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## Reading formations of subjectivity: from discourse to psyche

**Abstract:** This article represents a critical overview of strategies to examine subjectivity in discourse, highlighting a series of methodological approaches which seek to manage the tension between discourse studies' focus on social and cultural structures, and psychoanalysis' interest in unconscious motivations. One aim is to trouble the supposed opposition between discourse analysis and the psychosocial approach, and to regard the latter as a possible extension of insights established by the former. It is argued here that psychosocial readings in general, and Lacanian approaches more specifically, offer a cautious, nuanced way of introducing psychoanalytic ideas into the analysis of texts. The first part of this article offers examples of discourse analytic approaches which have explicitly sought to incorporate psychoanalytic notions, followed by a discussion of Lacanian discourse analysis – a method shaped directly by this psychoanalytic school's concern with language. The article concludes with a series of methodological injunctions for conducting a psychosocial form of textual analysis.

**Keywords:** discourse, subjectivity, identification, psychosocial studies, discursive psychology, psychoanalysis.

After the 'turn to language' in the social sciences, the 1980s brought about a renewed interest in the formation and experience of subjectivity (Hollway, 2011). This article highlights a series of methodological approaches which seek to manage the tension between discourse studies' focus on social and cultural structures informing the way subjects behave and conceive of themselves, and psychoanalysis' interest in unconscious motivations. It represents a critical overview of strategies to examine how subjectivity is "produced and reproduced in the text, as embodied and 'invested' discourse" (Saville Young & Frosh, 2010: 518), that is, how subjectivity is articulated by, and constituted through language. The aim is to trouble the supposed opposition between discourse analysis and a more psychosocial approach, and to regard the latter as a possible extension of insights established by the former.

Since the field of discourse studies is too vast to fully parse the distinctions between all of its subdivisions, the first part of this article offers examples of discourse analytic approaches which have explicitly sought to incorporate psychoanalytic notions, focusing on interventions by Wendy Hollway and Michael Billig, who demonstrate two very different methods of accounting for subjectivity in

discourse. This is followed by a discussion of Lacanian discourse analysis, a method shaped directly by this psychoanalytic school's concern with language and the analytic encounter. The article concludes with a series of methodological injunctions for conducting a psychosocial form of textual analysis ('texts' here broadly designating forms of transcribed data), using examples from the work of Claudia Lapping and Stephen Frosh.

The move from discourse to psyche, or from language to what is seemingly beyond its confines, is one of the central methodological preoccupations of psychosocial studies. A psychosocial approach is of utility to those social researchers who seek to go beyond reified categories of the 'social' and the 'individual', treating subjectivity as a dynamic phenomenon that emerges at the site of multiple, interacting forces (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). It is argued here that a Lacan-inspired psychosocial reading in particular can offer a cautious way of introducing psychoanalytic ideas, while trying to avoid the pitfalls of colonising the text with the researcher's interpretations and investments (Parker, 2010). This is enabled by the perspective's theoretical foundations, which locate the unconscious not *within* the individual, but as a feature of language. Throughout the discussion, special attention is paid to how one might track instances of identification in discourse – a key psychoanalytic concept when examining subjects' attachment to others, to ideas, and to community, thereby giving a clear illustration of the subject's embeddedness in the social. A focus on the dynamic nature of attachments, which has led to a privileging of the notion of identification over the more static 'identity' (Hall, 1996), also necessitates a more dynamic qualitative method such as the approach proposed here. I argue that a psychosocial methodology is especially well-placed to conduct such an analysis, as it provides "a framework for considering how we may be invested in a particular discourse" (Branney, 2008:576).

Each of the approaches described below features a discussion of the specific challenges inherent in such methodological endeavours. These challenges include the transmission of affect and desire to language, locating the presence and nature of attachment to identificatory positions, determining whether meaning emerged in specific instances of discourse or whether it to some degree preceded it, and how to

account for the role of the researcher.

### Discourse and the subject

The term 'discourse' encompasses a multiplicity of meanings – from practices to systems of meaning and knowledge production, to physical settings and forms of conduct – which, in turn, have led to multiple research trajectories and methodologies (Edley, 2001). The present discussion confines itself to the analysis of textual discourse, that is, the study of how signifying practices permeate interactions and constructs the limits of the sayable. It examines how subjectivity can potentially be read for, once the interiority of the subject is endowed with a complexity that cannot be reduced to the product of criss-crossing lines of power relations in discourse. After all, at first glance, discourse analysis, with its insistence on the agency of discourse and the way it provides and shapes subject positions, seems to leave out the question of subjectivity altogether, bar few exceptions such as the work of Henriques et al. (1984). When using the tools and techniques of discourse analysis, the role of the individual at times seems to be reduced to that of a sounding board for available subject positions in discourse, that is, the notion that the subject is spoken *by* discourse.

