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HOW TO BE SECRETLY LACANIAN IN ANTI-PSYCHOANALYTIC QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Preliminary Note

This paper has been published in Spanish as: Dunker, C. I. L. and Parker, I. (2008) 'Modelos y métodos socio-críticos de la investigación cualitativa: Cuatro casos psicoanalíticos y strategias para su superación', en Gordo López, Á. J. y Serrano, A. (comps) Estrategias y Prácticas cualitativas de Investigación Social (pp. 23-43). Madrid: Pearson Educación. We were careful in that chapter, for an audience of qualitative social science researchers, not to frighten them with any explicit mention of Lacan. We claim in the paper that psychoanalysis has many times in its history been defined as an anti-psychology, and so if we aim to generate, experimentally, an 'anti-psychoanalytic' approach, perhaps we may arrive at an 'anti-anti-psychology', in other words, at a way of encountering the nature of subjectivity in contemporary society. However, this attempt at a dialectical reversal of the terms of debate set in qualitative research – a 'sublation' as we put it in the paper – is risky. It could be read as leading us back to something we imagine is a more authentic psychology. There might be a more accurate way of framing our task in the paper. It could just as well be said that psychology has many times in its history been defined as a form of anti-psychoanalysis, and so if we aim to generate, experimentally, an 'anti-psychological' approach, perhaps we may arrive at an 'anti-anti-psychoanalysis', in other words, at a way of encountering the nature of subjectivity in contemporary society. In other words, we arrive back at psychoanalysis. In fact, if we take this route, we arrive at Lacanian psychoanalysis. So now you should read the following paragraph (which was the introductory paragraph for the Spanish book) as leading us to the sublation of fake-psychoanalytic categories (of the kind we find in already psychologised kinds of psychoanalysis) to a form of 'Lacanian psychoanalysis' (which we name here, for rhetorical purposes, 'anti-psychoanalysis').

Introduction

There are various contradictory theoretical frameworks that can be employed to enrich qualitative research. These are also important resources for us in this article, and we will be emphasising the *strategic* uses of theory to bring about political effects in research. We outline conceptual strategies for engaging with, and transcending the historical influence of, psychoanalysis in qualitative social science research. We aim to show pathways by which the researcher might tackle psychoanalysis in a more effective way than is accomplished by the standard 'defensive' procedures used to ward off psychoanalytic ideas. In this way, through the sublation of

psychoanalytic categories, we show the way toward a form of 'anti-psychoanalysis'.

Socio-critical models and methods

One, two, three

Qualitative research that aims to examine 'experience' is already confronted with questions about the role that this experience plays in ideology or in challenges to ideology. Feminist methodology provides one way of theorising the connection between the domains of political change and how political processes are lived out 'experientially', performatively at the level of the individual (e.g., Butler, 1990). Feminist perspectives attend to qualitative aspects of phenomena of all kinds, and throw into question the attempt to reduce behaviour, function, meaning or value to universal or 'natural' patterns that can then be used as points of comparison. Feminism shows how experience is not immediately accessible, because that experience is always mediated by language, institutions, discourses, culture, class position and, of course, gender. It thus connects with qualitative research that takes *mediation* seriously.

Marxist approaches are another valuable resource, and there are many implications of adopting a Marxist standpoint in qualitative research which connect with feminist perspectives. Marxism draws attention to the function of ideology, for example, and so to the always present possibility that present-day social arrangements may be operating for certain interests and against others; dialectical conceptions of social reality draw attention to the way political-economic arrangements are always in flux, in a process of change, and so we need to account in our research for why things seem to stay the same (Bensaïd, 2002). Marxist perspective thus draw attention to the nature of social reality not as a mere collection of 'facts' or 'objects', but as a network of contradictory *forces*. The reality of any object of research is not immediately accessible because there is always a process of addition or subtraction through which something appears to us as a recognisable object. This means that a qualitative approach needs to reconstruct the political ideological strategies that produce and sustain this process of conceptual addition and subtraction through which the world then appears to us 'as it is'.

A third relevant framework that we would like to draw upon is a composite of a variety of different theoretical perspectives that are sometimes assembled under the label 'post-structuralism' (Sarup, 1988). Although this is actually quite a misleading label, it serves to bring together analyses of power and resistance in the work of Michel Foucault and the radical deconstruction of dominant systems of meaning in the writings of Jacques Derrida. We take from this assemblage of theoretical vantage points the argument that it is not sufficient to study 'disciplinary' power, but that it is equally important to analyse the processes by which individual subjects come to believe that they should talk about their innermost thoughts and feelings; this is an aspect of power that incites 'confession', including

confession to a qualitative researcher. For us, this framework, such as it is, entails that we pay attention to how subjectivity is produced within its own particular 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980). Subjectivity must be considered as a kind of *effect* of discursive practices, not as the expression of the interior voice of free and autonomous individuals. Qualitative investigation must then question its own position when it aims to investigate phenomena, must include itself in the process that constitutes those phenomena, otherwise it will only produce and reproduce, to borrow a phrase from Karl Kraus, the 'illness of which it purports to be a cure'.

