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# 1

## Introduction

*Audie Klotz*

Debates across the social sciences rely on philosophical markers, notably the contemporary polarization between the so-called ‘positivists’ and ‘post-modernists.’ These labels are contested. Few ‘positivists’ rely on a narrow definition of falsification, and many ‘post-modernists’ reject extreme relativism. But the division is also grounded in some legitimate ontological and epistemological differences. For instance, positivists resist including language as a form of observable behavior, and those who reject by assumption the salience of culture or language need not debate how best to study meanings. Post-modernists, in turn, generally see concerns over rigorous analysis as a hallmark of a putatively flawed scientific approach to human action. One unfortunate result of this pervasive divide is a limited appreciation of the insights offered by scholars working within alternative frameworks. It leaves little common ground for analyzing the role of rhetoric in foreign policy choice, for instance.

Despite their abstract nature, the main terrain of these disputes is the realm of empirical research, including the delineation of legitimate research questions, allocation of funding for projects, and employment in the profession. For example, the conflation of ideas with ideology in the traditional ‘Realist’ characterization of ‘Idealism,’ still dominant in the field of International Relations (IR), privileges materialist explanations. The epistemological question of interpretation gets sidelined, because ideas are assumed not to matter as much as military capabilities. As a result, IR privileges a certain form of diplomatic history that lacks serious consideration of discourse analysis. And that can make it harder for scholars employing post-modern inspired approaches to get published in mainstream journals or get jobs at research universities (particularly in the United States).

Much has been written about this situation (see Hall 1999 on the philosophical issues and Steinmetz 2005 on the disciplinary ones). It has even spawned a 'perestroika' movement in Political Science aimed at opening up that discipline (Monroe 2005). But we still lack true intellectual engagement. Discussion remains an abstract positioning at the level of ontology or epistemology. Yet researchers need practical answers at the level of methodology: How *should* scholars interpret meanings? In IR, recent literature provides plenty of useful illustrations (such as the diverse contributions in Katzenstein 1996 and Weldes *et al.* 1999) but little about the practical trade-offs between techniques for analyzing language. What is at stake in selecting from discourse, speech acts, and semiotics – or even content analysis? When might it be justifiable to combine tools drawn from different analytical traditions – can discourse analysis or semiotics inform the construction of a dictionary for context-sensitive computerized coding, for instance?

We think that refocusing on methodological questions can break down the insularity of scholarly communities, because the justification for practical choices in empirical research exposes underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions (Klotz and Lynch 2007). We concentrate on IR (broadly defined) to provide a degree of empirical overlap. This helps to reveal how researchers wrestle with similar sorts of decisions that require the translation of abstract assumptions into concrete practices. Why do researchers define key concepts differently? How much 'data' is enough? What makes one interpretation better than another? We may still disagree on procedures and standards, but dialogue over methodology forces us to state the goals of our research, clearly define our core concepts, and set out our theoretical assumptions. Then, if warranted, researchers can expand their tools, or at least be able to understand a broader range of relevant literatures.

Many advocates of pluralism already seek to bridge the qualitative–quantitative split through the use of mixed methods. Statistical analysis can certainly be combined with case studies to capture causality in terms of conditions and mechanisms. Yet the presumption remains that positivism and post-modernism are incompatible. For instance, Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias actively promote pluralism, including formal models, but (mis-) characterize post-modernism as lacking methodology (2004: 5). Consequently, we have no guidelines for determining when post-modern analytical techniques are *similar*, *complementary*, or *incompatible* with prevailing positivist approaches. For instance, both rational choice and literary criticism offer theoretical templates for

historical narrative, but these remain *very* distinct literatures. Pluralism, as currently practiced, falls short.

Our starting point is 'qualitative' methods, because of the absence of sufficient guidelines for applying these tools. In contrast, courses in a wide array of statistical techniques are readily available. This gap creates a misperception that historiography and ethnography, for example, do not need to be taught to students and that experienced scholars intuitively know how to use interviews or textual analysis. Researchers of all generations continue to share tales of frustration about learning the trade through trial and error.

