

# m-e-t-h-o-d-o-l-o-g-i-e-s (or not)

How do questions and their possible answers change when a different methodology is applied? What new aspects become visible? Which ideas can emerge with a different way of engaging with questions? What do different ways-of-doing actually do?

## Some things to think with

- Kefir, From steel to skin (soundfile) <https://fermentos.kefir.red/english/aco-pele/>
- The story of AnarchaGland <https://anarchaserver.org/mediawiki/index.php/Anarchagland>
- Ursula K. Leguin, The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction
- Philippe Pignarre + Isabelle Stengers, Capitalist sorcery: breaking the spell [https://xenopraxis.net/readings/stengers\\_capitalistsorcery.pdf](https://xenopraxis.net/readings/stengers_capitalistsorcery.pdf)
- Read-In + Anja Groten, A feminist search tool <https://www.feministsearchtool.nl>
- Digitised version of Herman's Library, books that Black Panther activist Herman Wallace collected in his prison cell <https://herman.memoryoftheworld.org/>
- <https://0xdb.org/> allows users to search through metadata, stills and subtitles of 14,522 films, many of them copyrighted.
- Karen Barad, *Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart* (2014)

## The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction

15 minutes

*“If you haven't got something to put it in, food will escape you-even something as uncombative and unresourceful as an oat. You put as many as you can into your stomach while they are handy, that being the primary container but what about tomorrow morning when you wake up and it's cold and raining and wouldn't it be good to have just a few handfuls of oats to chew on and give littlqJglF to make her shut up, but how do you get more than one stomachful and one handful home? So you get up and go to the damned soggy oat patch in the rain, and wouldn't it be a good thing if you had something to put Baby Oo Oo so that you could pick the oats with both hands? A leaf, a gourd, a net a bag, a sling, a sack, a bottle a pot, a box, a container. A holder. A recipient.”* → Ursula K. Leguin, The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction

## Q + Q

30 minutes

Decide on a question together.

Sit at hearing distance from each other, but try not to form a circle.

One person starts by saying one of the questions out loud. The person closest to them on the left repeats the question, but adds, changes or omits an element. The person closest to them on the left repeats the question again and adds, changes or omits an element. Do this for at least two rounds

(everyone gets to rephrase the question twice). Stay attentive and listen carefully to each iteration until reaching the person that started. Write down the final question and compare it with the one you started with.

Discuss what is different, and how it happened.

## **Response-ability: bugreporting**

60 minutes

Decide on a question together.

*“Blaming Capitalism, Imperialism, Neoliberalism, Modernization, or some other “not us” for ongoing destruction webbed with human numbers will not work either. These issues demand difficult, unrelenting work; but they also demand joy, play, and response-ability to engage with unexpected others.”* → Donna Haraway

Technical and knowledge infrastructures are developed by NGO’s, companies, universities, governments, collectives, standard bodies etc. Intellectual property law are being decided upon in national, European and international institutions.

At various levels, each of these entities provide spaces of intervention, either because they themselves provide opportunities for dialogue, or through activist interrogation, lobbying or political pressure. Discuss: What spaces of intervention are you already response-able for? What would it take to file a bugreport? Map where to complain, to report bugs, to propose alternatives for the amalgamate at work in extra-legal libraries, and how.

## **Phenomenal cartography**

90 minutes

Decide on a question together. Identify a situation that the question relates to. Try to think of the situation as an ‘apparatus’ or ‘phenomena’: how is the situation a cluster of intra-acting agencies?

Knot a piece of string together to form a temporary loop to form the boundaries of the cluster.

Draw as many entanglements with other phenonema, human or non-human that you can think of. What, who does the phenomenon intra-act with? How does the phenomenon emerge through these intra-actions? Observe, describe the phenomena within it’s boundaries. What is cut? What does the cut do?

Now, shift the string boundary to another location (you can also make the boundary larger or smaller) and re-map the entanglements. What changed?

Locate the agency of both cuts: What does the boundary do when placed one way or another?

# Messing with methodologies

90 minutes

Split up in two groups. Each group selects one of the following methods:

## a. Renaming/reframing

Decide on a question together.

Identify a situation that the question relates to. Try to think of the situation as an 'apparatus' or 'phenomena'. Note the situation on an indexcard.

