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**Analytical buggery:
From disembodied detachment to embodied engagement in organizational analysis**

Prof. Torkild Thanem
Stockholm Business School
Stockholm University
tt@sbs.su.se

Prof. David Knights
Lancaster University and Oxford Brookes University
d.knights@lancaster.ac.uk

Inspired by Gilles Deleuze's (1995) historical-philosophical work, this paper introduces a method of 'analytical buggery' to promote more embodied ways of engaging with empirical material in organizational research. While the term buggery itself refers to practices of anal sex and perhaps even bestiality, as an analytical method it involves us violating convention through declaring and engaging our own bodies in the research act. Dominant research practice tends implicitly to assume that analysis is simply about disclosing or capturing the detailed order of 'things' through detached logical reasoning and/or the robust collection of data. By contrast, the organizational scholar committed to analytical buggery seeks to imbue their analysis with as much flesh and blood as possible from the lives they study. Rather than denying, we actually celebrate our own embodied life as an inescapable and embedded element in selecting topics, collecting data, generating interpretations and theoretical analyses, and writing up the results. As the analytical bugger plunges into an untidy web of extant concepts, empirical records and corporeal experiences, s/he may create monstrously immaculate concepts that embrace the scars and pains of organizational life as well as their apathies and indifferences, joys and excitements.

We begin by tracing the disembodied deceptions of organizational analysis back through key figures in the history of philosophy and science. By opening up the pores and confronting the wounds that incorporate this history, we outline the main ingredients, the challenges and concrete practices of analytical buggery..

Disembodied deceptions in analytical method

Scholarly and popular discourse gives us the impression that analysis is about structure and order, detachment and distance in producing precise representations of reality, through detailed logical reasoning that is independent of judgements contaminated by personal interests, private passions or bodily desires. Such notions are not only manifest within much academic research but they are also widespread on internet platforms such as Google and Wikipedia, where analysis is presumed to involve “the process of breaking a complex topic or substance into smaller parts” and “the detailed examination of the elements or structure of something”. This approach is elaborated by the Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahnemann (2011) who encourages readers to abandon our tendency for fast, intuitive thinking and gut-based decision-making, and instead learn to think slowly, logically, analytically and rationally, by cultivating our ability to stay calm and keep our cool.

Now, critical theorists and other sceptics may object that these examples offer little but a misconstrued strawperson of how contemporary organizational analysis is actually practiced. However, the popularity of disembodied reflexivity as reflected in methodology texts e.g. Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009) and in books on e.g. discourse analysis (e.g. Phillips and Hardy 2002) combined with the tendency foremost of us (at least in what we publish) to ‘clean up our data’, leave our bodies out of the analysis, and often to reduce the lives of our participants to a few short interview transcripts or disembodied observations speaks volumes in regard to views of any automated rejection of the ends and means of positivism – a legacy that despite the rise of phenomenology and qualitative methods is fully alive and kicking.

Like most inventions of western intellectual thought, analysis has its roots in Ancient Greek philosophy. After Plato’s early dialogues had set out a method of ‘elenctic’ analysis where the essence of a thing and the real truth of its definition was pursued through cross-examination, his later dialogues unfold an analytical method of ‘hypothesis’, which more clearly presages the representational and deductive or inductive methods of positivism. As Plato asserts in *The Statesman*, hypothetical analysis is conducted by confirming a true belief with a true account, but it also involves collection and division, that is, collecting different kinds of things which have something in common and then dividing them by specifying how they differ, “limb by limb, like a sacrificial animal” (1997: 330).

Aristotle, who founded the subject of formal logic and whose influence on western science for a long time exceeded Plato’s, may have done more to dismember and disembody the method of analysis than his former teacher. Distanced and detached from the kind of lively arguments that we find in Plato’s dialogues, Aristotle’s (1991) writing in the *Prior* and

Posterior Analytics is abstract and formulaic. Critical of Plato's method of division, he returns to the teachings of Ancient Greek geometry and comes to define analysis as a process of knowing "the reasoned facts" rather than just "mere facts" (Byrne 1997: 25). As confirmed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is geometry which inspires his syllogistic analytics where the elements of arguments are elaborated, structured and reduced to another, and where the causes of effects are found by working backwards; from ends to means, from effect to cause, from what we already know to something we seek to know (Beaney, 2017).

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The emphasis on decomposition and regression found in Plato's and Aristotle's analytical methods is extended in early modern notions of analysis. In *The Great Instauration*, Francis Bacon (1858 [1620]: 25) insisted that "the sciences need ... a form of induction which shall analyse experience and take it to pieces"; in his *Philosophical Meditations*, Descartes (1984 [1642]: 110) argued that "Analysis shows the true way by ... attend[ing] even to the smallest point"; and in the *Opticks*, Newton (1730: 405) stressed that "the Method of Analysis... proceed[s] from Compounds to Ingredients, ... from Effects to their Causes". At around the same time as Newton, Leibniz had pioneered a method of analysis whereby proofs could be made objectively, without relying on intuition, by reducing a proposition "into simpler ideas and simpler truths" (1989: 217).