The 'deconstruction' of meaning functions here to question claims that researchers (who too-often like to think of themselves as 'experts') usually make in their attempts to provide a certain fixed account which is more accurate than that given by their participants. We attempt to link this unravelling of 'expertise' with Marxist and feminist arguments by turning our research into a 'practical deconstruction'; then it is possible to move from merely interpreting the world to *changing* it; a radical interpretation that challenges the ground-rules and assumptions that serve those with power can then also lay the basis for different ways of being in the world. Here we differentiate ourselves from qualitative research that sees its tasks as either producing a re-description of reality, objects or phenomena or as providing a re-interpretation of data in a broader context, as some cognitive perspectives in sociology, anthropology and psychology attempt to do. The decision to work on a problem from within a socio-critical perspective is at the same time a choice and a bid to change the conditions which have made this problem possible.

Psychoanalysis otherwise

This brings us to our fourth critical resource, psychoanalysis, and it is this fourth resource that we will focus upon in this paper. Psychoanalysis, like feminism, examines the way in which social structural processes are lived out by the individual subject. For psychoanalysis, as with feminism, the 'personal' is 'political', and we will also be concerned in this article with the way we can develop qualitative research in such a way that the 'political' aspects of 'personal' life are taken seriously without *reducing* politics to the personal level (Burman, 1998). Psychoanalysis as a clinical practice links interpretation and change at the level of the individual very much in the same way as Marxism links interpretation and change at the level of political economy. An interpretation, as a radically new way of understanding which changes relationships between the subject and others, is also something that calls into being new forms of social reality.

So, we will be concerned here with the kind of interpretations qualitative researchers might make which is not content with merely changing how people view their world; we want to provoke interpretations by researchers and participants that change the texture of the world itself (Parker, 2005). In this sense, neither feminism nor Marxism is orientated to the classic problem-solving orientation that usually provides the coordinates for quantitative research. A good outcome of a piece of research may be

precisely to construct a new question, or to dissolve a false-problem, to draw attention to our lack of knowledge and failure to appropriately conceptualise a phenomenon. These perspectives – feminism and Marxism – are founded on conflict as an inherent premise; they are not only theories *about* conflict and methods to deal with it, they are also forms of praxis orientated to produce some change *with* conflict, extracting the consequences of that conflict.

Psychoanalysis also has strong affinities with some of the writers who are grouped together under the heading of 'post-structuralism', and this is the case insofar as they disturb and unravel the 'self-identity' of the subject. Psychoanalysis and post-structuralism both disturb and unravel the image that social scientists like to have of researchers and participants, that they are 'rational' social actors and that their 'attitudes' and 'experiences' can be discovered and described. They – psychoanalysis and post-structuralism – also both disturb and unravel the supposed unity of the different social science disciplines, whether sociology, psychology or anthropology, and call for multiple perspectives that go beyond mere 'interdisciplinary' research. (For a detailed discussion of these four resources, see Parker, 2003). Socio-critical qualitative research does not adhere to the image of science as an accumulating knowledge process, a bureaucratic puzzle organized by stable paradigms described by Kuhn (1962) as 'normal science'. Our research rather sustains itself more on an epistemology of perpetual crisis and attends to what is problematic about knowledge, much as is described by Kuhn during times of 'paradigm crisis' and by other authors concerned with problems of method, alienation and incommensurability during the process of scientific reasoning (e.g., Feyerabend, 1978; Habermas, 1971; Koyré, 1965).

With these preliminary comments on different theoretical resources and the place of psychoanalysis in relation to other socio-critical 'models' – feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism – as the conceptual background for our argument, we will now turn to consider why psychoanalysis in particular needs to be taken seriously. Above and beyond the various arguments that can be made for psychoanalysis by those who are enthusiastic followers of certain schools and traditions, there are two crucial reasons why psychoanalysis must be taken into account in socio-critical qualitative research.

Disavowal of indebtedness

The first reason is that disciplines that constitute the 'social sciences' are heavily indebted to psychoanalytic ideas in the way they have been historically formed as separate academic subjects, as distinctive disciplines of research and, this is the crucial point, they *disavow* that indebtedness. This disavowal requires a double-move; there is pretence that psychoanalysis is of no importance and, at the same time, there is the utilisation of psychoanalytic ideas in such a way as to deny their provenance. Sociology, psychology and anthropology had very close links with psychoanalysis at the beginning of the twentieth century, links that are

often erased in contemporary representations of their origins. These links are not merely historical curiosities, connections that will conveniently fade into the past, but are very much alive in the conceptions that social science disciplines have of appropriate models and methods of research. Even psychoanalysis, of course, has changed and pluralized itself, with its critical activity often being reabsorbed back into mainstream social sciences.

Many of the key defining characteristics of the social sciences are borrowed from psychoanalysis, and then the psychoanalytic lineage of those ideas lives on hidden in the conceptual and methodological structure of each of the disciplines (Foucault, 1970). Recent anthropological theories of the relationship between 'civilised' and 'savage' mentality, for example, are dependent on the mythical histories of civilisation outlined once again by Freud (e.g., Mannoni, 1991). When modern anthropology attempts to distance itself from the linear, Eurocentric and implicitly racist themes in the 'development' of civilisation – a progression that is supposed to run from 'animistic' to 'religious' to 'scientific' conceptions of the world – its own alternative structuralist model of the 'savage mind' once again presupposes the existence of the 'unconscious', if now in a different key (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Despite common theoretical starting points, such as the incest taboo, structuralist approaches absorbed psychoanalytic approaches into a new form of ethnography. Much participant research and action research is located in the heritage of this transformation of ethnography that still maintained colonialist visions of what were assumed to be 'lesser' cultures.