Methodologically speaking, most practitioners of discourse analysis claim that psychological states can and should be observed in language and practices. Psychoanalysts, on the other hand, tend to emphasise the importance of what is unspoken by, and possibly inaccessible to subjects, making these two approaches seemingly irreconcilable. However, some social psychologists such as Wendy Hollway have argued in favour of using the insights of discourse analysis in conjunction with psychoanalytic ideas about anxiety and desire in order to investigate the production of subjectivity in gender and family relations, and have found that:

[...] the positions which are available in discourses do not determine people's subjectivity in any unitary way. Whilst gender-differentiated positions do overdetermine the meanings and practices and values which construct an individual's identity, they do not account for the complex, multiple and contradictory meanings which affect and are affected by people's practices. (Hollway, 1989: 282)

She demonstrates that the conversations with her research participants are more than just a "mechanical circulation of discourses" (ibid.), and that the forms of subjectivity assumed in her interviews represent an attempt by subjects to protect themselves "from the vulnerability of desire for the other" (p.283). Together with Tony Jefferson, Hollway went on to create the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) method (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013), a type of research interview that seeks to elicit an open-ended, 'free associative' style of response. While closer in style to the kind of talk produced in the encounter between analyst and analysand, representing an attempt to free interviewees from the constraints of narrating their experience in a linear, organised fashion, there are nevertheless inherent problems to this 'psycho-social' approach. Ian Parker highlights that while language by and large tends to be the raw material of both psychoanalysis and discourse analysis, Lacan's insights, for example pertain to the exchanges between analyst and analysand (Parker, 2010). Trying to approximate the type of conversation that occurs in the clinic may not be a viable solution to overcoming the tension between discourse studies and psychoanalysis.

In fact, in an explicit critique of Hollway's analysis of an interview encounter, Margaret Wetherell argues that a reading which seeks to take into account unconscious forces can end up ignoring the discursive resources at subjects' disposal to organise their narrative, in itself a product of the always somewhat artificial interview situation (Wetherell, 2005). According to her, this insistence on the need for psychoanalysis as an explanatory tool can paradoxically strip subjects of agency to a greater degree than those forms of discourse analysis which seek to stay within the limits of the textual. While a contested term (see Maxwell and Aggleton, 2013), agency is adopted here to denote the ways in which language is used consciously by the subject to shape self-representation. Recently, Wetherell has reiterated this argument in advocating the compatibility of discourse studies and affect theory (Wetherell, 2014) without needing to turn to psychology, or psychoanalytic ideas.

### **Repression in discourse**

Discursive psychologists reject the focus on inner processes of much of traditional

psychology (e.g. Potter et al, 1990; Potter, 2012; Wetherell, 1998, 2013; Wetherell & Edley, 2014). Instead, they opt to treat interaction as the result of discursive activity, whereby meanings are negotiated in the social encounter:

In this respect, discursive psychology is inimical with psychoanalytic theory, which presumes that hidden unconscious motive-forces lie behind the surface of social life. Psychoanalytic theorists often treat outward social activity as a cipher for unobservable, inner motivational processes (Billig, 1997:139-140).

Inspired by predecessors such as John Austin and Mikhail Bakhtin, Michael Billig is concerned with talk as *social action*, thus at least partially rejecting the notion that thinking is an exclusively internal process, unobservable by others. When Billig does rely on psychoanalytic ideas, as he did in his 1999 book on *Freudian Repression*, he treats concepts such as repression as activities accomplished in language, rather than as unconscious mechanisms over which subjects have no control. In his account, the act of repression is consciously performed by the person, not by the ego or any other mental structure: as soon as we speak, we repress, after all, not all things can be said to everyone at all times, for different reasons. In fact, following this line of thinking, one can not only be more optimistic about the use of language as a viable route to arrive at subjectivity – here, the subject *is* language. Billig is keen to point that emotions are not unconscious, wordless inner states of arousal which require translation into words – he presents a view in which emotions are a form of activity that takes place in language and conversation. For the analysis of interviews, it is helpful to treat them as ‘situated interactions’ along the lines of what he describes in his analysis of the repressed elements present in any social interaction. This means factoring in the interviewer’s presence, as well as coming to recognise the interview event as artificial, that is, as a conversation, usually between quasi-strangers, that would not have taken place without the researcher’s instigation.

