



Methods of Analysis

Critical Analysis

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Kant (1781/2010) clarifies that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is more synthetic than analytic, as it “has a great similarity to that of the chemists, which they term the experiment of reduction, or, more usually, the synthetic process” (p. 15). He necessarily relies on analysis— “dissection of conceptions” or “dissection of the whole” into elements (pp. 39, 72). Nonetheless, Kant’s method is primarily critical synthesis while Marx’s method is primarily critical analysis.

English readers recognize two different subtitles for Marx’s first volume of *Capital*. Although the first German edition of *Das Kapital* (1867) was subtitled *Kritik der politischen Oekonomie (A Critique of Political Economy)*, the first English edition (1887), a translation which Engels edited, was subtitled *A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*. Since that time critical analysis has been associated with Marx in some form much as critique was associated with Kant through the 1800s to mid 1900s. As criticism and critique proliferated, especially of metaphysics and religion, through the nineteenth century, one analyst astutely declared “that this is an age of critical analysis, scientific conquest, skeptical unrest” (Worthington, 1878, p. 402).

With analysts adopting and mixing these methods, criticism, critique, critical analysis, and critical inquiry have since been used interchangeably or generalized as “critical method.” For example, Marcuse’s (1958) *Soviet Marxism* is subtitled *A Critical Analysis* but the method, from the first sentence forward, is “immanent critique” (p. 1). This method, he says, “starts from the theoretical premises... develops their ideological and sociological consequences and reexamines the premises in the light of these consequences” (p. 1). Immanent critique means, in short, discerning intents and premises and bringing these to bear on eventualities or realities, and *vice versa* (dialectically) (i.e., discerning internal or “immanent” contradictions).

Critical analysis can be defined as manipulating or disaggregating “text:” (1st) “analysing a text for absences which lead to the events and participants referred to in the text being mystified in the reader’s discourse;” and/or (2nd) “analysis of how the discourses which readers habitually inhabit may channel reading of a text into a particular interpretation which in turn can lead to ideological reproduction” (O’Halloran, 2003, p. 33).

Literary theorists exploited Barthes’ (1971/1977) redefinition of “text” to “field,” “network,” and “space,” to include everything from atoms to zoos (pp. 157, 161, 164). Reflecting on his notorious proposition (“*There is nothing outside of the text*” [1967/1997, p. 163]), Derrida (1986) said “I found it necessary to recast the concept of text by generalizing it almost without limit, in any case without present or perceptible limit” (p. 167). Against this pantextualism, other analysts advise specificity. For instance, Marx (1867/1967) famously begins *Capital* “with the analysis of a commodity,” a coat, not a “text” nor report on a commodity or coat (p. 35).

Contradicting pantextualism is extratextuality, meaning “that the boundaries of text are best conceived as extremely permeable, incomplete, and only momentarily established” (Hanks, 1989, p. 105). Contrary to Derrida’s proposition that there is nothing beyond or outside the text,

albeit simplified here, critical analysis asserts that there *is* something, actually all kinds of situational stuff, that interpenetrates beings, events, regions, texts, and things. Particularizing exactly what or who configures what or who is difficult but expected in critical analysis (i.e., what or who affords, backdrops, foregrounds, influences, obliges, primes, prompts, scripts, shapes, underwrites, etc.). Marx (1867/1967) demonstrated the value of this by identifying and carefully tracing the “splitting-up of the total social capital into many individual capitals” (p. 625). If critical analysis counters a monolith with plurality, questions of critical synthesis, aggregation, unity, and wholes, are nonetheless begged.

Like pantextualism, pancriticism comes with liabilities. Kant’s critiques of pure reason, practical reason, and judgment suggested that everything should be submitted to critical analysis, from capital to cuttlefish to celestial spirits, from everything on earth and under the seas to everything in heaven. With the cat out of the bag, Kant (1787/2010) emphasized in the “Preface to the Second Edition” that the *Critique of Pure Reason* contained a measure of reflexivity, pointing out that “we are indebted to a criticism which warns us of our unavoidable ignorance” (p. 17). An antidote to critical analysis is found in the “Socratic method, that is to say, by proving the ignorance of the objector” or critic (pp. 20, 422). The method is about demonstrating, proving, or reasoning (p. 422)—rejection of critiques out of hand is anti-intellectualism while dismissing critical analysts for their character/istics is discrimination (Petrina, 2012).

Critiques of critique, criticism, and critical analysis are revealing. Latour (2004) proceeds from a few stereotypes of the critic (“one who debunks... one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers... the drunk iconoclast”) to an extremely helpful schematic of how critical analysis works. Unlike magicians, critics do not have a code to protect the magic. “The critical trick,” Latour (2004) reveals, operates through a “Two Objects-Two Subjects” matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. The Critical Trick (Latour, 2004, p. 241).

[Agency in Critical Analysis:] The subject is either so powerful that he or she can create everything out of his or her own labor...	[Objecthood in Critical Analysis:] The object is either nothing but a screen on which to project human free will...
...or nothing but a mere receptacle for the forces of determinations known by natural and social sciences.	...or so powerful that it causally determines what humans think and do.