Sociological theories of the nature of representation, and of the progressive accumulation of cultural resources through which the individual actor becomes internally differentiated, though which the individual becomes 'civilised' as society itself becomes internally differentiated in the course of the transition from close-knit community organisation to modern capitalist society, rest upon psychoanalytic conceptions of the relationship between 'pleasure principle' and 'reality principle'. This conception of differentiated social organisation then forms the background for analyses of 'representations' of psychoanalysis itself in modern society (e.g., Moscovici, 2007). Even Parsonian functionalist sociology and Meadian interactionist approaches saw direct application of psychoanalytic concepts (Manning, 2005).

Psychology, a discipline which has been most intent on shutting out the existence of past links with psychoanalysis (Burman, 2008a), retains conceptions of the supposed connection between 'frustration' and 'aggression', for example, and then assumes that there is a necessary healthy process that occurs when an individual gratifies their desires. Even in the most normative psychology based on tests and assessment scales (Rorschach, Pfister, Thematic Apperception Test, etc) research is influenced by psychoanalytic concepts, and the same is true of many 'personality' theories that try and avoid Freud. In recent years, this conception has been evident in the assumption that it is healthy for the individual to share their experiences with others, and this is an assumption that has given a great deal of gratification and self-assurance to qualitative researchers who then

can tell themselves and others that the research process itself can be healthy and enlightening to the participants as well as to the researchers and the readers of the reports.

The turn to meaning

The second reason why psychoanalysis must be taken into account in any socio-critical qualitative research is that psychoanalysis has come to structure and inhabit the realm of the social in late-capitalist and neoliberal society. This is the case not only in Europe and US America, where psychoanalysis began and then flowered as an integral part of the development of consumer culture, but also in other parts of the world that are influenced by the political-economic forces of globalisation (e.g., Dunker, 2008). Psychoanalytic conceptions of the self – the individual who imagines that there are 'unconscious' reasons for their actions, who suspects that there may be causes in their own childhood for their present-day unhappiness, and who believes that their dreams and slips of the tongue can be interpreted to reveal what they are 'really' thinking – now saturate Western culture (Parker, 1997).

Historically, we can point to three major conceptual shifts after the Second World War linking the influence of psychoanalysis to the development of capitalism. First, there is participation of psychoanalytic discourse in the rebuilding of the advertising industry in order to produce a new 'culture of desire', a new view of the internal emotional life of the consumer. Second, there is an emerging connection between psychoanalysis and developmental psychology, and so also with a broader rhetoric of progress and development in economy and social theory (Burman, 2008b). Third, there is a massive absorption of psychoanalysis in many forms of psychiatry and in mental health programmes in order to produce new forms of interpretation and regulation of 'abnormality' and suffering. In these three shifts we see a curious coincidence; each shift requires psychoanalysis to produce a kind of qualitative complement to the production of quantitative research data and 'facts' recognisable to positivist investigators. We thus have a process in which there is a re-covering of the 'first nature' of human subjects – biological, objective and material – with a 'second nature' which is psychic, subjective and virtual (Jacoby, 1975). Psychoanalysis thus turns itself from being a radical peripheral and resistant force in early twentieth-century Vienna to being a conformist practice concerned with adapting people to society, a practice that has now spread around the world.

One of the additional reasons why the social sciences now attempt to disavow the early impact of psychoanalytic ideas on their own origins as separate disciplines is that they, the social sciences, are keen to guard their own expertise from contamination by popular culture. Their claims to be able to 'discover' empirical facts that are independent of the immediate consciousness of their research participants and the readers of their reports rest not only upon a division between their own expertise and the false or lacking consciousness of others, but also upon a differentiation of their own forms of knowledge from the explanations that abound in popular culture.

Psychoanalysis did not only influence and accompany the social sciences as they each took their first steps to produce knowledge about the world, it also, unlike the social sciences, triumphed in the realm of popular culture, and so that makes it into something that is all the more threatening to 'social scientists' and their own view of the past (Hacking, 1996).

Qualitative research has tended to be obsessed with the spectre of the lack of its own authority. The concept of 'quality' itself requires analysis of phenomena in such a way that there should not really be a reduction to homogeneity, identity and reproducibility, and so, as a consequence, this form of research does not have a guarantee that it is correct. In the case of psychoanalysis, of course, there have been many attempts to fill in this lack of authority with an appeal to the authority of others; institutions like universities or research institutes, state bodies that provide certification or funding, and discursive strategies that facilitate a sacralisation of its own specialist vocabulary. There is then the temptation in qualitative research that draws upon psychoanalysis to draw on these external forms of authority to sustain the privileged position they have with respect to those who are also elsewhere outside research institutions.