At the same time, discursive psychology’s focus on language, and the insistence that we are confined to its parameters (betraying its origin in conversation analysis and Howard Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology), at times limits its theoretical reach,

especially in situations where there might be a strong affective component at play, as criticised by Stephen Frosh in his discussion of Billig's work:

I think that the over-strong discursive move participates in a rationalist fallacy that itself 'flattens out' situations of great emotional complexity, of intense feeling (Frosh, 2002:189).

Crucially, this means that some psychic operations such as identification - which are not merely the product of social and linguistic convention, serving to enable the smooth running of everyday interactions - require different analytical tools. After all, where a purely discursive reading might seek to identify subject positions assumed in an instance of discourse, what the taking up of these positions enables the subject to do, and how they might reflect wider societal discourses, a psychosocial reading asks why it is that the subject displays such an attachment (or aversion) to these positions, and seeks to identify the modes and vicissitudes of such attachments. Rather than utilising language as data, confident in its ability to contain all the information one needs about subjects, "[...] psychoanalysis shows very clearly that there is a point where discourse fails, where language is characterised by its insufficiency rather than its expressive capacity" (Frosh, 2002: 172). However, the conclusion to be drawn here is not resignation, or mistrust in all that is produced in and via language. In Mladen Dolar's interpretation, there is "nothing that would call for casting away language as insufficient" (Dolar, 1993: 95). Language both provides the means with which to locate ourselves, and to be heard from that very location, and it creates a loss, as with one's entry into language one also becomes confined within its limits.

From a methodological angle, this raises the question of whether that which is unspeakable is caused by gaps in language, as implied in the quote above, or whether there is something that escapes representability. If the latter is true, then those interested in discourses of identification must look for strategies of evasion or compensation that emerge because of it, and which point to more than the polite evasion of everyday interactions which at times seem to form the focus of discursive psychology. Indeed, one of the major challenges facing the researcher interested in investigating processes of identification is the question of how to access these if the mechanisms at work are unconscious. Additionally, many of the facets



underlying a current subject position may in fact be unpalatable to the subject. Identification with, for example, a certain moment in a nation's history may be an instance of melancholic identification with the country's 'lost' status (see Paul Gilroy's 2005 *Postcolonial Melancholia*).

In recent years, a Lacanian approach to discourse analysis has been gaining currency, as it seeks to incorporate the analytical insights of discourse analysis with the “sophistication of its [i.e. psychoanalysis, MB] ideas about emotional investment and fantasy” (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008: 351). In fact, a Lacanian perspective is perhaps singularly well positioned for such an undertaking, as for Lacan the unconscious is to be located not *within* the individual, but as a feature of language, “that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject’s disposal in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (Lacan, 2002, quoted in Parker, 2005).

#### Lacanian discourse analysis

A Lacanian perspective aims to show that, while there may be a limited choice in the positions that subjects can assume within discourse, how and why they invest in certain subject positions can be fruitfully explored using psychoanalytic concepts:

Our route through this mire is to argue that in the accounts individuals give of their lived experiences, one can see at work both the powerful effects of social discourses and the agentic struggles of particular subjects as they locate themselves in relation to these discourses - and that the unconscious is both generated by this struggle, and generative of its consequences (Frosh et al, 2003: 7).

When conducting a Lacanian discourse analysis (henceforth: LDA), a first step when looking at texts is to read for existing discourses, and the position(s) the text or narrative takes in relation to them. Ian Parker provides a guide for ‘Negotiating Text with Lacan’ (Parker 2010), by advising the researcher to examine the formal qualities of the text, the anchoring of representation, to look at the different registers of communication and instances of agency and determination, the role of knowledge, positions in language, deadlocks of perspective and, importantly, to be wary of one’s own interpretation of textual material.



