

Qualitative Research in a Digital Era:

What's the Future?



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Digital
Technologies
in the 21st
century



Historical
Roots of
Qualitative
Research

QR in
the
future

**21st century: Big Data, Virtual Worlds, Micro-applications,
visualization/spatialization**

Roots of Anthropology and Sociology in colonialism and the industrial age to post-
modernism and critical social science



Qualitative Computing: Diverse Worlds and Research Practices Conference

February 24-26, 2011

Istanbul, Turkey

LOOK INSIDE!



Publication of: The Handbook of Emergent Technologies in Social Research

Editor: Sharlene Hesse-Biber
Oxford University Press, 2011

When I tried to get started, I found myself—Stuck!



My immediate reality made it hard to think about the future and all the neat things technology could do for qualitative research. I was stuck between the present and the future.

My program decided to review research courses and create a new Ph.D. in Research Methodology

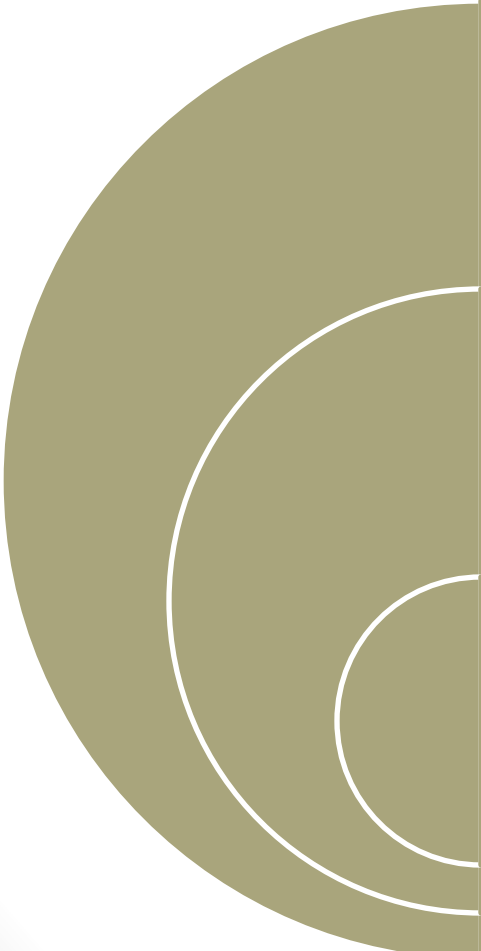
**QR in my program—Hidden,
under the radar: 1999-2011**



**As QR gets attention, I feel
exposed! 2012**



Feedback on QR courses



Qualitative Data Analysis Software	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Too much emphasis• Teach More Analysis
Visual Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Too emphasis• Emphasize what is basic (save time for the most important things)
Research Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn the basic types• Ethnography, Case Study, Grounded Theory, Phenomenology

I was a bit taken aback...

- “Well, I am a real methodologist. They just use QR to meet their ends.”
- “I go to ICQI, they don’t. How would they know what is important.”



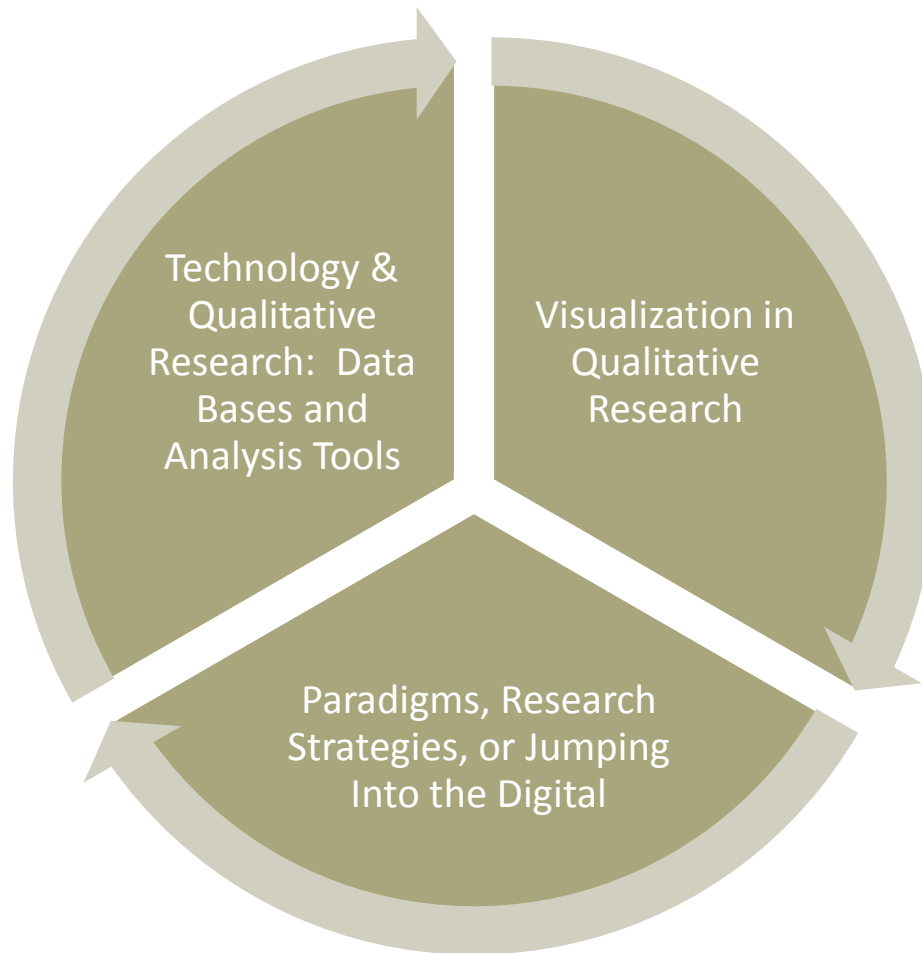
Grabbing for Theory....