This threat, and this is the crucial point, is nowhere more potent than in the social sciences concerned with the exploration of *meaning* in qualitative research. While quantitative models and methodologies could pretend to offer a more genuinely 'scientific' account of social relationships and internal mental states than psychoanalysis – which was portrayed as an approach that offered interpretations that could not be numerically validated – the newer qualitative approaches have had to inhabit the same methodological territory as psychoanalysis. In a contemporary culture that suffers the increasing effects of 'psychologisation' – in which not only social explanation is reduced to the level of the individual but each individual is invited to believe that their own personal experience contains the key to processes occurring in society (Gordo López, 2000; Parker, 2007) – qualitative social research neglects psychoanalysis at its peril.

Two points are often made by those attempting to separate psychoanalysis from qualitative research, and these arguments have the effect of privileging psychoanalytic knowledge over other methodological approaches so that it can then be employed within qualitative research. First, there is the argument that psychoanalysis necessarily bring us closer to inner, secret and idiosyncratic meanings. These representations of underlying meanings seem to connect us with a personal 'private language' that can only be translated into a public language in the transference situation and with the support of the psychoanalytic knowledge. In clinical psychoanalysis, the 'transference' describes how the past of the 'analysand' (the patient or client in treatment) is re-enacted and re-experienced in relation to the analyst, and so the clinical practice seems to provide a model for how research outside the clinic should be conducted (a model that should not, we will argue, take for granted).

The second argument is that meaning can be freely negotiated in terms of a conventional practice between participants in an open conversation, as if it were a form of 'free association'. This free association is

the rule of speech that requires that the analysand says everything, however irrelevant or unpleasant so that this speech can be interpreted by the analyst. Here the real qualities of the meaning are not so dense and fixed, but assumed to be plastic and fluid and it is often thought to be easy to change and manipulate meaning within an educational or other 'expert' approach. In both arguments, whether there is an appeal to hidden inner meanings or to negotiated conventional meanings, there is the underlying assumption that the construction of meaning is always a successful operation. Meaning can be isolated in fixed contexts and fully described or it can be treated as if it were a positive object like any other object described using particular categories (cf., Kvale, 2003).

However, we would point out that these assumptions that aim to protect psychoanalysis as a specialised form of knowledge are themselves quite mistaken. One might just as well view psychoanalytic investigation as being concerned not with success but with *failure*; psychoanalysis focuses upon absences of meaning, in nonsensical or meaningless experiences. Although qualitative research usually takes meaning to be a positive object, psychoanalysis leads us to consider all of the phenomena that are spoken of from the standpoint of negativity and meaninglessness (Nobus and Quinn, 2005).

Critical engagement

Our argument here is that socio-critical qualitative research needs to engage with psychoanalysis rather than attempt to disavow it, rather than pretend that psychoanalysis does not really already influence the way social scientists work and that therefore it need not be taken seriously. However, we need to be clear about the conceptual grounds of that engagement. It is not because psychoanalysis is a superior mode of explanation, that it provides a better model for research or a methodology that will help us find out 'more' than social scientific research perspectives that attempt to do without psychoanalysis. This is far from the case, and our engagement with psychoanalysis must be configured in such a way that we can appreciate its dangers.

Although we do believe that there are some valuable conceptual resources in psychoanalysis, we see these as arising from the historically-embedded position of psychoanalysis rather than from any inherent quality of it as a model or method. Along the road to the disavowal of psychoanalytic discourse there is the idea that if it must be used then it can be 'applied', as if it can be managed as a neutral instrument. The conservative argument against this attempt to apply psychoanalysis is based in the assumption that only 'proper' psychoanalysts should be allowed to do such a thing. This assumption is false, in our view, but this falsity itself contains an important clue as to the social function of psychoanalytic knowledge. The idea that only experts and authentically-trained psychoanalysts can deal with its conceptual categories indicates the political nature of the choices the researcher makes when she or he takes on that theoretical framework.

First, the historical legacy of psychoanalysis is a force to be reckoned with today not because psychoanalysis is 'true', but because it has become 'true' for many individuals who explicitly or implicitly structure their own interpretations of personal and social life according to its tenets (that there are unconscious reasons for why they act and that they should share their thoughts about these hidden reasons with others). This 'historical truth' of psychoanalysis can only be tackled by engaging with it and becoming conscious of the force of its underlying assumptions in the texture of social life. This link between psychoanalysis and 'popular knowledge' was pointed out many times in the history of the approach (e.g., Freud, 1933). Examples include the way Freud takes the side of popular culture against 'scientific' conceptions to insist that dreams have meaning, the way 'conversion' from mental to physical in a hysterical symptom is seen as determined by the commonly understood view someone has about their body rather than a neurological description, and the way psychoanalytic treatment develops through the vocabulary chosen by the analysand rather than in the discourse of the analyst.

Second, the present-day effects of psychoanalysis are particularly potent among social scientists, particularly those involved in qualitative research because they believe that it is more important – even that it is 'liberating' to study meaning instead of producing numerical representations of the world. The Marxist argument that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it is nowhere more pertinent than with respect to those who try to pretend that psychoanalysis is of no relevance to them. If the dead weight of the past is indeed to be thrown off as people engage in socio-critical qualitative research, that process can only occur if we know what it is we are throwing off. The question turns back once again to the point at which psychoanalytic frameworks were imported into the social sciences. In theoretical domains we find that this process of importation is often the diametric opposite of what happens in 'normal' capitalist economic exchange. When we buy something we often have the impression that we end up with *less* than what we meant or expected to get. The problem with conceptual importation – such as that of psychoanalysis into academic disciplines – is that we always get *more* than we intended to buy into. This means that even when we try to evacuate the disciplines of psychoanalytic concepts we still find that 'surplus' remaining, and it structures the knowledge that is left behind.