An increase in qualitative methods books and courses across the social sciences recognizes this need for practical lessons (for a sampling, see the syllabi posted on the website of the Consortium for Qualitative Research Methods hosted at Arizona State University, that many publishers are expanding their offerings in this area is readily evident in their current catalogues). Those written by political scientists remain oriented toward testing theories and making causal arguments (King *et al.* 1994; Brady and Collier 2004; George and Bennett 2005; Goertz 2006; Trachtenberg 2006; Gerring 2007). Most ignore post-modernism or reject it explicitly; a few offer asides about limited compatibility. Two notable exceptions lean the other way, in defense of critical theory and interpretation: the compendium by Ackerly *et al.* (2006) of feminist approaches in IR and the commentaries compiled by Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006).

We adopt a broader view, taking seriously the goals of *both* post-modernist and positivist researchers. This book starts from the assumption that 'qualitative' methods are somehow linked to meaning. But we leave open the boundaries of what should be labeled qualitative, as well as the possibilities for combining qualitative with quantitative and formal approaches. The chapters in this book present a cross-sample of perspectives, ranging from interpretation inspired by Foucault to mechanism-seeking process tracing all the way to agent-based modeling. While the authors work within the field of IR (or international studies, as some might prefer), they bring the insights of other fields, opening up an interdisciplinary conversation.

The contributors offer detailed guidance on how to apply specific tools of analysis and how to circumvent some inherent limitations. All are accomplished scholars who share, with extraordinary candor, their successes and failures. Since fostering use of a broader range of analytical tools requires breaking down the barriers constructed by epistemological polarization, we also asked them to consider whether it would be

appropriate (and if so, when) to combine their primary tools with other qualitative, quantitative, and/or formal techniques.

Part I segues from ontology and epistemology to methodology via research design. Any project is grounded in particular literatures, and the theories contained in those literatures provide a specific vocabulary to characterize the empirical world. Theories, by their nature, simplify and privilege certain aspects of that world. Yet few works on methodology help aspiring researchers get from those ontological assumptions, manifest in theories and concepts, to methodological choices. Illustrating with applications of Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis, Anna Leander, in Chapter 2, offers four steps for translating key concepts into empirical work: asking questions, exploring the relationship between key concepts, figuring out how to apply those concepts, and reflecting on the ways in which those concepts, in turn, can create social realities.

Extending Leander's comments on reflexivity, Brooke Ackerly, in Chapter 3, points out that some concepts, notably gender, embed scholars in their own social environments, presenting researchers with a series of potential dilemmas in the design of their studies. Tensions start with the formulation of key questions and range from very practical issues of sampling to the ethical implications of publishing. For those striving to sensitize themselves to inequalities, in both theoretical formulations and research practices, she offers 'curb cutting' as a pedagogical tool that trains people to view the world through different interpretive lenses.

Leander's and Ackerly's shared emphasis on context and interpretation are, for many, the hallmarks of 'qualitative' case-based research. But in Chapter 4, Audie Klotz uses their insights to challenge the common treatment of case studies as a 'method.' Case selection, she argues, is part of research design, and a variety of methods can be used to analyze them. Researchers should, therefore, clarify their questions, their concepts, and their logic of comparison before tackling the two tasks specific to case selection: defining a 'case' of something and mapping out the universe of *possible* cases (including non-cases). She then assesses three strategies: single cases, paired comparisons, and the elusive category of 'More-than-Two but Not-a-Lot.'

Especially for the Classic Qualitative Tools covered in Part II, we selected authors who would draw on examples from IR because researchers in our field lack teaching materials that address the particularities we face. Discourse analysis by a literary theorist, for instance, may operate at an aesthetic level that does not capture politics or policy concerns. In contrast, Iver Neumann, in Chapter 5, suggests ways to

turn censorship into an analytical advantage, among other insights. He translates the meta-theory of discourse into four methodological steps. The first is a precondition: a degree of cultural competence. From there, he guides readers through the delimitation of texts and subsequent mapping of the representations that comprise discourse. The final step is to untangle the layering of dominant and subordinate discourses.

Diplomatic history's narrative approach has long dominated qualitative analysis in IR (even after the 'history' versus 'science' debates of the 1960s) and is amply represented in the burgeoning methods literature (Elman and Elman 2001; Trachtenberg 2006). Alternatively, offering a post-modern perspective in Chapter 6, Kevin Dunn shifts down from Neumann's macro-historical level to explore agency in the creation of representations and contestation over them. After clearly situating his work ontologically and epistemologically, including its differences from causal analysis, he offers concrete advice on tracking down archival materials destroyed by arsonists and coping with the overwhelming amount of textual, visual, official, popular, and other materials appropriate for his genealogical approach to history.

