminists also argued the necessity for qualitative data to support or demonstrate, for example, inequalities in income, access to services or poverty rates and so on (Lawson 1995, Moss 1995a, b). Feminists contended that methods themselves had no inherent epistemological or ontological qualities; rather how they are deployed in the pursuit of certain forms of knowledge produced data that supported feminist ways of knowing, and contested masculinist forms of knowledges (see for example Maynard 1994, Stanley 1990, 1997, Stanley and Wise 1983a, 1993). However, feminist researchers also considered the fact that these methods assume a ‘humanist subject’; one who is deemed able to accurately recount lived experiences and observations ‘authentically’. In working through these concerns, feminist researchers struggled to grapple with critiques of the ‘knowing’ subject and the ‘objective’ researcher; the power relations and ethical concerns in the research process in documenting marginal lives as well as problems with notions of truth and authenticity – struggles that became increasingly familiar for researchers across disciplines (cf. Burt and Code 1995, Haraway 1991, Harding 1986, 1987, Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2008).

Given how queer approaches undermine the once stable sexual (and gendered) subject now conceived as fluid, blurred and contingent, the prevalence of qualitative methods in queer scholarship is perhaps unsurprising (Gamson 2003, Plummer 2005). Arguably, it is illogical to ‘count’ subjects once one has argued that a ‘countable subject’ does not exist – the methodological problematic we described at the beginning of this chapter and one haunting qualitative as well as quantitative approaches. However, this form of thinking does not predominate in popular cultures where the knowable ‘gay and lesbian’ figure is increasingly one to be counted and regulated (Brown and Knopp 2006, Browne 2008). Not surprisingly then, where statistical data is gathered on sexuality, mainly through market research or census data on ‘couples’, it usually finds white, affluent, middle class, men who live in specific areas (see Badgett 2003, Brown 2000, Brown and Knopp 2006, Browne 2008, Duncan and Smith 2006, Fish 2008). This gives a very particular picture of sexual and gender difference and is dependent on finding
individuals prepared to identify with particular sexual variables (‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘bisexual’ and so on). This obviously becomes increasingly complicated with more nuanced and non-normative understandings of gender and sexuality, particularly in relation to queer identities (see Browne, this volume). Contesting the supposed veracity (and truth-making processes) of statistical data techniques as well as the power relations that can inform ‘quality’ data collection, Plummer (2005: 336) notes that queer can be disloyal to all forms of conventional disciplinary methods; and that includes contesting the norms of social science research. Queer can challenge the supposed coherence, reliability and generalisability regarded as a central concern to some social scientists (see also Halberstam 1998). Yet, while queer approaches might contest the possibilities of quantification of subjects, there is a danger in then asserting that queer epistemologies, methodologically, require the use of qualitative methods only, or must always contest traditional and conventional techniques. As some of the contributors in this collection argue, queer approaches should overtly grapple with the contradictions that arise without definitively endorsing one set of methods over another.

One could argue that there is, in fact, no ‘queer method’ (that is, ‘methods’ specifically as research techniques), in the sense that ‘queer’ lives can be addressed through a plethora of methods, and all methods can be put to the task of questioning normativities – a political positioning that infuses research processes with ethical considerations.³ In particular, where queer is taken to destabilise particular understandings of the nature of the human subject and subjectivities, power relations, the nature of knowledge and the manner of its production, a ‘queering’ of methods themselves might pose particular difficulties as well as possibilities for traditional data collection methods (Gamson 2003, Green 2007, Plummer 2005).

‘Queer research’ could promote a particular understanding that simultaneously constitutes and destabilises conventional research considerations. Thus, are there data collection techniques or methodologies that are not ‘queer’? Does ‘queer’ fundamentally alter the realms of identities, ‘the social’, and conceptualisations of realities such that social science research methodologies are defunct for these ontological and epistemological forms? Does social science research that investigates lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and otherwise ‘queer’ lives need to locate itself within anti-identitarian queer epistemologies? What place do traditional social science methods, and quantitative research have in understanding the messiness of sexuality and gender in the contemporary world? In this context then, what we might mean by queer research is also problematic. Is research ‘queer’ if it is undertaken by queer researchers? Is such research about queer subjects and/or research that employs a queer conceptual framework? And what does it mean when we speak of a queer methodology or a queering of methodologies? These

³ These links are apparent even where the methodologies deployed, driven by a particular philosophical positioning, upset the conventional norms of data collection, such as Halberstam’s scavenger methodology (1998).
questions are at the heart of the chapters that follow; while some are addressed, many more remain unanswered.