Four psychoanalytic instances

Now we can turn to particular aspects of psychoanalysis as a worldview (as a 'model'), and as a mode of reasoning (as a 'method'). We do, incidentally, follow Freud's (1933) argument that psychoanalytic methodology should not be turned into a worldview, but should operate in relation to science, here social science. We will show in more detail, through examining the insidious operation of psychoanalytic categories in social scientific research, how it might be possible to develop socio-critical approaches that transcend commonsensical ideological psychoanalytic conceptions of the world.

Through these four instances we will illustrate the general argument that a progressive alternative to the usual procedures of disavowal with respect to psychoanalysis that obtain in the social sciences can be elaborated.

We have deliberately used the psychoanalytic term 'disavowal' – a strategy of denial alongside simultaneous instrumental use of what is denied – with its resonances of refusal and fixation, of the attempt to shut away something and the corresponding fetishisation of that which comes to stand in the place of that which is shut away. In classical psychoanalysis 'disavowal' is meant to describe how the child might refuse to acknowledge that they can see no penis on the mother's body, and fix on another object to replace that absent thing to create a fetish through which they can pretend that there is no real difference between men and women. We are, of course, using the notion of disavowal in a much more formal sense (that is without the naked mother, child's perception and absent penis as necessary contents of the structure), to describe how denial that something is the case (that psychoanalysis is a powerful structuring force in the social sciences, for example) covers over the value still secretly given to that something, or something that stands in for psychoanalysis (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988).

The structuring principle we will use to describe these four instances is that one of the most important consequences of the shutting out of psychoanalysis – the attempt by the social sciences to pretend that it is of no importance – is that psychoanalytic conceptions of meaning then return in a distorted, fetishised, form. They return both as repetitions from the history of the development of the social sciences and as material from psychologised popular culture that is saturated with psychoanalytic categories. The process of engagement with these instances of psychoanalysis in qualitative research then requires a 'working through' that will accomplish the 'sublation' of distorted fetished elements of psychoanalysis. A 'sublation' here is used to capture the way in which we intend to refuse the commonsensical and ideological psychoanalytic categories we will describe and to rework and to improve the aspects of them that should be retained for genuinely progressive socio-critical qualitative research.

In the history of philosophy a certain idea is dominant in a certain period and then, after a time, the idea fades in significance, a principle is found to be false, or the problem is resolved and attention is then focussed on new problems (Kuhn, 1962). The concept of 'sublation' captures the way that the old idea or principle is not usually simply disproved and disposed of but is maintained, contained in the new higher-level principle that has replaced it. As another example (which is conceptualised by Piagetian and Vygotskian theorists in developmental psychology as well as by those drawing on psychoanalytic ideas), in our childhood we wrestle with certain problems which are forgotten by the time we are adults, but in fact it is those very struggles which have formed us as the adult that we now are, no longer troubled by those same problems. Thus sublation is at work, superseding but simultaneously preserving what is apparently cancelled out (Bottomore, 1991; Bensaïd, 2002).

Sublation of each of the four instances, then, enables us to produce conceptual models and methods that are simultaneously explicitly indebted to the conceptual and cultural history of psychoanalysis and, at the same time rigorously and deliberately '*anti-psychoanalytic*'. Notice, however, that this 'anti-psychoanalysis' should not proceed by way of simple evasion or denouncement; it should be accomplished in such a way as to avoid secretly maintaining presuppositions, of what we had attempted to evade, or to repeat, in reverse, the modes of argument of the position we defined ourselves against as we denounced it. We do not want to end up like the atheist who spends all their time denouncing God, whose existence is then still defined by the God that obsesses them.

The hold of psychoanalysis on culture and on the subjects who comprise it requires a more interpretive (dare we say 'psychoanalytic') strategy. For these particular purposes – to develop socio-critical qualitative research in the social sciences – it is necessary to find a new way of dealing with and dispensing with psychoanalysis, but we will see that it is only possible if we approach that task with due acknowledgement of the historical weight of psychoanalysis upon our present-day conceptual strategies. Let us now turn to the four psychoanalytic instances.

1. Interpretation

Social scientists turning to qualitative research are often able to acknowledge that the 'interpretative' stance they adopt is cognate with, if not influenced to some degree by psychoanalysis. The 'interpretive turn' in the social sciences already calls upon a quasi-psychoanalytic sensitivity in which there is a 'suspicion' of the first, immediate, surface layer of the research material – whether that is an ethnographic account, interview transcript or cultural text – and an attempt to delve beneath to something that will explain what is 'really' going on (cf., Rorty, 1980). There are two aspects of this interpretive activity which are particularly problematic and which owe a great deal to the impact of psychoanalytic ideology inside and outside the social sciences.