The integration of a Large Technical system with a social organization: [D]epends upon the presence of individuals or institutions capable of functioning in both, of being to a degree accepted by both, of talking both languages, and of efficiently translating one into the other. In other words, two-way flows of information do not occur spontaneously or without human intervention. What is necessary is the presence of individuals..."**Translators**", who function at the interfaces between the interacting systems, translating the information generated in one system in a form intelligible to participation in other systems (Gokalp, 1992, 7).

Grabbing for more theory...

Boundary objects are objects, which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individual-site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds (Star and Griesman, 1989, 393).

Elevating and Bounding the 3 Areas of Critique



Technology and Qualitative Research: Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Why don't more people use QDAS?

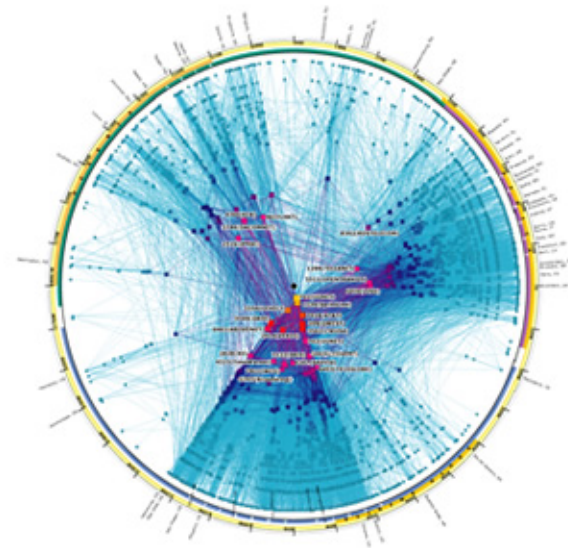
- It's been around for 30 years...why don't more people use it!
- What are the barriers?
- Is it too hard? Slow? Complicated?
- Are they too lazy?
- Will it be gone in 10 years?
- Will everything be in the cloud? A mash-up?

Why don't qualitative researchers love their data bases?

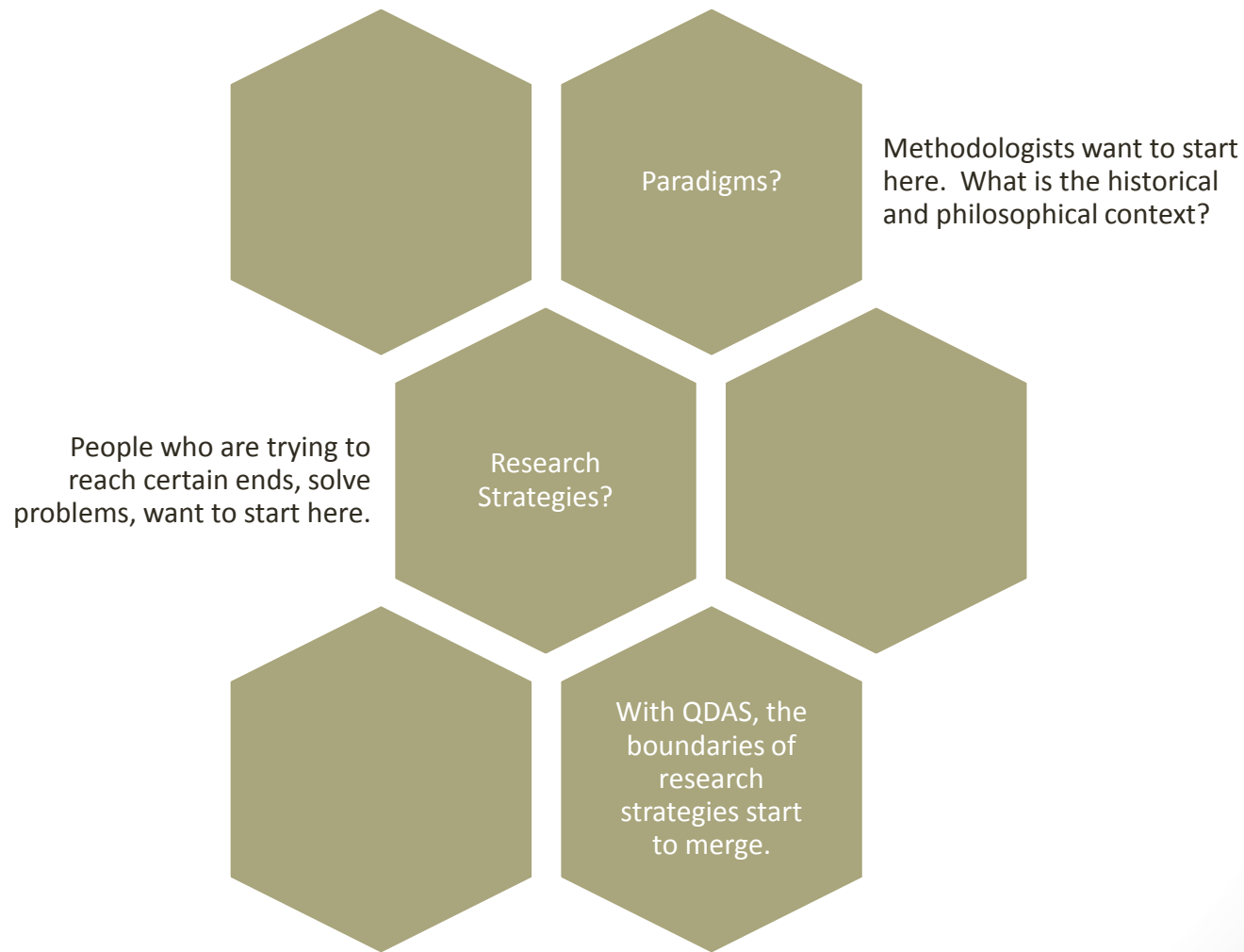
- We spend ages building complex data bases, but we never get credit for them.
- QDAS makes our data bases transparent and portable—why don't we share them, love them, honor them, publish them, get credit for them?!!!