The three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real permeate discourse and the way the subject is positioned within it: “whenever we deal with discourse we are necessarily dealing with the intertwining of imaginary, symbolic and real elements” (Neill, 2013:6). In discourse, the *Symbolic* is referred to by Parker as the “*unconscious* of the text” (2010, author’s italics) – it is what is not thematised, does not appear to require thematisation, yet functions to structure the text and our understanding of it. Here the task of the discourse analyst is to ‘map the discourse’ (Neill, 2013), and to determine which signifiers assume primary importance. For practitioners of LDA, meanings are held in place by an underlying ‘governing term’ – that of the master signifier, which may or may not be explicitly expressed. This is the signifier or ‘nodal point’ which provides coherence to the discourse, and which, if removed, would deprive it of all meaning. In Neill’s analysis of a narrative detailing a woman’s childhood experience in South Africa, an example of such a structuring term is that of apartheid itself, and the way its discourse infiltrated and shaped subjectivities.

While “there is no escaping the symbolic”, there is also “no experience of the world which is not affected by identification. There is no escaping the imaginary realm” (Neill, 2013: 339). The *Imaginary* can be described as the dimension of ego-substantiating interactions between subjects (e.g. the interviewer and the interviewee, or the author and the public) and in this capacity it relies on the narcissistic aspects of identification, as well as its aggressive and rivalrous tendencies. This is the dimension of discourse in which the researcher’s investments are prone to play the greatest role, with a danger of reading in the text for what one is looking for or hopes to find, or giving in to the impression that the interlocutor and the respondent are speaking of the same object (e.g. Lapping, 2013). Finally, the *Real* of the text is the underlying ‘centre of gravity’, which simultaneously resists adequate representation or verbalisation by subjects. The Real can be regarded as the pre-discursive force or desire that motivates speech, and which is evident in representations of horror, or of limitless enjoyment. It is a source of anxiety for subjects and can be observed in breaks or gaps in spoken discourse. The Real is “what any ‘reality’ must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through this repression [...] a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in

the field of apparent reality” (Fisher, 2009:18). Hence it is hardest to identify, but must be assumed as leaving its traumatic mark in discourse.

In order to benefit from the insights of Lacanian psychoanalysis, discourse analysts should not conclude their labours at the stage of having identified the three registers in operation within the text. Used in this way, LDA becomes little more than a method for ordering data, or at most “a tool to open up a text” (Parker, 2010). According to Žižek, it is the categories of fantasy and *jouissance* that make up the crucial component which has been left out of existing discourse analyses, namely the aspect of enjoyment, of the subject's attachment to certain signifiers, despite their outwardly irrational nature (Žižek, 1989). They are also behind subjects' attachment to a 'symptom' or mode of complaint which they offer as explanation for recurring social problems. In my own work analysing Russian responses to the arrest and imprisonment of Russian punk group Pussy Riot in 2012, its members were frequently vilified as their public forms of protest were seen to represent a form of 'stolen enjoyment', from which their detractors were barred and to which the only reaction possible then appeared to be one of rejection that demands punishment. Indeed, Pussy Riot's opponents were able to celebrate their outrage at the group's contempt for traditional values, in the process fostering a kind of libidinal community based on a solidarity of *jouissance*, of shared suffering or injustice (Brock, 2015).

The concepts of *jouissance* and fantasy may thus provide clues to what constitutes subjects' attachment to certain discourses, in other words, what makes up the “drive behind identification acts” (Stavrakakis, 2007: 166). But while work dedicated to detecting the workings of fantasy in ideology, and of ideology in fantasy, may have become more prevalent since the publication of Žižek's *Sublime Object of Ideology* in 1989 (e.g. Glynos, 2001, 2008; Stavrakakis, 1999, 2007), accessing the workings of fantasy and desire represents perhaps the most challenging task for the researcher. Significant methodological challenges therefore remain when one tries to implement the above recommendations to empirical data.

Finally, the privileging of language in LDA is coupled with what at times reads like a celebration of incomprehension. According to Lacan, “I would go as far as to say that it is on the basis of a kind of refusal of understanding that we push open the door to analytic understanding” (Lacan, 1954-55/1988:265). His clinical recommendation not

to assume the place of the 'subject that is supposed to know' (*le sujet-supposé-savoir*) - while ethically sound as a way of refraining from colonising the text with the researcher's investments - makes viable forms of investigation of subjects' accounts even more elusive. After all, how can one make this 'refusal of understanding' actionable, that is, how can one transform an impossibility into a methodological injunction?

