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The critical theorising of analysis

Fryer, David M.; Nic Giolla Easpaig, Brona

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Critical Analysology: The critical theorising of analysis

We seek here to extend the critical project into methodology and analysis and to encourage others to do so too.

Key words: analysis, authority, critique, discourse, governmentality, methodology, qualitative methods, power, resistance, truthing

What does 'critical methodology' mean? That is to say, within which discourses would such a phrase be deployed and what would be the implications of deploying it?

To try, first, to clarify our use of 'methodology' ... although some, confusingly, use the term 'methodology' as a synonym for 'method', there are distinctions which most researchers – even those working within mainstream, acritical, research traditions – usually deem it essential to make between: what we report actually doing i.e., procedure; the method we claim to use to do it and our theorised warranting of the use of that method to produce and legitimate knowledge claims i.e., methodology. Whilst the detail is complex and contested, to talk of methodology is, in short, to talk about theorising method.

To try, second, to clarify our use of 'critical' ... 'critical' when used in critical psychology discourses as opposed to acritical ones, does not necessarily imply criticism. A critical analysis could, for example, be thoroughly critical yet entirely lacking in criticism. Nor is critical engagement necessarily reactive in the sense of being critical 'of' something. Critical activity may also be productive.

Foucault (1981/2002, pp. 456-7) wrote that critique 'does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based' ... it involves 'showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted. To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy'. To engage with critical methodology, in this first Foucauldian, sense is to deploy a critical theory discourse in which taken-for-granted

David is constituted where many diverse socially structured privileges intersect while Brona's interest in exploring analytical practice emerged through doctoral research.

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assumptions deployed when people allegedly theorise method are uncovered and examined, it is to show that methodological procedures which seem obviously appropriate from an acritical methodology standpoint, seem from a critical methodology standpoint, strange and difficult to take seriously let alone justify. Methodological manoeuvres which are easy to carry out from an acritical methodology standpoint are, from a critical methodology standpoint, difficult, sometimes fiendishly difficult.

Foucault (1978/1990/2007, pp. 44–6): 'I would ... propose, as a very first definition of critique, this general characterisation: the art of not being governed quite so much' ... 'how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them ...' ... "to not want to be governed' is of course not accepting as true ... what an authority tells you is true, or at least not accepting it because an authority tells you that it is true ... critique finds its anchoring point in the problem of certainty in its confrontation with authority'. To engage with critical methodology in this second, Foucauldian, sense is to question whether ways we acritically theorise method are actually processes through which we come to govern ourselves in line with the interests of others i.e., we subjectively subjugate ourselves, coming to think methodologically in ways which render us compliant to the agendas of others. Resisting acritical methodology, refusing to theorise method 'like that, by that, in the name of those principles,' etc., is, in a Foucauldian sense, part of 'the art of not being governed'. To engage in critical methodology is to not accept what a methodologist tells you is true 'or at least not accepting it because' a methodological 'authority tells you that it is true'. Critical methodology 'finds its anchoring point in the problem of certainty in its confrontation with' methodological 'authority'.

In his lecture 'What is critique?', perhaps his most interesting and significant explication of critique, Foucault wrote that 'the core of critique is basically made of the bundle of relationships that are tied to one another, or one to the two others, power, truth and the subject. And if governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth' (Foucault, 2007 p. 47).

We have plundered what Foucault writes (at least in translation) about power, truth and the subject being tied to one another as a toolbox to construct the following:

'Truth' is better thought of as a verb than a noun. To 'truth a claim' is to give a claim the status of truth. The ways claims are truthed varies from time to time, place to place, interest group to interest group etc. The ways the claims of psychiatrists are truthed are different from the ways the claims of anti-psychiatry activists are truthed.

Truthing involves the deployment of systems of interlocking elements which Foucault called (in translation) apparatuses: 'thoroughly heterogeneous ensembles consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions ... the apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements' (Foucault, 1980 p. 194). When stated this way we can see that methodology – a regime whose function is the truthing of theoretical claims about method – is produced and maintained through an apparatus which is collectively constituted and reconstituted from moment to moment through text books, teaching, ethics committees, philosophy of science, refereeing processes, publishers' commissioning processes, conventions regarding what counts as 'knowledge', 'evidence' etc.

Any truth regime also has a dimension of power in that: it truths the claims of some and untruths the claims of others, it determines whose voice is not only heard but understood and heeded and it determines whose voice is ignored, positioned as incomprehensible or silenced; it has implications regarding who intervenes and who is intervened into etc. Actually – because power and truth are tied to each other – this could be put the other way round and say the same thing: any power regime – including a methodological regime – has a dimension of truth, that is, a dimension through which claims are truthed etc.

The subject is tied to truth and power in the sense that the 'subject' is a moment in a continual process of re-subjectification. As Biehl, Good & Kleinman (2007, p. 51) put it there are 'interconnections among changing modes of subjectivation and transformation of social organization, modes of production, knowledge structures, and symbolic forms' – knowledge structures, of course, being systems of truthed claims which produce and reproduce forms of power. Critical methodology involves resistance to our own re-subjectivation in relation to methodological power/knowledge structures.

From a critical methodology standpoint truthing is nothing to do with representing 'what is the case' in the 'real world' arrived at through research based on 'rationality' and 'empiricism' but rather it is the consequence of a set of social practices which promote the interests of some as opposed to other interest groups. Psychology methodology knowledges – like all knowledges – are from a critical standpoint potentially problematic and potentially to be contested regarding: how they are constructed and legitimised; whose interests they serve; how they can be resisted or subverted. There are many 'reality-versions', and each 'reality' is constituted then socially manufactured through legitimation apparatuses into 'knowledges'. Those manufacturing and legitimating apparatuses include methodological ones. Critical methodology, then, involves uncovering and where necessary contesting those methodological apparatuses.