Depending on their personal interests and preferences, critical analysts waffle between the matrices. Instead, Latour (2004) tries “to associate the word *criticism* with a whole set of new positive metaphors, gestures, attitudes, knee-jerk reactions, habits of thoughts” (pp. 246-247).

Critical analysis gets taken for granted through a sentiment that “everyone is a critic.” From the playpen, children grow up criticizing each other and their elders for breaking rules. These and other “kin objections to cultural rule violations” are common and prolific across history and contemporary societies (Jenkins, 1991, p. 404). Similarly, giving and receiving a critique, or “crit,” are synonymous with education (Petrina, 2017). Given the volumes of information sorted by everyday users of the web and its social media platforms, critical thinking has resurged as form of logic looking for fallacies. If so naturalized, then is the method of critical analysis and “a whole set of new positive metaphors, gestures,” etc. all the more important?

1. What is Analysis?

a. Kant

i. (1781/2010, p. 15): This experiment of pure reason has a great similarity to that of the chemists, which they term the experiment of reduction, or, more usually, the synthetic process. The analysis of the metaphysician separates pure cognition a priori into two heterogeneous elements, viz., the cognition of things as phenomena, and of things in themselves. *Dialectic* combines these again into harmony with the necessary rational idea of the unconditioned, and finds that this harmony never results except through the above distinction, which is, therefore, concluded to be just. (Meiklejohn trans.)

1. Kant (1781/1881, p. 373): This experiment of pure reason has a great similarity with that of the chemists, which they sometimes call the experiment of reduction, or the *synthetical process* in general. The *analysis* of the *metaphysician* divided pure knowledge *a priori* into two very heterogeneous elements, namely, the knowledge of things as phenomena, and of things by themselves. *Dialectic* combines these two again, to bring them into *harmony*. (Müller trans.)

ii. (1781/2010, p. 39): For what of analysis, that is, mere dissection of conceptions, is contained in one or other, is not the aim of, but only a preparation for metaphysics proper, which has for its object the extension, by means of synthesis, of our a priori knowledge. And for this purpose, mere analysis is of course useless, because it only shows what is contained in these conceptions, but not how we arrive, a priori, at them.

iii.

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c. Luepnitz (2009, p. 974): The word 'analysis' comes from the Greek verb *ἀνάλυειν* [*analyein*], meaning to loosen or untie. Lacan writes: "Psychoanalysis alone recognizes this knot of Imaginary servitude that love must always undo again or sever" (1949, p. 7). For Winnicott, analysis may untie or free the True Self from its moorings in compliance. For Alvaereth Stein, psychoanalysis began to "loosen the bars" in a way that speaks both to the development of the self and to the transformation of subjectivity.

2. What is Critical?

a. Fischer (1883, p. 232): Kant's epoch-making achievement lies in the *critical* direction which he has allotted to and pioneered for philosophy. In order correctly to estimate the importance and extent of this epoch, we must make clear *what is called critical thinking*. Objects can be held either dogmatically or critically: dogmatically, if one takes the objects as given and perceives only their attributes; critically, if one searches into the conditions from which they and their attributes proceed—that is, investigates their origin and follows the circumstances of their evolution. The origin and development of objects are the problems of the critical thinking; the presentation of the historical development of things is its labor and result. If we accept a system of the universe as given and completed, and seek to discover the laws of its present organization, we treat it dogmatically; on the contrary, critically, when we ask the question, How has the universe originated, and by what changes has its present state gradually arisen? It is precisely the same with the contemplation of the earth and all terrestrial life in the entire diversity of its forms and kinds, with the contemplation of mankind and its races, people, and languages, religions and religious records, poetry and the fine arts; in a word, with the whole world of nature and art.