**What is ‘the Social’ in Social Science Research?: Multiple Methods, Multiple Politics**

The terrain of social (science) research methods is disparate and contested. The conjoining feature of this area of study is usually the focus on ‘the social’ and conceptualising ‘the social’ has moved through different phases in academic thinking. Recently (including within queer thinking), ‘the social’ has come under critical scrutiny, with some suggestion that queer theories are/can be disarticulated from the study of ‘the social’ (Green 2007, Seidman 1995). Such social science contentions imply that queer theoretical work is important, but is disengaged from understandings of contemporary experiences of sexualities and lived socialities. Increasingly, it is argued there is no one ‘social’, but many socials operating in diverse ways and across multiple scales. In this era of globalising forces, the ‘social’ meanders across and through its more traditionally understood territories and exceeds its old spatial boundaries (Beck 2000). Some proclaim the death of ‘the social’ in favour of conceptualisations linking notions of associations, assemblages and other terms that direct attention away from the idea of the social as coherent. Recent scholarship also contests the notions that the ‘social’ has any necessary materiality or that particular social structures and constructs can be used to explain other phenomenon or outcomes. The social, it is asserted, cannot be reduced to human interactions and a growing body of work addresses the non-human, including the place of objects, animals, environments, materials and so on (see for example Giffney and Hird 2008, Latour 2005, Law and Hassard 1999, Murdoch 1997). Law (2004: 2) argues that social science methods can only ever partly capture the mess of social worlds, requiring us to rethink ‘the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science’ (see also Graham, this volume). In a similar vein, Latour (2005) attributes the need to refocus attention to a ‘sociology of associations’ because of the success of social sciences, and Plummer (2005) argues that with the advent of societal change, research techniques should also alter.

There can be no doubt that reconceptions of the social have prompted the proliferation of ‘new’ and ‘innovative’ social science methods seeking to (re)present the messiness of social life, attend to affects, and to work beyond particular representational concerns (see for example Anderson 2002, Macpherson 2009). These methods seek to investigate that which cannot be reduced to, and at times contest, traditional forms of data collection. In addition, such methods question the place of social ‘science’ in understanding social lives by challenging the tenants of social science research, such as rigour, clarity and the possibilities of ‘knowing’ social life. Consequently, social research methods may not necessarily adhere to any ‘scientific’ structures of knowledge.
Strategies of data collection need to address this understanding of social worlds, including various forms of observation, visual materials and engagements with auto-ethnography as well as exploring the intersections of humanities and social sciences through art and textual analyses (see for example Boellstorff 2007, Halberstam 2005, Holmes-Jones and Adams this volume, Power 2009, Volcano 1999, Volcano and Dahl 2008). However, there is a danger that investigating social worlds in this sense returns us to textual analyses that proclaim the messiness of everyday life, without involving the people and materialities present in the creation of these studies.

Clearly, the desire to foster progressive social change through research is not necessarily distanced from the contestations of the social. Scholarship recognises the researcher’s place not only in constructing ‘socials’, but also in questioning, rethinking and reworking them. ‘The field’, ‘the social’ and other presumed stable objects of social science enquiry into sexual and gendered lives are implicated in and by queer theoretical approaches and the ways queer is read through and in these social contexts (see Jackman, Nash, and Dahl, this volume). Lewin and Leap’s (1996) edited collection Out in the Field, notes that issues of reflexivity, and the ethics involved in carrying out fieldwork about sexualities, illustrate that not only are methodologies always informed by those that ‘collect’ the data, but that collected data has implications for the researchers themselves. More than this, social science research itself is implicated in the reconstitution of ‘the social’ (Browne 2003, Dahl, this volume, England 1994, Law 2004).

Looking at the wide range of queer scholarship that has developed since the early 1990’s, it is clear that ‘queer’ approaches are deeply engaged in questioning the existence and ‘knowability’ of the social, particularly in various social normative claims. The entanglements of methods, lives and research moves beyond ‘explaining’ the social, making it clear that queer theorising and social research fields are mutually constituted. If sexual and gender studies (and broader social theorising) create social fields, it follows that destabilising such theorising, including through queer theorising, and creating new social methods can create transformative politics through research (Law 2004). This mode of politics is one of the many ways that power relations and associated hierarchical constructions of social lives can be contested through research. Participatory action research, for example, encompasses and develops new social research techniques with reworkings of established forms of data collection (Kindon et al. 2008). By recognising not only the messiness of social life, and the place of the research/researcher in (re)creating it, such research can provide a place for those who otherwise tend to be marginalised, disenfranchised and excluded in the process.