Much later, when the social sciences were being established as distinct academic disciplines, a decompositional form of analysis was picked up most famously by Talcott Parsons (1937). In *The Structure of Social Action*, he appeals to what he calls 'analytical realism' that develops concepts corresponding, "not to concrete phenomena, but to *elements* in them which are *analytically separable* from other elements" (730; our emphasis.). In contemporary sociology, Parsons' legacy has been continued under the heading of 'analytical sociology'. According to one of its champions, the aim of analytical sociology is to identify explanatory mechanisms by "dissecting ... social phenomena" and "decompos[ing] a complex reality into its constituent elements" (Hedström 2005: 2). In organization studies, this often takes the form of distinguishing between levels in the hierarchy of directors, executives, middle management and workers, conceptually between strategy, planning and execution or dissecting the organization into constituent parts of culture, structure, process and practice. Another more anatomical logic is apparent in the tendency to analytically dissect and cut out organizations from their outside environment, and in the widespread use of body part metaphors such as 'head office', 'foot soldiers' and 'the cultural heart of the organization' (Dale 2001).

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The corporeal scars and pores of analytical work

Clearly analytical sociology has been a practice of detailed dissection and disassembly and we can see how organizational analysis can be viewed similarly but this is not entirely accidental. For during the French Renaissance, the Latinized term ‘analysis’ did not merely become a matter of ‘unravelling’ and ‘investigating’ but was synonymous with ‘dissection’ and ‘cutting up’. Before Descartes had established his rationalist form of decompositional analysis and pioneered the shift from Medieval and Renaissance scholasticism to early modern philosophy, he had developed an interest in anatomical dissection. After he had left Paris for Amsterdam in 1628 he lived for a while on Kalverstraat in Amsterdam’s slaughterhouse quarter in order to secure “a fresh supply of organs to dissect from the butchers” (Rodis-Lewis 1992: 53), optimistic that the anatomical structure and mechanistic physiology of animals would parallel that of human beings. Dissection, then, was not merely a metaphor of analysis but a concrete work process that made it possible to identify and locate the different organs by which the organism was constituted.

However, when tracing the etymology of analysis back to its Ancient Greek roots it becomes apparent that it cannot be limited to the practice of finding and ‘fixing’ a thing’s or a body’s mechanistic structure. For the Ancient Greeks, *analuein* was literally a question of cutting (*luein*) up (*ana*), of solving and dissolving the whole and cutting its members loose (Byrne 1997).

According to the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1994), Descartes’ error consisted in dividing the mind from the body, thus ignoring how much our capacity for rational analytical thinking depends on our embodied feelings and emotions. Through a number of experimental studies, Damasio has shown that neurological patients who lack the capacity to feel pleasure and pain also have an impaired capacity for rational decision-making because their loss of feeling makes them stop caring about the consequences of their decisions (see also Pennycook et al. 2015).

This reminds us that the problems, practices and possibilities of analysis are wide open, and that they always have been. In the *Mathematical Collection*, the Ancient mathematician Pappus of Alexandria (c.290–c.350) distinguished ‘problematical analysis’ from ‘theoretical analysis’; while theoretical analysis demonstrates through theorems that something does or does not exist, problematical analysis “serves to carry out what [is] desired to do” and create something which does not yet exist (in Hintikka and Remes 1974: 9).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze cultivated such a desire by undertaking a series of unconventional readings of key figures in

the history of philosophy, including Hume, Kant and Bergson (see Deleuze 1983, 1988, 1991). In Deleuze's own words,

I coped with ... the history of philosophy as a kind of buggery or ... immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 6)

Although the concerns of Pappus, Deleuze and the history of philosophy may seem far removed from the immediate concerns of most organizational scholars, they enable us to rethink what analysis is and what it can be. Approaching analysis as an act of buggery, the history and future of analysis becomes one of pores and openings as well as wounds and scars.

Analytical buggery

By 'buggering' analysis, it can be cut loose from the distanced, detached and desensitized manner in which disembodied research tends to dissect and stitch up organizational life as if it were a lifeless corpse. Far from being an invitation to 'make things up' or abstract things beyond recognition, this style of research enables us to *embody* the work of analysis; to express the vibrant, untidy and fleshed relations through which we live and work in organizations whilst searching for the prevailing powers and sometimes aberrant practices through which our lives are constituted.

The practice of analytical buggery is both a theoretical project and a problematical one, which defies deductive and inductive forms of logic. Analytical buggery neither applies existing theory deductively as a grid of concepts to be confirmed or validated by empirical data, nor does it create new theoretical constructs inductively by looking for what might emanate from 'the data'. No monstrous offspring can be conceived, and no analytical buggery can be committed if one's primary concern is to see how well 'the data' 'fits' specific theories, or **if one claims to generate theory unaffected by existing concepts and thought.**

Furthermore, analytical buggery transgresses the iterative kinds of reasoning that have tended to be the norm amongst social and organizational scholars in recent decades. Like many colleagues, we have sought to analyse and theorise empirical material 'abductively' by

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working back and forth between records and research problems to see how the material answers different questions or pushes us in diverse directions and how far it agrees or disagrees with existing concepts and theory (cp. Sutton 1987).