The first aspect is the implication that in some way the research material – which the analyst sometimes likes, in deference to quantitative research paradigms perhaps, to call the 'data' – is the mere 'manifest' content. If it makes sense to the participant as they produced it in an interview or as they described what they are doing in an ethnographic study, the reasoning goes, then we must be all the more suspicious of what the underlying hidden meanings are. The avoidance of an appeal to authorial intention to explain the meaning of a text in the case of discursive or other interpretative readings of cultural material rests on the same assumption; that it would be pointless and fruitless to ask an author why they produced the text we have before us – and so it is as if only the researcher can detect the real reason. It is not that this argument is in itself wrong; rather it serves to emphasise the point that we must ask what assumptions are brought to bear when we view it as a mistake to go to the author to get closer to the 'real' meaning. As a kind of a complementary myth, it is

sometimes thought that we can fix meaning in a clear and exhaustive corpus of text with delimitated boundaries and so put a halt to the flux of meaning. In both cases – the autonomy of the author or the autonomy of the corpus - we are prisoners of the fiction of 'real' meaning even at the moment we try to avoid it.

It is, in the standard social scientific approach to the research material, tempting to excavate the 'real' meaning, as if it were the 'latent' content that already existed beneath the surface, as if it were a dream text (Freud, 1900a, 1900b). Needless to say, the various procedures by which the social scientist thinks they are able to reveal the 'latent' content rely upon an expertise that is not available to those who produce the accounts in the first place. Immediately a position is adopted which resonates with and reproduces the worst banalised representations of the psychoanalyst peering into the mind behind the jumble of free associations and rationalisations that have been offered by the poor unwitting speaking subject. This operation is based in the idea that psychoanalytic interpretation functions as a translation process in which we first have the natural, ambiguous and confused language of the subject and we then translate it into the artificial, unequivocal, and clear language of the researcher.

An appropriate tactical engagement with this assumption which is at one with the broader strategic argument we are elaborating here, is to refuse the lure of *meaning* as such. Instead of buying into the underlying assumption that our task is to excavate meaning and to produce a richer more detailed meaning – whether that is 'thick description' that goes beyond what any informant told us or 'close reading' that reveals underlying themes – we suggest that we take an immediately 'anti-psychoanalytic' step to *reduce* the degree of meaning in the interpretations we produce. It is possible here to mobilise elements of ideology-critique from the Russian formalists, for example, and to reduce the 'meanings' that seem so self-evident to the researcher and reader to nonsense, and through this 'estrangement' effect to start to examine how the nonsensical elements function (Bennett, 1979; Nobus and Quinn, 2005).

In this perspective, interpretation functions as a kind of transcription or transliteration, rather than as a translation. A transcription goes from one level of expression (spoken language, images, and gestures, for example) to another level of expression (in a written language for example). A transliteration goes from one system of writing to another (from Chinese to English for example). When we are able to recognise that we have a huge problem when we record an interview and then transcribe it into written discourse, when we pay radical attention to the choices, exclusions and decisions we have to make in this process, we can take a distance from the tempting principle of full 'positive meaning'. There are therefore many procedures that we undertake automatically in qualitative research that we have to put into question when we refuse the 'interpretative' paradigm; we have to question the existence of perfect translation, our confidence in synonyms, the natural contiguity of certain expressions, and the efficiency of communication as a whole.

2. Interiority

A strong temptation in social scientific research is to attempt to delve inside the mind of the individual subject, to discover what their beliefs are about social processes or to unearth their 'feelings' about social relationships. This temptation was strong enough in the quantitative tradition, and was present not only in psychology – which is devoted to the study of internal mental processes – but also in cognitive and experiential versions of anthropology and sociology. The attempt to focus on 'feelings', rather than words and discourses, mires us once again in the presumption that there could be such a thing as perfect communication. The search for feelings brings in its train assumptions about reciprocity and reflexivity and these assumptions function as an index of a supposed identity of the meaning. Empathy and spontaneity are then elevated into what are taken to be natural virtues of the qualitative researcher.

The turn to qualitative research in the social sciences comes at a time when psychologisation in culture has increased to such an extent that the meanings that an individual subject attaches to phenomena are often assumed to provide the touchstone of truth. In place of traditional notions of 'validity' and 'reliability', the intuitive warrant for the value of interpretations has come to rest upon the assumed correspondence between what the reader, researcher and research participant really 'thinks' or 'feels' to be the case (e.g., Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Such emotional criteria, which work so well in everyday life for sure, can be very unhelpful in qualitative research. It fits with the argument, sometimes to be found in psychoanalytic writing, to the effect that 'repression' bears upon affect rather than representations (e.g., Freud, 1927). Actually affects could be clarified in more detail in everyday conversation when we have a partner who does *not* comprehend them perfectly, but who questions the way they function, and this questioning is what we should be encouraging in qualitative research.

