Subjectivity, the Researcher, and the Researched

Amanda Wolf
Victoria University of Wellington

Abstract. *Stephenson's work fundamentally blends a theory of subjectivity and a methodology for its study. However, in most Q studies, inquiry centres on perceptions, attitudes or discourses, not on subjectivity. A review of three exemplars of different uses of Q methodology concentrates on the purpose of the inquiry and the nature of that which is inquired into. Two terms each for inquiry and that-which-is-inquired-into are juxtaposed in an analogy: concourse is to Q sorting as subjectivity is to feeling. Q-methodology inquiry, conventionally conceived, privileges epistemology. However, that-which-is-inquired-into is not merely ontological, since it arises from Q sorting. Q sorting itself is an inquiry (loosely conceived) into some event or situation. Appreciating the extent of the common ground of subjectivity in various Q-methodology applications necessitates understanding that Q sorters both draw meaning from and put meaning upon in the act of Q sorting.*

Introduction

William Stephenson wrote numerous works touching on a variety of fields. Although he also undertook applied consultancies that delivered context-specific advice, his academic oeuvre may be read as a half-century-long exercise in stating and elaborating the methodology he invented, and famously announced to the world (Stephenson, 1935), and the theory underpinning it. Typically, he blended his theoretical work with illustrations of Q methodology using everyday topics, one sorter, six or seven 'conditions of instruction', and two or three factors (such as in the memorable cases of the "irascible husband" or "I see this white table here", Stephenson, 1980). His writings also suggest opportunities for Q methodology to generate new knowledge in many fields, and to probe deeply into common patterns found among a number of people in a culture. He pointed out such missed opportunities and wasted effort in investigating a full range of topics central to the lived experiences of people, all for want of his methodology. "Only now", he would write, in one context after another, "are we able to quantify the subjectivity at issue". Stephenson's now is our then. Applications of Q methodology

Contact author: amanda.wolf@vuw.ac.nz

have blossomed in numerous fields of scholarship and practice. Yet, there is still much to be gained from reflecting on his intellectual contributions to methodological theory—both in his own time and his own terms, and in our times and new terms.

The impetus for the present article is a puzzle in current practice. Many recently published Q studies lack specific attention to the nature of subjectivity and hence, on the face of it, represent some significant distance from Stephenson, who developed Q methodology to study subjectivity. For instance, the abstract book for the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity conference in Hamilton, Ontario, mentions subjectivity in just three contexts: the sponsor's name and two papers, including an earlier version of the present article. What, then, has become of the study of subjectivity? And, if subjectivity is not studied, what is? What are the implications for Q methodology?

These questions sparked an examination of three exemplars of different Q-methodology study designs. With some clues from these studies, the paper then unpicks four terms in an analogy—*concourse* : *Q sorting* : : *Subjectivity* : *feeling* as a mechanism to better understand the place of subjectivity in contemporary Q-methodology applications. I aim to offer an interpretation of each term that narrows the conceptual distance apparent in current applications, not to settle once and for all what Stephenson really meant.

The article finishes by proposing keys to a partial accommodation between practices of different sorts and Stephenson's theory. One key is framed on the left side of the analogy, the side that belongs to the inquirer and the inquiry (concourse is to Q sorting). The other key falls on the rights side, the domain of that which is inquired into (subjectivity is to feeling). Surprisingly perhaps, the keys are joined in Q sorting: at once the most prosaic element of a given experiment and the most methodologically rich. These keys reinforce the contention of some writers that Q methodology is a valued tool of discourse analysis within a constructionist paradigm. As importantly, this partial accommodation also prepares ground for further theoretical and philosophical clarification of Q methodology practices in current use and more probing applications. And it would, I contend, reassure applied researchers that it is worthwhile to probe subjectivity according to the full and innovative project Stephenson established.

Missing Subjectivity

The main body of Q literature today contains numerous applications that posit some social curiosity, often with a crisply defined motive to contribute to tangible improvements in people's wellbeing. Studies tend to fall into one of three baskets. The first type of study centres on *perceptions*—identifying and comparing the various 'opinions' or

'perceptions' that people have about some topic. *Discourse* studies seek to identify and compare 'discourses' or 'accounts' or 'stories' about some topic. In between, studies seek the ways people's *attitudes* align with discourses. Typically, perception investigations aim to find and interpret Q factors based on Q sorts from a diversity of people in order to know more about how people's points of view are patterned. Attitude studies can lean either toward whole-person points-of-view, or toward discourse studies that centre on the pursuit of already-out-there themes and on deriving meaning in the form of storylines from the tangle of expressions and statements comprising those themes.

