

The Rigour and Art of Interpretive Writing

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Transcription, Analysis, & Interpretive Memos

Analysis in interpretive work has no beginning point, but rather becomes an ongoing experience that began even before the interview. In the shaping of words in figures on paper, something miraculous happens...

The clay bowl resting on the table in front of me meets my eyes with its curved and grainy surface. Yet, I can only see one side of that surface – the other side of the bowl is invisible, hidden by the side that faces me. In order to view that other side, I must pick up the bowl and turn it around in my hands, or else walk around the wooden table. Yet, having done so, I can no longer see the first side of the bowl. Surely I know that it still exists; I can even feel the presence of that aspects which the bowl now presents to the lamp on the far side of the table. Yet, I myself am simply unable to see the whole of this bowl all at once.

Moreover, while examining its outer surface, I have caught only a glimpse of the smooth and finely glazed *inside* of the bowl. When I stand up to look down into that interior, which gleams with curved reflections from the skylight overhead, I can no longer see the sunglazed outer surface. This earthen vessel thus reveals aspects of its presence to me only by withholding other aspects of itself for further exploration. There can be no question of ever totally exhausting the presence of the bowl with my perception; its very existence as a bowl ensures that there are dimensions wholly inaccessible to me – most obviously the patterns hidden between its glazed and unglazed surface, the interior density of its clay body.

If I break it into pieces, in hopes of discovering these interior patterns or the delicate structure of its molecular dimensions, I will have destroyed its integrity as a bowl; far from coming to know it completely, I will simply have wrecked any possibility of coming to know it further, having traded the relation between myself and the bowl for a relation to a collection of fragments.

Abram, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more than human world* (pp. 50-51). New York: Vintage Books.

There can...be a general expectation that what the text says will fit perfectly with my own meanings and expectations...but what another person tells me, whether in conversation, letter, book, or whatever, is generally supposed to be his own and not my opinion; and this is what I am to take note of without necessarily having to share it...Within this multiplicity of what can be thought - i.e., of what a reader can find meaningful and hence expect to find- not everything is possible; and if a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he will not be able to fit what he has misunderstood into the range of his own various expectations of meaning. (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 268-269)

What do we conserve and forget in interpretive analysis and writing?

"Half of the world is always behind you"

Aletheia

1. To open (Greek god, Poros):
an opening, opportunity,
portal, unconcealing
2. To enliven: to bring life that
what was dead; lethal, lethe
3. To remember: Lethe, River of
Forgetfulness

The person you were talking
to is not your topic.

Therefore, to accurately
represent the person is not
your task.

Interpretive Writing

Hermeneutics has a tragic, loving relationship with language.

“If we may talk here of playing games at all, it is not we who play with words, but the nature of language plays with us.”
(Heidegger, 1968, pp. 118-119)

Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either. In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity...that is why the capacity to read, to understand what is written, is like a secret art, even a magic that frees and binds us.

(Gadamer, 1989, p. 163)

"the ever-present difficulty of residing within "the
quietness of a single interpretation"

Davey, 2006, p. xiv

"understanding does not merely interpret the world
but changes it"

Davey, 2006, p. xiv

So what??????

All interpretation works under the promise of truth...knowledge is not so different from faith. When we opt for a given interpretation, we do not do so because we know it to be true..but because we *believe* it to be the best, the one that offers the most promise and is the most likely to make the text intelligible, comprehensible for us.

- Madison, 1988, p. 15

"What are perceived as the weaknesses of philosophical hermeneutics – its inability to arrive at a final interpretation....are indeed its strengths"

Davey, 2006, p. xv

When you talk to me about my research, do not ask me what I have found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data...I am not confessing to telling any lies about the people or events in my stories..The proof for you is in the things I have made – how they look to your mind's eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart

Sandelowski (1994, p. 61)