The assumption that there is an 'interior' realm of the mind that must be brought into the light of day also corresponds, of course, to popularised versions of psychoanalysis. Even some versions of psychoanalytic theory and practice after Freud have rested on the assumption that the human mind is a kind of space which is filled with conscious and unconscious 'contents' which can be retrieved by a clinician or researcher with the right skills (cf. Leader, 2000). In this way the banalised and distorted notion of 'interpretation' – the supposed translation of hidden latent meanings into the manifest content described by the psychoanalytically-oriented social scientist – is accompanied by the equally banal notion that psychoanalysis concerns itself with secret contents inside the mind. The principle of affective identification between the researcher and their object of investigation must instead be challenged, replaced with a principle of *unfamiliarity*, by which we try to localize what is strange in apparently familiar taken-for-granted meaning.

Our response to this problem of interiority, as a strategic engagement that works with it in order to unravel its presuppositions, is that we should refuse the opposition between exteriority and interiority, and that we can

treat what is putatively 'interior' as being constructed and maintained through the operation of social processes. It is the very operation of these social processes in capitalist society that serves to encourage each individual to imagine that mental phenomena are inside their minds in the first place rather than outside (Parker, 2007). However, rather than turning to quasi-behaviourist notions of the determination of individual subjects by social circumstances, it is the particular construction of the interior that we wish to question. Study of 'interiority' thus also requires study of processes of psychologisation, perhaps at some moments as a form of ideology. This does not mean avoiding the emotional dimension of research but it does mean considering emotion not in terms of inner interior experience, or as an external observable behaviour, but as a *practice*. Here again are productive effects of a refusal of the received opposition between latent and manifest content.

3. Subjectivity

The attempt to delve inside the mind of a research participant is matched by the attempt by the researcher to delve inside their own mind in order to bring out any 'biases' or 'prejudices' they might have. There is a long tradition in anthropology and sociology, particularly in ethnographic forms of research, to account for the effects of the intervention of the researcher (e.g., Clifford and Marcus, 1986). The fact that a particular individual or team are entering the field and describing it from the vantage point of a particular institution will have immense effects not only on the forms of description, but also often on the research participants themselves as they puzzle about what they do and try to make it meaningful to the outsiders. Our problem is not with this questioning of institutional positions and the privilege accorded to those in universities, but with the way the problem is configured when it starts to be inhabited by psychoanalytic notions. The usual way of conceptualising the response of the analyst as 'countertransference' feeds this orientation to research subjectivity (e.g., Freud, 1915; Hollway, 1989).

When there is undue concern with the 'subjectivity' of the researcher they then come to understand the work of 'reflexivity' as entailing the search inside their own mind for hidden motives for the choice of research topic or interpretations they make of it. This reflexivity is often reduced to the individual 'subjective' decisions the researcher makes, rather than treating reflexivity as a function of institutional positions and collectively-maintained requirements (Parker, 2005). When we look to these particular 'subjective' elements we find rather poor research; to be 'subjective' often means not much more than general identifications or unjustified decisions, and an appeal to the 'subjective' as such is commonly used to close discussion down rather than open it up.

Our response to this problem is to refuse the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, and show how the realm of the subjective inhabits even those practices that are usually thought to be objective. Here we draw on arguments from within feminism, Marxist theory and post-

structuralist critique that illustrate how the claim to 'objectivity' calls upon a series of elaborate procedures that reflect certain standpoints (e.g., Henriques et al., 1998). Close analysis of the way subjectivity is manufactured in relation to different forms of technology also serves to demystify the realm of the personal as something that is usually pitted against the political realm (Gordo López and Cleminson, 2004). It is more important to show how subjectivity and objectivity is produced in certain language games and to ask what the stakes of the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity are, rather than delving into one side of the equation abstracted from the other.

4. Relationships

The domain between research participant and researcher – between the 'interiority' of the object of research and the 'subjectivity' of the agent – is of crucial importance in qualitative social science. Once again, this domain is prone to psychologisation and in particular to the unbidden influence of psychoanalytic conceptions of 'relationships', which are now often configured as painful and difficult 'research relationships'. Psychoanalytic notions are often apparent in the language used to describe these relationships, sometimes in the use of the terms 'painful' and 'difficult' employed in their therapeutic senses – that is, as mentally or emotionally painful and difficult – and in the way the institutional relationships between researchers and researched are often described as structured by 'boundaries' that should be maintained and honoured.

There is then a temptation for the researcher to try and protect the research participant and respect the putative 'boundaries', and thus to infantilise the research participant. In this way the 'painful' and 'difficult' experiences the researcher has about the relationship – a relationship that is already at this point being described using popular therapeutic terminology – are also attributed to the research participant, and a series of protective procedures, which go under the name of 'accountability', 'confidentiality' and 'ethics', are put in place. This is a state of affairs we characterise as 'generalised transference'; that is, the specific language of the clinic is used to apply to every social relationship, here to research relationships. Here again there is the danger of extrapolating from clinical psychoanalysis, which itself has too-often been treated as a privileged domain in which general relational phenomena are assumed to operate (cf., Freud, 1915).

Here we find some complex extensions of the idea of method as such. Method is a sequence of paths the researcher, or someone else who is in the same position, could take without taking any personal risk or choice in order to produce replicable knowledge. The formulation of a clear replicable sequence provides what pretends to be a guarantee, but it also suggests that if you choose a method you are no longer responsible for its consequences; the researcher simply elects to follow a 'method' and then faithfully obeys it. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is not so easily protected by the anonymity of the method, and so there have emerged a new series of tactics

by which to neutralize the inherent risk of the practice of method. These require extracting from the research situation any form of conflict, pain and potential suffering that may obtain in the encounter between researcher and research participant. This pacifies all parties, and invites them to believe that they do not have to think about their activities or the effects of the research intervention.