- i. (p. 233): I do not speak of this or that product of investigation, but of the critical tendency, of mind in which even opponents must share in order to combat those conclusions to which they are averse. Any one of our great literary men, since the days of Lessing, could be brought forward as an example to show the position one occupies in the critical knowledge of things; but above them all stands Kant, *because he applied the critical method to knowledge itself*, and thereby became the founder of a period which has, with good reason, been styled the *critical*. The last century is called the period of Clearing-up (*Aufhlaerung*); ours is the period of Criticism. It is in this fact that we discover the bearing and significance of the Kantian epoch. (Tans. B. Rand)
 - b. Nietzsche (1888/2005, pp. 190-191): Learning to *see*, as I understand it, is close to what an unphilosophical way of speaking calls a strong will: the essential thing here is precisely *not* 'to will', to be *able* to suspend the decision. Every characteristic absence of spirituality, every piece of common vulgarity, is due to an inability to resist a stimulus— you have to react, you follow every impulse. In many cases this sort of compulsion is already a pathology, a decline, a symptom of exhaustion, - almost everything that is crudely and unphilosophically designated a 'vice' is really just this physiological inability *not* to react.— A practical application of having learned to see: your learning process *in general* becomes slow, mistrustful, reluctant. You let foreign things, *new* things of every type, come towards you while assuming an initial air of calm hostility,— you pull your hand away from them. To keep all your doors wide open, to lie on your stomach, prone and servile before every little fact, to be constantly poised and ready to put yourself into— *plunge* yourself into— other things, in short, to espouse the famous modern 'objectivity'— all this is in bad taste, it is ignobility par excellence. (Trans. J. Norman)
 - c. Magurshak (1983, p. 121): Inevitably, a number of both introductory and upper level students timidly ask how they might presume to criticize thinkers as luminous as Plato and Hume. They assume that being critical means finding fault or shredding an opposing position. To them, being critical means negatively evaluating another person's endeavor. As their instructor, I find that my assessment of students' work betrays a similar shallow understanding of the notion of criticism.
 - i. (p. 122): I suspect that these misunderstandings are neither idiosyncratic nor provincial... In examining the meaning of the Greek roots of these terms, it becomes obvious that *being critical* is fundamentally positive and, for the sake of effective learning, ought to be recalled and reintroduced into the everyday vocabulary of liberal education. According to one standard Greek dictionary, the verb *krinein* (the root of the English terms in question) means first of all "to separate," in the sense of "to distinguish" one element or aspect of anything from another.... For the Greeks, then, the negative sense of being critical ["to bring to trial," "to pass judgment" in the legal sense, and "to condemn."] derives from the more positive sense of rendering a fair or balanced estimate of a matter on the basis of discriminating thought. This becomes clearer in the meaning of the noun *ho kritikos*, the Greek word for a person loosely called critic. Surprisingly, this term refers not to a judge or a legal arbitrator but to a "discerning" person, one who shows "good" judgment and understanding.
3. What is Critical Analysis?
- a. Dallmayr (1991, p. 13): In the wake of the Kantian revolution, critique or critical analysis gained primacy in the domain of knowledge, while contemplative or "metaphysical" ontology was devalued to a pre-modern or pre-critical legacy. Since this legacy was closely tied up with many cultural and political traditions, critique inevitably became the antipode of tradition bound beliefs and institutions; Kant's motto *sapere aude* [dare to know], in fact, installed reason as the nemesis of historical customs and as pacemaker of modernization—a process which was only partially eclipsed by the later upsurge of scientific positivism.

- b. Mills (1995, p. 29): Feminist critics usually have a very clear idea of why feminist analysis must be done and why it is necessary to develop tools to do so; since, as I mentioned in the Introduction, feminists are concerned not only to analyse texts but to change social relations through that analysis and through other forms of action. Feminist text analysis, like critical linguistics, can develop into a form of consciousness-raising, a ‘making aware’ of that which seems to be self-evidently normal or neutral, a ‘making strange’ of the ordinary, and forcing readers to re-examine the text in the light of a consideration of gender. For those who work in educational institutions, this is an essential part of our task as teachers and lecturers, that we attempt not only to impart skills in text analysis which are of interest in themselves, but also to make students aware of or enable them to describe effects in texts for whose description they previously lacked the vocabulary. In this sense, feminist stylistics is not simply an academic exercise, it is primarily political; a way of empowering people so that they are not the dupes of texts, so that they can analyse texts and in that analysis become aware of some of the factors which work on all individuals in the present society.
- c. O’Halloran (2003, p. 33):
 - i. Description stage of CDA
 - 1. text bias analysis - a form of critical text analysis.
 - a. Critical analysis = comparative analysis of the lexico-grammatical patterns of texts (or within one text) which refer to the same event.
 - 2. mystification analysis - a form of critical discourse (1) analysis
 - a. Critical analysis = analysing a text for absences which lead to the events and participants referred to in the text being mystified in the reader's discourse (1); analysing a text for how its presences reinforce these absences from reading.
 - 3. socio-cognitive analysis - a form of critical discourse (2) analysis
 - a. Critical analysis = analysis of how the discourses (2) which readers habitually inhabit may channel reading of a text into a particular interpretation which in turn can lead to ideological reproduction.
 - d. Felski (2008, p. 110): critical method, then, focuses on how expansive claims about language, truth, or power-discourse relations are translated into particular forms of interpretation and argument. It quickly becomes evident that the relations between political or philosophical worldviews and methods of reading are complex, contingent, sometimes asymmetrical, and not always predictable. While particular theories influence how we read, the reverse also holds true: practices of reading, governed by their own distinctive logic, rhythms, and history, covertly mold how theories are interpreted, taken up, and used.
 - e. Comaroff (2011, pp. 172-173): I really think that critical scholarship is not just negative or, as some might have it, "pessimistic." (In the context of Africa, critical scholars are often termed "Afro-pessimists.") But this seems to me to confuse the act of critical engagement with an affective state. Critical analysis is a positive necessity if we are to understand social conditions, and such understanding is a prerequisite for any responsible ethical engagement, any politically relevant intervention.
- 4. What is Critical Inquiry?
 - a. Bozdogan (1988, p. 45): *critical inquiry*— an exploratory rather than expository task. Whether it is perception/reception of the world (i.e., looking at the Orient) or conception/intervention in the world (i.e., the act of design), critical inquiry is a way of revealing, through a multitude of interpretations, never complete and only gradually "thickening" our understanding of the situation.