In "she unnames them", fiction writer Ursula K. Leguin imagines a situations where animals by return their designation (horse, cat, cattle) back to their human domesticators as a way to change the power-relation with them. Donna Haraway 'refigured' the Anthropocene by naming it Chtulucene and Pechblenda attempted to undo the colonization of bodies by renaming a gland originally named 'Skene gland' into 'Anarcha gland', after one of the racialised women that had been violently operated upon by Dr. Skene. What kind of metaphors, semantics, figurations or imaginaries could help to imagine technologies otherwise?

Choose a device/technology/apparatus related to the question you picked, and note its current vocabulary. What keywords surround this device?

Choose a semantic field which the device/technology/apparatus is not usually connected to (marine biology, street fashion, dog-breeding, fermentation, ...) and note its vocabulary.

Try to switch the two vocabularies. Mix your metaphors! Shift register, scale! How did the act of renaming shift the imaginary around the technology? In what way were the two fields maybe already entangled? Tell a story which involves the re-named technology using images, sound, movement, ...

## b. s|p|e|l|l|l|l|n|g

*"The witch's proposition doesn't ask for the conversion of those to whom it is addressed. When witches address others, they do nothing other, all told, than relay, echo the question that transformed them themselves - existential catalysis. They tell us their recipes and ask us: 'And you, where do you draw your capacity to hold up and to act from? How do you succeed in creating the protection that the poisoned milieu in which we all live necessitates? What protects you from the vulnerability that our common enemy hasn't stopped profiting from? What do you do? What have you learned?'"* → Philippe Pignarre + Isabelle Stengers, Capitalist sorcery: breaking the spell

The meaning of 'spelling' (putting letters in the right order) is directly connected to the verb 'to spell'. By ordering elements in a particular way, a constellation of elements will have power but if you get it wrong, the magic does not work.

Invent a 'spelling method' to suggest an answer to the question you selected. Your 'spelling' might operate like an oracle, a kaballah, a gambling game, a ritual, ...

Try out the spelling method on different questions.

### **c. Tunneling through (diffractive readings)**

*“We might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunnelling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it. It might seem a bit odd to enlist an organic metaphor to talk about diffraction, an optical phenomenon that might seem lifeless. But diffraction is not only a lively affair, but one that troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries, such as organic/inorganic and animate/inanimate. Indeed, the quantum understanding of diffraction troubles the very notion of dichotomy – cutting into two – as a singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then.”*

Decide on a question together. Identify a situation that the question relates to. Try to think of the situation as an ‘apparatus’ or ‘phenomena’. Note the situation on an indexcard.

Pick one of the resources listed above. Try to operate on the situation with the help of the resource. Imagine you are projecting the situation through the prism of the resource, trying to observe how the resource, the observation and the resulting pattern changes. Think of different ways you can ingest, excrete, aerate, turn-over the situation with the help of the resource.

Note your observations on a piece of paper.

“I’m all right.”

“You will be.” It glanced at Tate and Gabriel. “Your friends won’t be, I think. Not both of them, anyway.”

“What? Why not?”

Nikanj rustled its tentacles. “Kahguyaht will try. I warned it, and it admits I have a talent for humans, but it wants them badly. The woman will survive, but the man may not.”

“Why!” Lilith demanded.

“He may choose not to. But Kahguyaht is skillful. Those two humans are the calmest in the room apart from you two.” It focused for a moment on Joseph’s hands, on the fact that he had gouged one with the nails of the other and that the gouged hand was dripping blood onto the floor.

Nikanj shifted its attention, even turning its body away from Joseph. Its instinct was to help, to heal a wound, stop pain. Yet it knew enough to let Joseph go on hurting himself for now.

“What are you doing, foretelling the future?” Joseph asked. His voice was a harsh whisper. “Gabe will kill himself?”

“Indirectly, he might. I hope not. I can’t foretell anything. Maybe Kahguyaht will save him. He’s worth saving. But his past behavior says he will be hard to work with.” It reached out and took Joseph’s hands, apparently unable to stand the gouging any longer.

“You were only given a weak, ooloi-neutral drug in your food,” it told him. “I can help you with something better.”

Joseph tried to pull away, but it ignored his effort. It examined the hand he had injured, then further tranquilized him, all the while talking to him quietly.

“You know I won’t hurt you. You’re not afraid of being hurt or of pain. And your fear of my strangeness will pass eventually. No, be still. Let your

body go limp. Let it relax. If your body is relaxed, it will be easier for you to handle your fear. That’s it. Lean back against this wall. I can help you maintain this state without blurring your intellect. You see?”