The different types of study have much in common. They are premised on a community—be it national, demographic, professional, or some other—and on social communication present in that community. The inquirer selects a discrete topic salient to this community and generates a representative Q sample. Typical studies involve many respondents (usually in the range of 20 to 80). The designs feature the factor analysis of one set of Q sorts, usually scaled according to a theoretically neutral sorting instruction (such as 'agree-disagree'). Authors invariably provide descriptions and interpretations of the resulting factors.

Further, the applied studies I admire justify (often implicitly) using Q methodology for a similar, and properly methodological, reason, namely that Q methodology provides access to understanding and insights into patterns in social communication. However, precisely what is the nature of those patterns, ontologically speaking, and hence what is the 'stuff' of interpretation, is never made entirely clear. This is not to fault the studies, which after all, are not focused on methodology. But the issue *is* methodological: the standing of those interpreted patterns is provided by theory. If the theory is Stephenson's theory of subjectivity, the patterns are indicative manifestations of a person's predispositions to act based on lived experiences. If the theory is one of discursive practice, the patterns relate selectively and meaningfully to discourse, which is an ensemble of ideas in a social context.

But, what is Q methodology without subjectivity? Eden, Donaldson, & Walker (2005) observe that "many Q studies do not directly engage in theoretical discussion about the nature of subjectivity", noting that it is to be expected that "methods" travel far from their theoretical origins (p. 414). It may be that these authors reduce theory-rich Q methodology to theory-free Q method. But, equally, the observation could signal that methodological theories other than Stephenson's theory of subjectivity ground these Q methodology applications. Stephenson, of course, introduced a whole package, including technique (method) and theory. He never deviated from the view that the only journey with Q methodology was a journey to understand subjectivity. If modern users

of Q methodology do not engage in a discussion about the nature of subjectivity, it could be because they have elected to focus on interpretations of patterns which can be presented with the aid of substantive theory alone, in which case the relevant theory relates to the topic of interest in the community studied, not to the nature of subjectivity. Alternatively Q-methodology users may have discovered that Q methodology may be applied with other methodological theories. These other theories may be simply different from Stephenson's, with one's choice of theory a matter of matching methodology and purpose. Or, other theories may be more or less equivalent to Stephenson's theory of subjectivity, possibly representing a refinement in some measure. My interest centres on those users who appreciate that Q methodology is more than method, yet nevertheless do not take on Stephenson's 'subjectivity' explicitly.

Eden, et al.'s claim is reinforced by a scan of current publications. Authors may mention the word subjectivity once or twice, in the mode of a nod to an assumed common and tacit understanding that needs no special elaboration or explanation. In contrast, Stephenson always kept subjectivity on prominent view. What, then, has become of the study of subjectivity through Q methodology? If the methods have travelled far from the theoretical study of subjectivity and Q methodology as a whole, is the new nevertheless compatible with the old, still connected in some direct, if attenuated, fashion? A focus on this question might shed light on why current perception-, attitude- and discourse-focused practices seem to diverge from both each other and Stephenson's own views.

In the next section I present brief overviews of and reflections on three recent studies. Each was selected as a published exemplar of different, but commonly employed, study designs.

Some Examples

The first study, which claims to focus on 'perceptions', reveals that subjectivity gets caught up with the topic through which it is (ostensibly) investigated. Stephenson's theory, not directly engaged, nevertheless appears operational to some extent. The second example uses Q methodology as a tool for finding and analysing aspects of discourses. It shows little effective distinction between 'attitude' and 'discourse' and devotes extended space to reporting and illustrating findings. Yet, it also invites contemplation about what it means to have an attitude in respect of a discourse, and hence opens to a consideration of theories in that vein. The final example was chosen as an example of studies authored by Paul Stenner, who has been part of a long-standing effort to establish and justify a constructionist use of Q methodology. Stenner writes from a theoretical bent in which Stephenson's theory plays no role (Stainton Rogers, 1997/1998; Stainton Rogers & Stainton

Rogers, 1990; Paul Stenner & Watts, 1997/1998). Language that emphasises 'self-reference' to 'that which is mine', essential to Stephenson's subjectivity, is absent. Instead, 'subjective' signifies something like 'as construed by' or 'constructed by' a person, read as a *process* not an outcome or state. It follows that the person/subject is the site of the expression of experience, and such expression is not uniquely individual. The three examples supply clues to the divergence between types of studies and between many current studies and Stephenson's theory.