Many of the chapters in this collection are concerned with relations (and crossovers) between researcher and participants bringing together the questioning of stable social lives, the research practices that, in part, create them and power relations engaged in recognising and constituting social life through social research (see chapters by Gorman Murray et al., Dahl, Nash and Heckert, this volume). The complex place of the social in/of ‘the field’ also comes under critical
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scrutiny, as power relations and taken-for-granted norms are interrogated. Most of the chapters in this collection explicitly or implicitly seek to address the place of research in effecting social change, but no coherent ‘queer’ or social research agenda is proposed. Rather, these chapters illustrate how research engagements can take multiple forms and serve a plethora of purposes and politics.

This book interrogates conventional social science research, as well as pushes the boundaries of what might constitute ‘queer’ objects of study. We see the questioning of ‘the social’ as an opening; one of the many ways of exploring the messiness of social lives, experiences, power relations and hierarchies. Such investigations, however (as with queer engagements with identities, sexualities and genders), should not create orthodoxies, forcing closure around multiple socials, methods and the myriad ways of knowing the mess of social life. In light of this, you will find that in the chapters that follow, authors often both depart from the norms of social science research methods as well as the emergent orthodoxies of queer theorising.

In keeping with our approach that resisted the imperative to define ‘queer’, we did not impose any criteria relating to methods/methodology on our authors nor did we suggest what we meant by ‘social science research’ to the authors. Instead we asked the authors themselves to clarify what they meant by methods, methodologies and social science research. Again, rather than finding coherence, this book illustrates some of the breadth of this field and the diverse appropriation and understanding of often taken-for-granted terms such as ethnography, the researcher, participants and the field. Allowing authors to grapple with these issues led to useful and productive discussions that we hope will continue beyond the pages of this book. We are clear that in intersecting queer and methods and methodologies, we are not proposing a solution to the tensions created through placing these into conversation, converging them or reworking each in relation to the other. Once again questions remain, including whether it is, or continues to be, productive to talk of something called queer methods and methodologies.

There is no Structure:
The Road Map of Queering Methods and Methodologies

In creating this book, we sent out personal invitations to so-called ‘queer celebrities’ and those we knew were working in this area. We also put out an open call for contributions and interventions. This approach resulted in chapters from a wide variety of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, women’s/gender studies, communication studies and geography reflecting both the coherence and

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4 Creating singular ‘correct’ methods/methodologies is not also the intention of authors such as John Law. Thus, other, or ‘new’ ways of knowing and methods can operate alongside and compliment more conventional forms of data collection. However, in putting these into conversation with each other both are affected by the interaction.
distinctions across disciplinary boundaries as well as within them. Because of the diversity of the contributors, in addition to the differences we have discussed above, there is no one praxis, orthodoxy or way of intersecting queer and social science research methods. Instead, the coherence of the chapters pivots on the centrality of queer theory in social science research.

As with most editors, we struggled to squeeze chapters into structures, recognising that they escape confinement, overlap, and contest each other in diverse ways. At the book proposal review stage, any structure we tentatively and uncomfortably proposed was unravelled by reviewers who rightly pointed to the artificiality of our selected boundaries and categories. We found it a struggle to create an order for the chapters, not because they do not fit together, on the contrary the chapters overlap and complement each other but do so in ways that defy neat categorisations within overarching themes. As a result, we decided to work with a more open and fluid structure allowing connections, synapses, overlaps and disjunctures to be drawn out by the reader (see also Moss and Falconer-Al-Hindi 2007 who produced a number of separate contents lists to deal with this very issue). This rhizomatic approach is also reproduced in certain chapters throughout the book (see Dahl, Heckert, Gorman-Murray et al. and Jones and Adams).