#### **Exit from the methodological dead-end**

As a way out of the above dilemma, and following his earlier intense engagement with the Lacanian approach (2008a, 2008b, 2008c), Derek Hook has in recent years increasingly called for reconsideration of Freud's work (Hook, 2013; Hook, 2014). While he is similarly wary of researchers confining themselves solely to the textual, to that which is seemingly legible, he simultaneously warns explicitly against mapping psychic formations onto discourse, that is, against using psychoanalytic terminology as simply an additional means of categorising textual discourse. In order to examine how the presence of phenomena such as desire and identification make themselves known in discourse, Hook therefore suggests approaching the analysis with a number of questions which operate as structuring principles for the text and enable the researcher to extract facets which might form the building blocks of a careful psychosocial reading. These questions include enquiries into what it is the community most values or yearns for, as a way of locating narcissistic points of identification and given ideal-ego values, as well as the community's 'lost objects'. Others focus on the preferred mode of enjoyment of a group, and, crucially, seek to identify its key symbols and points of historical identification. Many of these elements come to the fore in Hook's analysis of reactions to the World Cup held in South Africa in 2010, an event which provided a key moment of shared positive affect for the post-apartheid nation, as well as the important identificatory role of Nelson Mandela for the national psyche (Hook, 2014).

Similar to Hook's extension of Lacanian insights, which he achieved by returning to Freudian theories of identification, Claudia Lapping advocates a non-dogmatic approach to psychosocial methodologies. Rather than staying within the confines of one school of psychoanalysis, she acknowledges the transformation psychoanalytic

concepts have to undergo in order to retain utility for social research. In her book on the pitfalls and possibilities of using *Psychoanalysis in Social Research* (2011) she suggests that openness is essential to psychosocial forms of analysis:

I am arguing *against* the reification of psychoanalytic concepts. Psychoanalytic concepts are not unitary objects that exist outside a particular analysis. They are constituted in the process of analysis, in the discontinuous elements of discourse; they are signifying elements that are only temporarily ordered or fixed within a particular social and historical context (Lapping, 2011:6).

Lapping engages with the question of whether one can read discourses in the manner reserved for the interpretation of dreams, as this would in principle represent the most fundamentally psychoanalytic of all forms of textual analysis. Indeed, some of the concept introduced by Freud, such as the distinction between manifest and latent content, notions of condensation and displacement, and the idea of overdetermination have become popularised to a degree that they have entered mainstream discourse (Parker, 1997). The concept of overdetermination has also re-emerged in discourse analysis, for example in Laclau and Mouffe's employment of the idea of 'nodal points' tying the field of discursivity together (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

While she is attuned to the needs of scholars engaging in empirical social research, Lapping is simultaneously wary of the spectre of misinterpretation by those who have come to treat psychoanalysis as something of a *Weltanschauung*, thereby ignoring the potential challenges of integrating psychoanalytic ideas outside the context of the clinic (Frosh, 2010). Possible temptations for the social researcher are those of overprivileging one's own research agenda so as to become blind to the actual discourses at hand, or to apply psychoanalytic ideas haphazardly in order to give an illusion of psychological depth. Finally, Lapping gives room to the divergent opinions surrounding the debate of whether one can ever get to the truth of another subject, and if so, by how much, for instance by asking whether affect can be transmitted without distortion. This is of special relevance to social researchers who may find themselves trying to minimise the degree of 'static' in research

encounters, while inadvertently becoming its source. It is important to remember that subjects do not represent puzzles to be solved by the 'right' analyst. Engaging in psychosocial forms of methodology means giving up on the fantasy of mastery. Indeed, not all instances of say, repetition, may even benefit from the introduction of psychoanalytic concepts, as they may not always point to strong underlying attachments.

### **Methodological lessons**

Moving on to the consideration of methodological injunctions for a psychosocial analysis of discourse, Frosh and Lapping both suggest a multi-stage approach to the text. In one of the studies commended by Lapping, the first analytical stage operates on the level of discourse, focusing on "the discursive texture of reiterated categories" (Lapping, 2011: 92). This means reading for existing discourses in the text, and to examine how subjects position themselves in relation to them. At this stage, there is not yet any accounting for why there is attachment to certain positions within discourse, as this quasi-Foucaultian stance does not offer the explanatory tools which would reveal "why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others" (Hall, 1996: 10). Following this first ordering move, the second stage opens itself up to the careful introduction of psychosocial ideas such as desire and resistance, and is thus potentially more equipped to "capture the complexity of desire, transference and the compulsion to repeat (Lapping, 2011:93). However, while certain inferences may be made and patterns be given some hesitant interpretation, even a multi-stage process does not allow for analytical certainty. Through a psychosocial reading, the fact of affective investment can be established, but its meaning or definite origin most likely remain opaque. Thus for example, a repeated insistence on, or discursive performance of certain heteronormative facets of masculinity may indicate a desire to approximate a fixed identity position, but this can never be established with certainty. In other words, "we can trace the discursive instantiations of reiterated desire, but we cannot, perhaps, gain access to desire itself" (Lapping, 2011: 95).