Example 1: Perceptions of Outdoor Leaders

Hutson and Montgomery (2006) seek "to describe the perceptions of outdoor leaders toward the ways they feel connected to nature places" (p. 29). The report presents the conceptual background, methods, and the shared and differing "perspectives" of outdoor leaders. "Subjectivity" appears once in the abstract and three times in the introductory paragraph of the "method" section. In all cases, the word is limited to describing Q methodology—"Q sorting falls within the conceptual framework of Q methodology, a research strategy that explores and measures subjectivity" (p. 29); "Q methodology is based on principles derived from the scientific study of subjectivity . . . . Q methodology examines the subjectivity that operates within individuals that is considered communicable . . . ." (p. 30). Similarly, "subjective" appears just three times, used in a similar fashion, noting the ability of Q methodology to explore the "subjective nature" of perceptions (p. 30); to explore the "subjective operantcy that outdoor leaders bring to nature place experiences" (p. 30); and to describe factor as "a collection of inter-related subjective responses" (p. 31).

The article sidesteps subjectivity *per se*, concentrating instead on "attitudes of connectedness to places in outdoor settings" (p. 29). The authors seek "a holistic understanding of how outdoor leaders feel connected to nature places" and "to capture and interpret communicated perceptions, attitudes, thoughts and feelings that may be generalized back to the phenomenon being studied" (p. 30). That phenomenon, connectedness to nature places, is conceived as the nexus of "experiences and intentions continually unfolding over time [that] further moves the formation of place meanings towards an open-ended definition of a deep connectedness of people and places" (p. 30). The true subject of the paper is thus revealed as something like ongoing enactment of connectedness, in which the enactment is specific to a person and (types of) place. Yet, the presentation of the two factors reverts to distinguishing types of people, specifically two types of outdoor leaders, each of which "subscribes" to a "point of view" (p. 35). Members of the two groups are said to differently "conceptualise their

own place connection in outdoor settings" (p. 37).

Stephenson (1986, pp. 44–45) argued that Q studies that stop with the interpretation of factors in terms of the topic under investigation (such as connectedness to outdoor spaces) are incomplete, because they do not show how the *self* [his emphasis] of the individual is involved. In my view, Hutson and Montgomery lean tantalisingly close to completing their study per Stephenson's urging. They claim that individuals may *identify* with a particular view of connectedness, that their identity is due to, or associated with, *feeling*, and they imply that there is something of the *vector* of one's lived experience in the enactment of connectedness to nature places. The authors, in articulating an objective to gain a holistic understanding, seem poised on the brink of discovering insights about the relationship between perceptions of connectedness and a person's "*readiness* to react this way, a complex preconception in this direction amounting to a thrust or a vector by the individual in the way he exists, based on his beliefs, wishes, or whatever" (Stephenson, 1986, p. 47).

Ultimately, however, the article's conclusions do not distinguish the phenomenon of connectedness from the subjectivity of connectedness. No link is made between the perceptions of people and their feelings or understanding of connectedness. The paper leaves unspecified how the inquirers' descriptions and interpretations of factors produce *understanding*—of connectedness or of subjectivity-as-point-of-view. Although the authors refer to *feeling(s)* in both their purpose statements and factor descriptions, the word appears to be used colloquially, implying a range of meanings including beliefs and conceptions equally, rather than a point of engagement with subjectivity.

Example 2: Health Lifestyle Attitudes in Discourse

The second study (van Exel, de Graaf, & Brouwer, 2006) stems from a need "to know what attitudes youths have of their lifestyle in relation to their current and future health" because this group is considered at risk or vulnerable (p. 2629). Therefore, the authors undertake "discourse analysis using Q methodology" to "uncover" or "reveal" adolescents' attitudes (abstract, p. 2628). The words "subjectivity" and "subjective" occur once each, in a single paragraph (p. 2630) that introduces Q methodology. The article's final paragraph claims that "a Q-methodological study can be helpful in revealing subjectivities in the context of adolescent health" (p. 2637).