So how did we ultimately decide to organise the book? We played with the idea of drawing names out a hat (or letting the dog decide), producing a completely random structure not beholden to any academic protocols or personal preferences. In the end, we concluded we needed to work with and for those who may not be intimately familiar with the issues raised in this collection, and to create a structure that leads a reader through the material in a way that allows them to grapple with this complex arena. The chapters placed at the beginning of the book discuss issues and approaches that frame key concepts and ideas related to intersections between queer approaches and research design. The middle chapters discuss various queer approaches in research design; drawing on and reworking a number of central themes and considerations. The final chapters focus on a radical rethinking of queer theorising and social science methods and methodologies in new and provocative ways. So while there is an ‘order’ to these chapters, such order reflects our concern to further the reader’s understandings rather than thematic or categorical decisions.

We begin with the work of Alison Rooke who considers the well-rehearsed critique of queer theory’s so-called textualism and of sociology’s continued attachment to scientific methods. Calling for an affective and erotic approach to research, Rooke appeals for a ‘queer sociological ethnographic perspective’ that considers queer theories of sexual subjectivity and a queer ethnographic approach. By paying attention to everyday, lived realities of hetero and homo-normativities, she argues ethnography offers cogent insights into how lesbian identities and sexual subjectivities are necessary, negotiated and always being reformed. Further, she notes, we need to question the possibility of there being a stable ethnographic ‘self’ and an achievable ‘distance’ that critical ethnographers supposedly attain during the writing up period. Rooke argues that a reflexive approach requires
that we understand that the ‘field’ has fluid and flexible boundaries (to which the ethnographer is emotionally (inter)connected) and recognise the always becoming identities and subjectivities ethnographers occupy. This highlights the productive possibilities lurking in the silences of ethnography and how a queer reflexivity helps us consider the erotic in knowledge production – an argument illustrated through her experiences as a ‘lesbian’ queered through the course of her fieldwork at a LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) community centre in London.

Jamie Heckert continues the exploration of the (re)making of the researcher through an impassioned account of how he ‘becomes queer’ in the research process; an experience he links to his desire to explore forms of ‘methodological anarchism’. For Heckert, this is a process of letting go of the traditional research boundaries, including those between theory/data, researcher/researched, homo/hetero. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, he asserts that ‘becoming queer’ is always in process, never stable, fixed or predictable. Through the sharing of rhizomatically interconnected stories, Heckert formulates an understanding of a ‘queered’ methodology that is not reserved for the ‘transgressive few’. Rather, he asserts we all fail to attain normative standards of sexual/gender performance and conceptualises the individual as ‘a multiplicity interconnected with other multiplicities’ (48). If this is the case, the researcher becomes both subject to and the subject of research, highlighting the interconnections that create the possibilities of becoming queer, becoming anarchist.

Lorena Muñoz continues this reflection on the unstable positionality of researcher and researched and the shifting nature of the ‘field’ in her consideration of ‘whiteness’ in queer research. She critically reflects on the presumptions researchers can bring to the field and how a consciously queered methodological approach can open up unexpected avenues of enquiry. In exploring Latina experiences of street vending in downtown Los Angeles, Muñoz argues that employing a ‘queer of colour’ methodology allows her to slip subject positions, as a researcher, between her queer and Chicana identities. So doing, she argues, can ‘enable us to reconfigure fluid racialised, sexualised and gendered methodological constructions in the field’ (58) rendering visible what often remains unseen. Exploring her own nuanced and multifaceted identities that interweave personal and public selves, Muñoz examines her own complicity in reproducing Latino vending streetscapes in Los Angeles that often reiterate heteronormative assumptions and trans/national imaginaries.

While we need to be attentive to the queered positionality of a researcher in a queer methodological approach, we cannot lose sight of other aspects of the self beyond gender and sexuality in play in queer lives. In conjunction with Alison Rooke, Andrew King, Ann Cronin and Yvette Taylor assert that queer methodological approaches must be attentive to issues of intersectionality including a concern with class, age, racialisation and ethnicity as well as gender and sexuality.

Yvette Taylor draws our attention to how queer research approaches often inadvertently centre the socio-economically most privileged by neglecting
interrogations of class. Taylor notes that queers’ much-touted ability to assimilate and/or transgress normative boundaries is not freely available to all. She argues that queer methodologies are often ‘deployed by/for/with queers’ (69) in ways that exclude or render invisible certain queer lives. What is required, Taylor argues, is a re-orientating of queer methodologies towards critically investigating the silences of material (im)possibilities, particularly for those who do not occupy positions of middle class ordinariness. In comparing working class and middle class interviewees’ experiences of parenting, Taylor demonstrates that a queer methodological approach, driven by intersectional analyses, highlights that the possibilities of queer fluidities are limited to those with the resources to step out of, assimilate or transgress the ‘system’. In this instance we can see how queer methodologies that attend to the possibilities and limitations of intersecting sexual and classed normativities highlight how some queer lives ‘may not be that queer at all’ (83).