Unlike historiography, ethnography appears infrequently as a tool of analysis in IR, perhaps because advice from an anthropologist working in a rural village is of limited use to someone seeking to do participant observation in a government department. But anthropology as a field is shifting away from the local in isolation, and as Hugh Gusterson demonstrates in Chapter 7, participant observation and interviewing can indeed help to answer questions about international security. Security clearance may be a distinctive barrier, but access to any field site presents challenges. Starting, like Neumann and Dunn, from a theoretical perspective informed by Foucault, Gusterson presents ethnography as a tool for mapping meanings, but he carries this out at the micro-level of individuals within their communities.

Given the penchant for qualitative analysis in IR to focus on individuals as key actors in historical narratives, Jeffrey Checkel's use of process tracing, in Chapter 8, presents an extension of a traditional approach, rather than an alternative one. By linking process tracing to the study of causal mechanisms generally, and by illustrating with independent and dependent variables beyond the foreign policy arena narrowly defined, he opens up possibilities for its application at diverse levels of analysis and across fields of study. Checkel also discusses some practical considerations of using elite interviews, official documents, and secondary sources to distinguish various dynamics of decision-making

and collective identity formation as micro-level mechanisms of socialization.

Part III continues this focus on individuals and micro-level analysis, albeit in radically different ways. Each in its own way challenges what typically would be considered a qualitative method yet still captures some element of its hallmarks: meaning, interpretation, and context. Therefore, we call these Boundary Crossing Techniques, because they force researchers to reconsider what, if any, characteristics should define qualitative research.

In Chapter 9, Jerrold Post brings psychology and psychiatry to the task of figuring out what makes leaders 'tick.' His technique of Political Personality Profiling is a variant of the single case study, one which draws on personal history and comparison via personality type. No special training is required, he points out, only a sensitivity to psychologically minded types of observations that enable the researcher to identify the characteristics and patterns that clinicians use for diagnosis. More generally, his approach offers one answer to questions about how deeply analysts can delve into the minds of their research subjects.

Margaret Hermann, in Chapter 10, asks many of the same research questions about political leadership as does Post (and as many analysts of foreign policy do), but she uses Content Analysis as her tool for analyzing individuals at a distance. She delineates eight generic steps that any researcher should think through in order to analyze large quantities of textual (and visual) materials. Along the way, she challenges some of the myths that many interpretive scholars have about this approach; current software programs, for example, do allow for context-sensitive coding.

Gavan Duffy remains skeptical about getting into the minds of these leaders, even at a distance, and offers an alternative approach in Chapter 11 that concentrates on communications between individuals (such as foreign policy makers). Influenced by Anglo-American speech act theory, he applies formal logic to texts in order to create replicable interpretations. Pragmatic Analysis contrasts with the post-modern inspired approaches of Neumann, Dunn, and Gusterson, as Duffy holds out the future possibility of using computers to provide systematic analyses of discourse.

Taking formalization one step further, Matthew Hoffmann makes a case, in Chapter 12, for adding agent-based models to the interpreter's toolkit. He argues that this particular form of computer simulation can capture key dynamics of mutual constitution. Yet he insists that all

models are heuristics, and, therefore, remain the basis for interpretation rather than objective analysis.

Part IV steps back from particular tools to Implications for pluralism in research and teaching. In Chapter 13, Samuel Barkin returns to the broad debates alluded to in this introduction. He remains skeptical of the term ‘qualitative’ and cautions against any naïve embrace of pluralism. More optimistically, Deepa Prakash in Chapter 14 highlights teaching tools that work especially well. She draws on her own experiences and those of her peers as they experimented with the guidelines offered in the manuscript versions of this book, as well as her perusal of assignments described in other syllabi. Together, these two chapters give scholars plenty of ideas for teaching and learning without falling into the trap of reifying the category of qualitative methods.

This book provides both an introduction to unfamiliar techniques and a guide for better application of familiar tools. Those designing a course might want to assign the chapters in order, while someone looking primarily to use a particular approach can safely skip to that section. Others may wish to concentrate on particular themes, clustering the chapters that focus on textual analysis, for instance, or perhaps those concerned with individuals as agents. Cross-references within each chapter provide suggestions for identifying such threads. Readers trying to figure out how to combine various techniques would benefit from reading the Research Design and Implications sections before delving into the toolbox. While controversies in contemporary IR and Political Science instigated the creation of this book, we hope that these chapters – in whatever order they are read – will prove useful to researchers seeking to practice pluralism across the social sciences.

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