In hindsight, this is how the first author worked with his co-author Louise Wallenberg and came up with the notion that male-to-female transvestites express transgender not so much through *undoing*, as by *underdoing*, gender; that they do not simply copy feminine stereotypes to pass as women (cp. West and Zimmerman 1986) or exaggerate such stereotypes through drag (cp. Butler 1990) but combine a variety of “feminine, masculine and ungendered practices and attributes” (Thanem and Wallenberg 2016: 266).

While this concept could be seen as a monstrous creation which both is and is not an offspring of Butler’s or West and Zimmerman’s, there is more to analytical buggery than the iterative movement between theory and empirics. Moreover, Deleuze’s abstract, impersonal and disembodied approach needs buggery too for merely the creative construction of evermore disruptive concepts can still leave readers bewildered concerning how their own bodies and Deleuze’s body are implicated in and through such conceptual innovations. In addition, in order to enjoy the kind of slips and dislocations that Deleuze made whilst buggery key figures in the history of philosophy, we need to acknowledge how our own embodied experiences seep into our analytical processes.

This has always been an important undercurrent in feminist and post-colonial scholarship though it has not always been expressed explicitly and straightforwardly. Revisiting Frantz Fanon’s (2008 [1952]) anti-racist manifesto *Black Skin, White Masks*, we are reminded that his analysis of race relations and his argument for black liberation must be read bearing in mind that he “was born in the Antilles” and not in Africa (14) but also in light of the personal experiences he shares of everyday racism in post-war France. In a more explicit way, Adrienne Rich (1976: 15-16) acknowledges how her feminist analysis of motherhood “is rooted in my own past” and “that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will be truly ours.” Though opening himself to accusations of post-hoc rationalization, Torkild cannot deny that Louise and his analysis of transvestite gender practices in everyday life and work was buggery by his own living as a part-time transvestite who uses ‘too much make-up’ and retains a masculine voice.

This is not to say that analytical buggery is an exercise wholly determined and legitimized by personal experience or that it involves fabricating fake findings and passing them off as scholarship. But it would be disingenuous to pretend that the themes we identify and the

concepts we create from our empirical material are unaffected by our own thrills, troubles and experiences. Like any matter, our empirical records make up a *corpus*, a body brought into this world by other bodies. David felt buggered by his own infertility that without intention was made more monstrous as others celebrated the joyful experience of giving birth and nurturing offspring and this stimulated reflections on masculinities as identities that left bodies out. This produced a broken body as cerebral complacency was confronted by a body breaking down with the weight of the disembodied cognitive faith in the intellect. A revelation here is that reflections on gender can be as disembodied, distanced and disengaged from their subject matter as are the most objectivist and representational of research.

To bugger an analysis in practice it may therefore be good to first get a physical grasp of the empirical *corpus*. If you'll excuse our presumptuousness, forget about all the software packages that are advertised on the premise that they would do the analysis for you. Rediscover some of the old unspoken tricks that used to be common practice among qualitative scholars. Cut out quotes and observations with a pair of scissors. Lay it all out on the floor along with artefacts you have collected during the research process. Step into your empirical material, get on all fours and work with it, play with it. This may seem terribly old-fashioned at a time when the digitalized economy is so hyped up that we are assumed to be doing everything on-screen and on-line. But as you move and shift, switch and dislocate the different bits and pieces on the floor, you may start to notice expressions and emissions in your material that were initially hidden; what you first expected to be a marginal issue may turn into a central theme; and a mundane habit may become more significant than a critical incident.

It may also allow us to search behind the surface features of a phenomenon to reveal the concealments of organizational practices. So in examining the development and use of insulin pumps to manage Type 1 diabetes, we could see this biopolitical technology residing in and reproducing a thanatopolitics of death deferral that organizational providers and recipients routinely concealed. Since this was, I to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, the demon that dare not speak its name, the biopolitical regime of health care was left unscarred and uninterrupted by its own practice (Knights, Latham and Aninandita, 2019).

Conclusion

Bearing in mind the scars and openings that are embodied in historical and present writings on analytical method, analytical buggery makes it possible to untangle our research problems by infusing new sensations, extracting hidden emissions, and creating unconventional insights from the empirical material at hand. By confronting our empirical material with our own

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embodied experiences as well as with existing theoretical concepts, analytical buggery makes it slip out of the established frames of reference that otherwise tend to determine our thinking. Cutting our empirical material loose from prevailing concepts, analytical buggery may create immaculately lucid concepts. Though such concepts are unable to represent the empirical reality we inquire into, they may express distinct features in the lives of our research participants without neglecting their complex and contradictory desires, habits and experiences. Unlike the dead corpse facing the dissector, analytical buggery recognizes that empirical matter is living, breathing and thinking flesh.

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