In a similar vein Andrew King and Ann Cronin take as their starting point the use of the term ‘LGB’ (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual) in public policy initiatives focused on older people in the United Kingdom. The uncritical use of the term LGB in these contexts can fail to recognise the contingency of sexual identities that refuse containment within these categorisations. They argue that a more thoughtful understanding of how lives are lived requires a queer rethinking that is attuned to the fluidity and incoherency of lived experience to better understand how older adults might reflect on their experiences over their life course. The authors consider how categories of ‘older lesbians, gay men and bisexual adults’ are formed and, using Judith Butler’s work, contend that identities are political in that they reproduce as well as transgress hegemonic norms. Utilising membership categorisation and narrative analyses, the authors explore how participants represent themselves and their social worlds. In attending to the complexity of self-identifications, actions and experiences, we become aware not only of the signification of our research categories but of how, when and where people deploy these categories. This approach troubles straightforward associations of sexuality and age and seeks to avoid repeating hetero-normativities and other power relations in how we undertake research.

The ‘field’ is a complicated place, made more unstable by the shifting positionalities of the participants (both the researcher and researched), and by the inherent difficulties in finding common understandings across sometimes vast political, social and cultural divides. Andrew Gorman-Murray, Lynda Johnston and Gordon Waitt seek to interrogate the ‘queerness’ of communication through a reflection on the use of interview-based research methods with sexual minority communities and participants in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Australia. The three authors, in refusing one authorial voice, use a conversational approach to explore questions of insider/outsider and the complications of sexual subjectivities in postcolonial settler societies. They argue for a greater account in queer research of the power relations, positionalities and differences embedded in sexual minority populations. In a vein similar to both Rooke and Heckert, the authors argue that
‘a queer research context’ must allow for a plethora of possible subjectivities to emerge and attention must be given to ‘queer silences’. The fluidity and spatial contingency of researcher-researched subjectivities is highlighted as well as the need for attentiveness to ‘the fractured constellation of ethnicised-sexualised hybrid identities’ unfolding in postcolonial settler locations (107). In paying attention to the ‘queering of communication’, the importance of spatiality and the mess of methodologies, the authors assert that the fluidity of sexualities and ethnicities in research processes changes researchers as much as it creates knowledges.

Continuing a focus on the queerness of the ‘field’ and the research process, Michael Connors Jackman argues that the critiques of various forms of literary and textual analyses found in much queer theoretical work, can be fruitfully brought to bear on more traditional anthropological assumptions about the ‘field’. Jackman questions the here/there, field/academy binary, and the presumptions made about where the field actually ‘is’. Analysing the them/us of scholars/informants dualisms, Jackman examines the ‘dynamic desires’ in play in the ‘field’ and how they reveal ‘intimate details’ that can question the supposed ‘rigour’ of fieldwork and the nature of the ‘field’ itself. Reminiscent of both Dahl’s and Heckert’s chapters, Jackman argues for an intense appreciation of how sexuality is continually managed in the ‘field’. In reconsidering the role of desire, Jackman moves to open up conversations that account for the traditional academic and emotional de/linking of sexuality and erotics imposed on research encounters. Jackman concludes by suggesting that while ethnography is an important ‘import’ from the social sciences to queer studies, we need to undermine the inherent heterosexuality of ‘the field’; arguing for a range of replacement conceptualisations including the idea of queer publics and assemblages.5

Catherine J. Nash also explores the shifting nature of insider/outsider relationships and the unstable nature of the ‘field’, drawing on her experiences talking with transmen about their everyday lives in LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer) space in Toronto. She reflects on the unexpected instabilities in a researcher’s subject position that can occur over the course of the interview process and, in fact, during a single interview. Nash also considers the importance of spatiality in the research process and the importance of being attentive to the historical and cultural specificities of the field. Wading through the political and social debris that contextualises her discussions with transmen’s use and experience of queer/lgbtq space, Nash simultaneously notes shared histories, distances and divisions that characterised her interviews. For Nash, as well as

5 As we noted earlier, it is important to consider the ‘location’ of queer theorising. Jackman’s discussion, for example, illustrates the particularity of the North American scholarly context where queer studies has emerged as a separate subdiscipline in many American universities and colleges. Jackman’s argument would not have much logical consistency in the United Kingdom, for example, where queer studies does not have such disciplinary specificity and queer approaches have a much stronger interdisciplinary application.
Dahl and Heckert, the politics of knowledge production are a central focus and a queer methodology can engage with the struggle to recognise the permanent instability of researcher-researched relationships, insider/outside status as well as the intersubjective political and social processes in the research process.