Joseph turned his head to look at Nikanj, then turned away, his movements slow, almost languid, belying the emotion behind them. Nikanj moved to sit next to him and maintain its hold on him. “Your fear is less than it was,” it said. “And even what you feel now will pass quickly.”

Lilith watched Nikanj work, knowing that it would drug Joseph only lightly—perhaps stimulate the release of his own endorphins and leave him feeling relaxed and slightly high. Nikanj’s words, spoken with quiet assurance, only reinforced new feelings of security and well-being.

Joseph sighed. “I don’t understand why the sight of you should scare me so,” Joseph said. He did not sound frightened. “You don’t look that threatening. Just ... very different.”

“Different is threatening to most species,” Nikanj answered. “Different is dangerous. It might kill you. That was true to your animal ancestors and your nearest animal relatives. And it’s true for you.” Nikanj smoothed its head tentacles. “It’s safer for your people to overcome the feeling on an

individual basis than as members of a large group. That's why we've handled this the way we have." It looked around at individuals and pairs of humans, each with an ooloi.

Nikanj focused on Lilith. "It would have been easier for you to be handled this way—with drugs, with an adult ooloi."

"Why wasn't I?"

"You were being prepared for me, Lilith. Adults believed you would be best paired with me during my subadult stage. Jdahya believed he could bring you to me without drugs, and he was right."

Lilith shuddered. "I wouldn't want to go through anything like that again."

"You won't. Look at your friend Tate."

Lilith turned and saw that Tate had extended a hand to Kahguyaht. Gabriel grabbed it and hauled it back, arguing.

Tate said only a few words while Gabriel said many, but after a while, he let her go. Kahguyaht had not moved or spoken. It waited. It let Tate look at it again, perhaps build up her courage again. When she extended her hand again, it seized the hand in a coil of sensory arm in a move that seemed impossibly swift, yet gentle, nonthreatening. The arm moved like a striking cobra, yet there was that strange gentleness. Tate did not even seem startled.

"How can it move that way?" Lilith murmured.

"Kahguyaht was afraid she would not have the courage to finish the gesture," Nikanj said. "It was right, I think."

"I drew back any number of times."

"Jdahya had to make you do all the work yourself. He couldn't help."

"What will happen now?" Joseph asked.

"We'll stay with you for several days. When you're used to us, we'll take you to the training floor we've created—the forest." It focused on Lilith.

"For a little while, you won't have any duties. I could take you and your mate outside for a while, show him more of the ship."

Lilith looked around the room. There were no more struggles, no manifest terror. People who could not control themselves were unconscious.

Others were totally focused on their ooloi and suffering through confused combinations of fear and drug-induced well-being.

"I'm the only human who has any idea what's going on," she said. "Some of them might want to talk to me."

Silence.

"Yeah. What about it, Joe? Want to look around outside?"

He frowned. "What just didn't get said?"

She sighed. “The humans here aren’t going to want us near them for a while. In fact, you may not want them near you. It’s a reaction to the ooloi drugs. So we can stay here and be ignored or we can go outside.”

Nikanj coiled the end of one sensory arm around her wrist, prompting her to consider a third possibility. She said nothing, but the eagerness that suddenly blossomed in her was so intense, it was suspicious.

“Let go!” she said.

It released her, but was now completely focused on her. It had felt her body’s leap of response to its wordless suggestion—or to its chemical suggestion.

“Did you do that?” she demanded. “Did you ... inject something.”

“Nothing.” It wrapped its free sensory arm around her neck. “Oh, but I will ‘inject something.’ We can go out later.” It stood up, bringing them both up with it.

“What?” Joseph said as he was hauled to his feet. “What’s happening?”

No one answered him, but he did not resist being guided into Lilith’s bedroom. As Lilith sealed the doorway, he asked again, “What’s going on?”

Nikanj slid its sensory arm from Lilith’s neck. “Wait,” it told her. Then it focused on Joseph, releasing him, but not moving away. “The second time will be the hardest for you. I left you no choice the first time. You could not have understood what there was to choose. Now you have some small idea. And you have a choice.”

He understood now. “No!” he said sharply. “Not again.” Silence.

“I’d rather have the real thing!”

“With Lilith?”

“Of course.” He looked as though he would say something more, but he glanced at Lilith and fell silent.

“Rather with any human than with me,” Nikanj supplied softly.

Joseph only stared at it.