The article's language centres on "attitudes" (17 uses) and "discourse/discourse analysis" (88 uses). Overall, the article avoids theoretical discussion. The main exception is a brief treatment of discourse. The authors conceive discourse in two related ways. As *milieu*, discourse refers to views as they are "embedded in social reality"

(p. 2629). As *content*, discourse is "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (p. 2629, quoting M. Hajer). van Exel et al. call factors "discourses". They describe five discourses, to which adolescents in the study "are aligned". This discussion takes up close to half of the article, and includes numerous verbatim statements from the Q sample and from post-sort interviews. In a concluding section, the authors note their intention to follow-up with a survey to gauge the prevalence of the five discourses, which they claim (reinforcing Hajer's conception of discourse) are "representative of those that can be observed among youths in this age group" (p. 2637). The results are said to be valuable for offering "clues for prevention interventions", noting that some groups may be more readily reached and influenced than others. In addition, the authors claim that more study is needed on relating attitudes and behaviours. In essence, the study asserts that individuals have, or may be associated with, attitudes that are revealed through discourses.

This study appears in a well-regarded mainstream journal that publishes applied social science. It is framed against the serious implications of increasing obesity. The article invites speculation about two plausible theories, one substantive and one methodological that could, in the absence of explicit treatment in the article, help shed light on the authors' intent. First, the authors assume that prevention interventions will be effective if they reach youths selectively with targeted messages. Underpinning this assumption is a theory of persuasion common in the social marketing literature (e.g., Andreasen, 2002). The knowledge needs in this theory include existing attitudes (some components of which may put individuals at risk) and possible triggers or wedges to effect a change in, or reinforcement of, an attitude. Persuasion's core logic can be depicted in a chain: message$\rightarrow$ perception$\rightarrow$ attitudes$\rightarrow$ beliefs$\rightarrow$ intentions$\rightarrow$ actions$\rightarrow$ social good. The article seeks to inform people in the social marketing chain who need to know what attitudes about health lifestyle are held by at-risk people. Once so informed, this audience needs to know the prevalence of each attitude in order to effectively convey messages. They also need to know how attitudes and behaviours are linked in order to confine interventions to changing attitudes that are associated with positive behaviours (hence the article's notes for further research). In short, unlike Hutson and Montgomery, whose study was ostensibly about perceptions, but suggested a deeper interest in their *content*, namely feelings of connectedness, van Exel, et al.'s article can be read as most centrally concerned with attitudes for *instrumental* purposes. It follows that Q methodology is framed as an instrumental tool.

The theory of persuasion, to the extent it bears on attitudes, is highly individualised. The reported Q-methodology experiment maps a subset of the population within the field of discourses. Individuals, through Q methodology, stake out discourse terrain—or attitude composites or factors—thereby (it is implied) paving the way for informed social-marketing interventions. Readers interested in this article may be drawn by the novelty of the means of finding attitude composites, or be attracted by the presentation of whole pictures in place of the more fragmentary information from attitude surveys, for instance. Even so, it could be argued that discourse as milieu is not congenial to the linear persuasion logic. Perhaps if attitudes are composite wholes located in a field of discourses, an appropriate field (or social) theory of persuasion is called for (with the work of Hajer and others brought to bear on its elaboration).

Second, the fact that individuals *do* stay in view, clustering in one of five discernable patches in the overall field, makes plausible a suggestion that the article's methodology is consistent with Stephenson's theory. The authors present the adolescents' 'attitudes' as a manifestation of 'alignment', with its connotations of predisposition: a young person has an attitude which aligns that person with one particular factor/discourse more than others. Alignment is revealed by the adolescents' participation in the health-lifestyles context of the study, in which some ideas in circulation are given strong meaning and others weaker meaning by that person. An older meaning of attitude, as a physical posture, orientation, or inclination (Sumner, 1995, p. 766) may be more apposite than an "internal state of feeling toward, or an evaluative response to, an idea, person or object . . . [that] resides in the minds of audience members" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2005, p. 35). Combining the implicit theories of persuasion and attitude, Q methodology can provide ideas about people's inclinations (to change) in the terms of the subject matter investigated. Those inclinations are based in lived experiences, and because of that grounding, they may precede and underpin their revelation in factors ("discourses" in van Exel, et al.'s use). As with Hutson and Montgomery's study, lived experiences are partly explanatory of the revealed patterns. The article, however, stays focused on the discourses—the patches of ground—rather than the individuals who are drawn to them.