Stephen Frosh posits that psychoanalysis is useful for "outlining patterns of desire in which subjects become stuck" (Frosh, 2010: 186) and can thus perhaps

explain attachment to certain subject positions. The analytical procedure of 'concentric reflexivity' he discusses at length in his 2010 article with Lisa Saville Young is similarly consistent of two stages or 'circles'. The first circle:

[...] is concerned with discursive positions resisted and taken up in talk.[...] In Lacanian terms, master signifiers are identified in the text – recurring metaphors or discourses that define and limit what can and cannot be said, making certain subject positions possible while denying others (Saville Young & Frosh, 2010: 518).

In procedural terms, this stage analyses the text's structure, paying attention both to the text's internal logic, and the way it reflects or "ventriloquates" (Frosh, 2007) broader cultural discourses. The second stage represents the "realm of the psychosocial" proper, as it "understands subjectivity, produced and reproduced in the text, as embodied and 'invested' discourse and it is here that psychoanalysis is drawn upon as part of the attempt to construct the text in a certain way" (ibid.). However, subjectivity itself is not a stable entity in the text. Rather it is located at the intersection of the two concentric circles, and its manifestation is a product of "the subjectivity of the researched as well as the subjectivity of the researcher" (Saville Young & Frosh, 2010: 519). A psychosocial reading is thus able to discern specific textual dynamics, and to connect such observations to the presence of desire, or the existence of certain master signifiers structuring discourse. Specific instantiations of discourse can be interpreted as instances of certain psychic operations. For example, a discursive tendency to divide objects into good and bad and to insistently reject or expel the negative can be related to processes of splitting as ways of managing perceived threats to the psyche, while a contradictory move of displaying knowledge of certain ideas or facts, and simultaneously a willful rejection of them can be indicative of fetishistic disavowal (Mannoni, 2003). While such readings are never final – psychosocial meaning can rarely be fixed in this manner – they may shed some insight both into the logic inherent in discourse, and the subject's investment in it.

### Conclusion

This article gave an overview of discourse analytic approaches that seek to

incorporate psychoanalytic ideas in order to investigate the formation of subjectivity as it is evident in discourse, concluding with psychosocial forms of discourse analysis specifically those inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis. It highlighted the productivity of distinguishing between two, consecutive readings of data in order to examine both discursive and psychical dimensions, and, crucially, their interrelation. This discussion seeks to convey optimism in the possibility of bridging the gap between 'the formation of subjectivity' and the 'social dimension' of discourse (Malone, 2000). It was concerned not only with what is directly verbalised, but also with how to incorporate other forms of meaning present in the text, such as interruptions in speech or disruptions to coherence. The type of analysis suggested here ultimately argues that a careful analysis of language, and emerging patterns and structures within it, can provide the supporting data for this 'insufficiency', and point to other, unconscious forms of meaning.

Another key aspect of social research addressed was the exploration of the dynamic between researcher and researched, highlighting that possible interpretations are always multiple and contested, and that the researcher's investments can play an important role in producing them. Finally, the article emphasised the need to implement psychoanalytic concepts such as identification with caution. While the psychosocial researcher seeks to locate the unconscious forces driving certain discourses into circulation, and to examine subjects' investment in them, it is important to resist the temptation of seeing the unconscious ubiquitously. Psychosocial forms of analysis, even in their allegiance to different schools of psychoanalysis, are particularly aware of how they are implicated in the meanings created in academic research. Hence the impasses referred to above should be seen as productive, rather than limiting, as they point to the possibilities as much as to the limits of what can reliably be detected in discourse.

The approach discussed here should also serve to remind the scholar that while qualitative research usually relies on the narrability of experience, much of what has an impact on subjects' lives may lie outside of this: "To say, as some do, that the self *must* be narrated, that only the narrated self can be intelligible and survive, is to



say that we cannot survive with an unconscious” (Butler, 2005: 65). In fact, explanations that seem too linear or ordered and thus leave no room for alternative meanings should leave the reader suspicious. Instead, accounts that do justice to subjectivity need to relinquish fantasies of integration, and to instead see the self as multiple and over-determined: “There is always 'too much' or 'too little' - an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (Hall, 1996:3).

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