*Ulrika Dahl* draws on her research practice with femmes to argue for a queer feminist ethnography. Together with Nash, Dahl is motivated by the queer political stakes of ethnographic research and explores femme lives and experiences as a neglected aspect of queer gendered engagements. She considers what it might mean to conduct femme-inist research that seeks to reframe the meaning of femininity. Questioning the home/away dichotomy that can structure conceptualisations of the field, Dahl unsettles hierarchies associated with research academies, calling for a queer anti-normative critique of the processes and practices of writing. Drawing on her *Femmes of Power* book (2008), Dahl discusses the work she has done together with Del LaGrace Volcano to create participants as co-researchers. Grappling with issues such as anonymity, the reduction of research participants to theoretical points, sameness within femme-ininity and intra-femme-politics and community, she points to the possibilities of queering ethnography by co-producing knowledge in order to rethink the meanings of femininity. ‘Tuning into the frequency of femme-on-femme research’ (164), Dahl calls for a commitment to sisterhood and the creating of community through research that does not stand outside of that which it studies/creates.

Extending the consideration of politics of intimacy taken up by Heckert and Jackman, *Mathias Detamore* places ethical questions at the centre of queering social science research. ‘Queerifying’ the liberal individualised ethic of consent, Detamore seeks to engage with an ethics as method that is queer as it queerly queers research/researcher relationships (see Gibson-Graham 1999). Taking to task Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) in the United States, Detamore argues that the research process is risky, intimate and innovative, creating new sets of possibilities that should be approached through a queer ethics as method. The politics of intimacy becomes a political device, one that queers the institutionalised dominant bureaucracies, and is best seen through participatory action research. Moving beyond emancipatingjugated voices and towards ‘something that looks much more like kinship’ (178), Detamore points to the mobile negotiation process in research relationships that cannot operate outside the social and the personal. Researchers are affected by research kinships, creating ‘mutually entangled vulnerabilities’ which can ‘craft new ethical constructions that transform and shape alternative social worlds’ and advocacy (168). In taking ethics seriously, Detamore argues for ‘sober perseverance’ in using ethics as methodological tools for creating methods.

Shifting our attention away from questions about the ‘researcher’ and the field, *Mark Graham* asks us to reconsider the materiality of ‘things’ – an area that is recently gaining attention (see Giffney and Hird 2008). Drawing on the work of Karen Barad (2003, 2007) and her unusual fusion of ideas from feminism, quantum mechanics, queer theory, post-structuralism and philosophies of science,
Graham argues we need to consider how the research object is brought into being. We can do this, he asserts, through the research process itself, using a queer and naive methodology that is gullible and open to new suggestions in productive ways. This more ‘worldly’ method can follow lines of flight to reconsider how sex-gender-sexuality ‘cuts’ in ways that render them indeterminate and ‘available for alternative cuttings’ (192). To do this, he examines the giving of a ‘gift’ and the unlikely and unremarked materialities that surface when we queer our methodological approaches to research in this way. Arguing for methods that explore the queerness of materiality, Graham concludes with a call for humility that recognises that strategies and objects that can be used for queer ends, can also reproduce normativities and complicities.

*Stacey Holman-Jones* and *Tony Adams* begin by criss-crossing the role of autoethnography in constructing ‘knowledge of subjection’, and the place of stories of (unremarkable) ease and pleasure such as those found in a coffee shop encounter. Drawing parallels between queer theory and autoethnography, they position autoethnography as a queer research method. Queering the writing process, they use ‘I’ to encompass ‘us’ and ‘we’, in ways that understand such subjectivities as always becoming and potentially interlinked; offering the possibilities of writing ‘ourselves into new ways of being and becoming’ (198). Exploring the multiple definitional possibilities and uses of autoethnography, they use the device of the ‘hinge’ to examine connections that are tentative and yet necessary in both being and being heard. Beautifully written, the chapter interlinks poetics and prose, making autoethnography performative and activating queer into queering. Queer autoethnography allows for journeys of self-understanding that are relational and not restricted by the limits of categories while proposing challenges to normative ideologies and discourses. For Holman-Jones and Adams, queer auto-ethnography seeks to create transformation and liberation in ways that recognise and embrace fluidities and contingency, opening up more ways of being in the world, that is a political venture.