Turning from method to analysis, whilst *critical* theorising of method is comparatively rare, methodology – the theorising of method – is common, at

least in non-mainstream research (for often in mainstream research a naïve realist discourse reproducing many assumptions of positivism about 'truthing' is so dominant that it is positioned as the only scientific paradigm and the need to theorise is not appreciated let alone taken seriously). However, the *theorising of analysis* – which we here call *analysology* is rare and the *critical* theorising of analysis, *critical analysology*, even rarer.

Attention is now relatively often focused on how fieldwork is done, how text is produced or selected but – despite superficial appearances to the contrary – little serious attention is given to analysis other than a gesture to a method (e.g., grounded theory) or to a tool (e.g., NVIVO). We are aware of few attempts in the literature to seriously critically theorise what constitutes 'analysis' and still fewer which explicate why the account of analysis offered should be taken to be ideologically unproblematic, that is to say why the ways it functions in relation to power/knowledge should be taken to be unproblematic.

It is, we argue, important to engage in critical analysology in relation to any method of analysis one is contemplating using or teaching or in relation to the analysis claimed in work one is reviewing or in relation to the truthing allegedly done in knowledge one is problematising but that is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead we reflect briefly on the elusiveness of what is happening when analysis is claimed to have been done or even as it is claimed to be under way. Books about qualitative research can be searched in vain for explications of how analysis is actually done. One finds: rhetorical means for representing a 'reading' of a text as the result of analysis i.e., as the result of a systematic process once a 'reading' had been achieved but no guidance in how to achieve that reading. This seems true whatever method of analysis is represented as the 'royal road' to analysis in terms of the ritual incantation of the work of philosophers.

As an example, in thematic analysis a relationship between fragments of text and 'themes' is asserted but a grasp of the theme is needed to identify the fragments of text indicating it at least in the sense that, in thematic analysis, a fragment of text has to be recognised in terms of the theme it indicates in order for analysis to be possible. As another example, in Foucauldian discourse analysis a relationship between fragments of text and discourses which are located outside the text is asserted. Various 'methods' of 'doing Foucauldian discourse analysis' offer rhetorical means post-analysis to imply a systematic process of analysis has been carried out offer no help in explicating the analysis itself ... again a grasp of the discourses deployed through the text is necessary in order to identify fragments as indicating those discourses.

When one asks a qualitative researcher how the analysis ... the actual analysis ... was carried out, as opposed to a post-analysis rhetorical manoeuvre, the answer is often that analysis is a 'mysterious', 'creative process', at risk of disappearing if investigated too closely.

During research, which involved us working intensively with a variety of texts and the production of innovative yet warranted readings, we tried to

critically process what was happening and how it was happening – to unveil or at least start to demystify the process of analysis which we assumed must be going on. This was largely in vain. We tried to engage in reflexivity during the process of text engagement and reading emergence. We attempted to scrutinise the research process to try to identify the moments at which insights were produced but this defaulted into a sort of chronological narrative which seemed to obscure rather than highlight the processes which led to insightful reading. Assumptions about what constituted ‘text’ for analysis became less and less plausible as the domain of text considered expanded or diminished according to the frame of reference from which it was considered. Powerful understandings of what was important in the ‘texts’ seemed to present themselves independently of any ‘analytic process’, to erupt as if under pressure through ruptures, fissures and discontinuities. They were taken seriously not so much because they were the outcome of a process of systematic ‘analysis’ but because we – literally – could not ignore them. Our point here is that even in such work striving for transparency the processes through which the claims of the research were ‘knowledged’ were opaque, so that we were not even able to be confident the analysis was produced by us rather than us being produced by the analysis, in the sense of us being ‘remade’, re-subjectified, through the research process, such that we became relays or conduits for discourses which reconstituted us as subjects who read the ‘texts’ in the ways we did.

Through the engagement with the abovementioned analytical process, the certainties which were previously imbued in how analysis is accomplished disintegrated. This, for us has raised the question (amongst others) of, how then can analysis be critically theorised, or put another way what would critical analysis actually involve? In returning to the toolbox effective in relation to the critical theorisation of method, we have only begun to address this question.

Critical analysis should at a minimum addresses questions such as the following. What does ‘analysis’ entail, or rather what do ‘analyses’ entail, since – like psychologies – many different ‘analyses’ are constructed, given the status of being ‘real’ analytic processes (whatever they would be) by being treated collectively as if they are real, for example, by being legitimated by reference to philosophical genealogies, deployed, taught, written about, used to construct knowledge claims, warranted through ‘literatures’ composed of refereed journal articles etc., claims which, in turn, guide action and policy and thus have material consequences for others? Through what processes are various ‘analyses’ accomplished? How are various ‘analyses’ implicated in the accomplishing of ‘trudging’? How do various constructions of analysis discursively position what is ‘analysed’, the ‘analyst’ and the broader nexus of societal power? How are the relationships between meta-claims and texts analysed justified by different constructions of ‘analysis’ in relation to knowledge production? To what extent do different theorised accounts of analysis (re)produce psychologism and individualism i.e., (re)produce what Rose (e.g., Rose, 1985) refers to as the psy complex? Whose interests do various ‘analyses’ serve i.e., how are they

implicated in (re)producing power? What must be assumed to 'exist' for various analyses to be possible? What discourses and apparatuses are enacted in 'realizing' various analyses?

Without answers to such questions we do not, literally, know what we are doing ... or how we are being (re)constituted.

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