This problem can only be confronted by detailed historical study of how the clinic and forms of subjectivity that occur inside this peculiar social mechanism that is designed to produce 'transference', are constituted (Dunker, in press). The only way the apparatus of clinical psychoanalysis can be tackled is to 'relativise' it; that is, to render the transference into something specific rather than pretending that it is a necessary characteristic of all relationships that must then necessarily be attended to by social scientists. This means turning from generic rules and anonymity of the researcher to taking seriously the particular responsibility that bears upon someone embarking on activities and producing effects that the researcher cannot know about in their entirety before the research takes place.

Socio-critical strategies

Some readers will detect the traces of psychoanalysis in the very strategies we have used to unmask it. To this accusation our response is that you should not confuse smuggling (if you suspect us of importing more of the contraband material we declared and ditched at the door) with tactical deployment. If, for example, the reduction of 'meaning' to 'nonsense' in an interpretative procedure that attempts to avoid psychoanalytic ideology in psychologised culture ends up being close to what some psychoanalysts claim they actually do in their own clinical practice, then so be it. That is not our problem; our task is to tackle the immediate impact of psychoanalytic reasoning in social science. The same point applies to the argument that psychoanalysts themselves deconstruct the opposition between interiority and exteriority (Miller, 1986), and that they treat subjectivity as a function of transference pertaining to the clinic (Nasio, 1998). Again, we are happy to have these writers from within psychoanalysis on board as allies in the argument we are making here.

Psychoanalysis does provide some useful resources, but the ideological aspects, sedimented in popular culture through the banalisation and recuperation of the ideas to make them compatible with contemporary psychologisation, need to be carefully worked through and 'sublated' so that what is progressive can be retained and elaborated for further critical work. These strategies are not procedures that, once applied, can then be forgotten or taken for granted, and this is why we have refrained from giving prescriptions for how to develop psychoanalysis as a 'method' based on its own particular 'model' of social relations (or even an 'example' that would pin it down). Any method must be constructed from the particular qualities of the situation under examination. There is always an element of risk and the decisions we take cannot be guaranteed by rules and procedures or

ethics committees. If the object of inquiry resists the method we bring to bear, it is surely better that the object rather than the method survives at the end of the process (Latour, 2000; Kvale, 2003).

The stance that we have taken is to refuse the strategy of 'disavowal' that intensifies the power of the enemy substance – psychoanalysis – when it is fetished and turned into something that becomes more dangerous than it actually was because of what we have done to ourselves during the construction of our own defences against it. The enemy to good research functions thus because of the peculiar kind of grip it has on our work. It would be possible to find among the precursors to our task the work of those who attempted to work through and slough off what was 'abstract' about the procedures of psychoanalytic interpretation and to retain a practice that was 'concrete' (Politzer, 1994; for a psychoanalytic rebuttal of these arguments, see Laplanche and Leclaire, 1972).

Actually most of the qualitative research directly or indirectly inspired by psychoanalysis turns psychoanalysis into a kind of abstract psychology, with the exact characteristics pointed out by Georges Politzer (1994): a presumption of the conventionality of meaning (of categories, judgements, and contracts between researcher and their 'subjects'), atomization of meaning and behaviour (and the classification of 'attitudes'), the attempt to deal with mental process instead of actual 'life drama' (with an attendant affective dimension and the premise of total communication), an attempt to sidestep change (or 'interference' in the life of the 'object' under study), and the absence of any reflection about the historicity of meaning and the historical location of the researcher in certain assumptions about what problems and solutions pertain to a particular situation.

Psychoanalysis has many times in its history been defined as an anti-psychology (e.g., Burman, 2008a). If we aim to generate, experimentally, an 'anti-psychoanalytic' approach, perhaps we may arrive at an 'anti-anti-psychology', in other words, at a way of encountering the nature of subjectivity in contemporary society. In this way, an approach to the individual that psychology as a discipline usually betrays connects with the broader domain of the social sciences.

It could be said that we have aimed at a 'deconstruction' of psychoanalysis, in such a way as to question the imbrication of its ideological superstructure with strategies of discipline or confession (Hook, 2007). Our analysis has required a sensitivity to the historically-mediated role of psychoanalysis, that treats it as an ideological form that calls for interpretation so that it may better be harnessed to processes of change; this dialectical analysis of what is 'rational' in psychoanalysis is also, in some ways, indebted to Marxism. The standpoint we have taken is also very much influenced by feminist arguments about human nature as historically-mediated and appropriate epistemological procedures that attend to how social reality is configured so that those who benefit from it assume that this is the way the world is and must be.

There are clearly serious contradictions between psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, Marxist and feminist approaches in the social sciences (for a review of these contradictions see Parker, 2003), and we have not intended

to privilege psychoanalysis, merely to focus on what it promises. We anticipate that the research process will be reinvented each time a qualitative social scientist begins their work and particular potent psychoanalytic instances must be anticipated and refused as necessary, sublated as the work proceeds.

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