Visualization and Qualitative Research

- We can now capture the visual richness of our world in many ways.
- We can visualize information in infinite ways.
- Visualization provides us with new analytic tools.
- Why do interviews and observations—textual forms—still dominate in people's views of qualitative research?

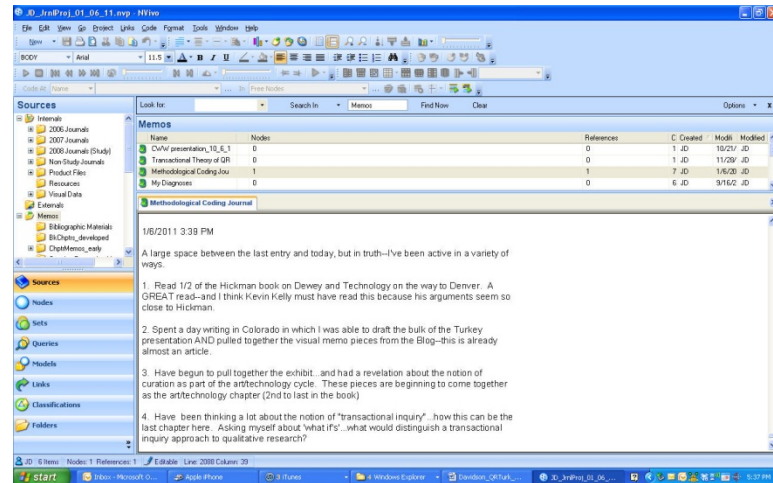


What defines the starting point of a qualitative research project?



Where will this take us?

- **We need to love our digital data bases!**
We need to get full publication credit.
We need to archive them. We need to solve the technical problems related to loving data bases, sharing them, and making them public



Embrace the visual: Confront the hegemony of the written text!

Technologies to capture the visual in research

- Cellphones
- Ipads
- Drawings
- Videos
- Blogs/vlogs

Technologies to Imagine Visually

- Mindmaps
- Tools to reorganize and manipulate visually
- Tools to visualize data

Revisit the roots of Qualitative Research

- Are the distinctions of **research strategies** still useful? (Case study, grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, etc. , etc., etc., etc....)
- OR, are they historical artifacts?
- Do they distract or hinder us now more than they help us?
- What if we asked a set of basic questions about each project and dispensed with the old-fashioned terms?
- When you get down to it: How are people actually making use of the research strategy in analysis? If we don't love our data bases—how do we know what they are really doing? And if what they say they are doing, is actually the same thing we are thinking when they say it?

What kind of translators will qualitative researchers need to be?

Is this a new methodological moment?

How will qualitative researchers engage each other in these conversations?

How will we help our academic colleagues to become part of the conversation?



References and Contact Information

Gokalp, I. (1992). On the analysis of Large Technical systems. *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, 17, 57-79.

Star, S. & Greisman, J. (1989). Institutional ecology, 'translations' and boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. *Social Studies of Science*, 19, 387-420.

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