*Tom Boellstorff* asks us to consider the intertwined and relational nature of the ‘data-theory-method triangle’ where the relationship between theory and data is best viewed as a methodological problem. In considering his own ethnographic scholarship in Indonesia as well as the virtual world of Second Life, he explores what he calls the ‘queer valence’ of his methods across these two different field sites. He does so through an exploration of two theses that could be regarded as queer in a methodological sense. Using notions of emic (insider’s point of view) and etic (outsider’s point of view) theory, Boellstroff argues that one element of a queer methodology might be to upset this distinction and allow for the emergence of theory from both ‘within’ and ‘without’. Second, he argues that a queer method might ‘surf’ binarisms’, that is, might ‘recognise the emic social efficacy and heuristic power of binarisms without thereby ontologising them into ahistoric, omnipresent Prime Movers of the social’ (223). As ‘queer techne’, that is, human action that alters the world through crafting, these methodological styles
offer the possibility of overtly (re)politicising queer studies and a ‘reframing of intersectionality in terms of method as well as object of queer study’ (230).

Lastly, Kath Browne’s chapter takes us back to one of the fundamental divides in social science research, namely, distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methods and methodologies and the perceived difficulties of ‘counting’ queer subjects – the potentially problematic issue detailed at the beginning of this introduction. Browne notes there is a shortage of critical engagements with the ‘quantitative’ in queer scholarship and her chapter takes up this issue through a consideration of ‘the messy processes’ of quantifying sexualities through a ‘sexuality question’ designed for governmental social research in England and Wales. In doing so, she attends to both the limitations of anti-normative queer conceptualisations and the messy possibilities that arise when one attempts to craft quantitative sexual identities questions for social science research. The productive tension, in holding together the utility of identity politics categories with the destabilising deconstruction of those self same categories, highlights the disruptive possibilities and limitations in the sexual categories created in social governmental research.

And Finally, or Just the Beginning?

This book, in allowing for the diverse possibilities of queer, explores the limitations and potentials of queer engagements with social science research techniques and methodologies. Plummer (2005) associates the conceptualisation of ‘sexualities as problematic’, with a ‘queer turn’ in research styles. This ‘queer turn’ is a central discussion point of this book, and yet the book acknowledges its ties to feminist scholarship, lesbian and gay studies and women’s studies, as well as social science research that foregrounds relations between people (and people, places and objects). In turn, we refuse a future within delineated boundaries. Thus, rather than attempting to overthrow ‘the old’ and lay claim to new (queer?) thrones, this book strives to do something different. We remain respectful of that which has forged the way for this form of social science and queer thinking to emerge. By refusing to establish or reinforce a queer canon or any social research/science ‘party line’, the book illustrates some of the methodological and theoretical innovations that arise from combining theories developed in particular contexts with research concepts and techniques that are equally culturally and spatially specific. It does this without offering any coherence or standardisation, challenging any form of queer/social/research fundamentalism. Thus, rather than sounding the death knell of any particular form of activism, identity, method, practice and so on, we are arguing for opening up a plethora of ventures and adventures.

This is not to say we have ‘got it right’. We see this book as limited, partial, and imperfect in many ways. We know that as readers, you may come with expectations of what ‘should’ be in such a collection, what ‘should’ be said and how. We suspect these expectations will only ever be partly met, if at all, and we would ask you to
consider what you can do to augment work such as this. The version of queer, social (science) research and methodology you identify with (adhere to?), may influence the way you read each chapter, (in)forming your views, perhaps reiterating some prejudices. We ask you to think about what feels ‘comfortable’ in the chapters that appeal to you (and what does not), why that might be, and then to dwell on other ways of knowing, doing and using the permanently flexible concepts of queer and social (science) and research. We hope this book will foment thinking and scholarship in these areas, furthering the engagements with the intersections, overlaps, divergences and coherencies between queer theorising and social (science) methodologies and methods. We envisage this will require compromise, losses and gains on all sides, such that ‘pure’ social science research/queer theory will be muddied and disorientated. Thus, rather than offering a definitive ending, this books seeks to create infinite openings.