“And yet I pleased you. I pleased you very much.”

“Illusion!”

“Interpretation. Electrochemical stimulation of certain nerves, certain parts of your brain ... What happened was real. Your body knows how real it was. Your interpretations were illusion. The sensations were entirely real. You can have them again—or you can have others.”

“No!”

“And all that you have, you can share with Lilith.”

Silence.

“All that she feels, she’ll share with you.” It reached out and caught his hand in a coil of sensory arm. “I won’t hurt you. And I offer a oneness that your people strive for, dream of, but can’t truly attain alone.”

He pulled his arm free. “You said I could choose. I’ve made my choice!”

“You have, yes.” It opened his jacket with its many-fingered true hands and stripped the garment from him. When he would have backed away, it held him. It managed to lie down on the bed with him without seeming to force him down. “You see. Your body has made a different choice.”

He struggled violently for several seconds, then stopped. “Why are you doing this?” he demanded.

“Close your eyes.”

“What?”

“Lie here with me for a while and close your eyes.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing. Close your eyes.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“You’re not afraid of me. Close your eyes.”

Silence.

After a long while, he closed his eyes and the two of them lay together. Joseph held his body rigid at first, but slowly, as nothing happened, he began to relax. Sometime later his breathing evened and he seemed to be asleep.

Lilith sat on the table, waiting, watching. She was patient and interested. This might be her only chance ever to watch close up as an oloi seduced someone. She thought it should have bothered her that the “someone” in this case was Joseph. She knew more than she wanted to about the wildly conflicting feelings he was subject to now.

Yet, in this matter, she trusted Nikanj completely. It was enjoying itself with Joseph. It would not spoil its enjoyment by hurting him or rushing him.

In a perverse way, Joseph too was probably enjoying himself, though he could not have said so.

Lilith was dozing when Nikanj stroked Joseph’s shoulders, rousing him. His voice roused her.

“What are you doing?” he demanded.

“Waking you.”

“I wasn’t asleep!”

Silence.

“My god,” he said after a while. “I did fall asleep, didn’t I? You must have drugged me.”

“No.”

He rubbed his eyes, but made no effort to get up.

“Why didn’t you ... just do it?”



“I told you. This time you can choose.”

“I’ve chosen! You ignored me.”

“Your body said one thing. Your words said another.” It moved a sensory arm to the back of his neck, looping one coil loosely around his neck.

“This is the position,” it said. “I’ll stop now if you like.”

From: Dawn (Liliths Brood), Octavia Butler

Oh, sweetness; this is the hardest part, the last part of labour. I right here with you, don't fret. I know it feel like your mamee trying to crush you dead, but is only she body pushing you out into the world. No, she can't hear you yet, only I could hear you. Yes, that was a big one. Rest little bit; another one coming.

Is really your mamee we should be talking to, me and the Grande 'Nansi Web. When Granny Nanny realise how Antonio kidnap Tan-Tan, she hunt he through the dimension veils, with me riding she back like Dry Bone. Only a quantum computer coulda trace she through infinite dimensions like that, only Granny Nanny and me, a house eshu. And only because Tan-Tan's earbug never dead yet. A fearsome journey, little one; nearly as fearsome as the one you on now. Ai, ai; this push strong! I know, doux-doux. Try not to frighten. See? It stop now. Only a few more.

We try to contact your mamee when we find she nine years ago, but the nanomites growing she earbug did calibrate wrong for Nanny to talk to them across dimensions. Eight years it take Granny Nanny to figure it out, and then was too late. Tan-Tan reach maturity, the earbug harden, and Nanny couldn't talk to she again. Another contraction sweetheart, hold on.

Antonio was a sick, needy man, but in he own way, is he provide the method for we to contact Tan-Tan. By the time she get pregnant with you, Nanny had figure out the calibration. She instruct the nanomites in your mamee blood to migrate into your growing tissue, to alter you as you grow so all of you could *feel* nannysong at this calibration. You could hear me because your whole body is one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface. Your little bodystring will sing to Nanny tune, doux-doux. You will be a weave in she web. Flesh people talk say how earbugs give them a sixth sense, but really is only a crutch, oui? Not a fully functional perception. You now; you really have that extra limb.

Whoops! It coming, it coming! That feeling is your head crowning, sweetheart—that is air on your skin of your scalp. Welcome into one of the worlds, pickney!

From: Midnight Robbers, Nalo Hopkinson