Example 3: The Social Construction of Sexual Relationships

The final example (Stenner et al., 2006), is presented in discourse-analytic and social-constructionist terms. Like van Exel et al. (2006), this piece is an exemplar of contemporary use of Q methodology in discourse analysis. Stenner, et al., use the term "subjectivity" just twice in the text. The first mention occurs in an introductory paragraph, noting that

health researchers have in recent years become interested in "broad hermeneutics", due to the "variance of meaning systems". Analysts, therefore, "centre" "meaning and subjectivity. . . often within a broadly discursive or narrative approach" (p. 670). The second appearance of the term simply notes that Q methodology puts "emphasis on the rich description of subjectivity" (p 671). The article contains six instances of "subjective", in three phrases, "subjective understandings", "subjective accounts" and "subjective viewpoints". Understandings, of course, are an espoused outcome of factor analysis in Stephenson's Q methodology, while accounts and viewpoints are given weight in social-constructionist frames. Accounts and viewpoints are inputs (in the form of Q sorts) to analysis, or perhaps to factors (as composite viewpoints, for instance). It is telling, therefore, that "subjective understandings" appears in the first sentence of the article, in the context of naming the focus of the article. Immediately, however, the rhetorical focus shifts to meanings, meaning systems, and discourse.

The presentation of factors reinforces this shift, favouring use of the term "account". The factor interpretations float free, by design, of any single person, any self, any social processes behind them. Discussion is framed in terms of three "discursive themes" or "conceptual dimensions" found in the "accounts" and assumed to guide behaviour (p. 674). For example, the first theme juxtaposes traditional and liberal accounts (incorporating, for instance, different Q-sort rankings for the statement "Marriage is forever"). The thematic analysis allows the authors to contrast ideas guiding sexual behaviour. This presentation format differs from the profile descriptions of factors in terms of perception or attitudes that *people have*, as in the Hutson and Montgomery (2006) study. The paper ends with a call for further research on the "ways in which broader cultural and political contexts shape and influence the narratives young people *adopt* in making sense of their sexual relationships" (p. 678, my emphasis). This phrasing highlights an emphasis on both context and narrative, which come together at the site of adoption, or coming-to-own. The unstated link in the article is between the accounts in Q sorts and factors and subjective understandings.

Stenner has had a good deal more to say about subjectivity in non-Q-methodology contexts. His views in a recent piece on Whitehead, published in the journal *Subjectivity*, (Stenner, 2008), ought to be carefully considered in light of his work with Q methodology and commentary on Q methodology (Watts & Stenner, 2003; Stenner, this issue). Rather than attempt a précis of the full argument, I focus my comments on a possible connection between Stenner, et al.'s (2006) invocation of "culturally available semantic resources" (p. 670) in the construction of collective representations or stories and Stephenson's

conscire or shared communicability.

In his philosophical work, Stenner suggests that subjectivity extends beyond "consciousness" and "knowing". In a "deeply empirical" domain, subjectivity and objectivity fuse in "the unified event of an experience" (Stenner, 2008, p. 94). Such an event, however, is a matter of realization, consistent with Whitehead's 'process ontology' (p. 99). In the event, which Whitehead terms an 'actual occasion', prior potential is "reduced", and is "grasped into the unity of an event". There is a conjunctive synthesis involving creativity, and something new is added, which then becomes potential for the next actual occasion (p. 99). The experience of the subject is expressed in this process (p. 100). The "thread of one's life" is a stream of such occasions (p. 105), which occur in a causal chain through which "feeling" flows (p. 103). This feeling, Stenner reminds us, is *metaphysical*, and applies to the passing along of the subjective-objective occasion to another in the process of becoming (p. 103). Whitehead further refers to the continuity of actual occasions as a "society", so that one's thread of life forms a society of actual occasions. When a person *constructs* a narrative, experience and expression come together in the process, "reduced" from the domain of the potential through a process in which the subjective and objective fuse. It would seem to follow that in a Q methodology study the inquirer looks upon and interprets Q sorts as if they convey constructions in this sense. A metaphysical feeling, creating occasions and created by occasions, leads at high levels of organisation to "culturally available semantic resources" that form discourses. Subjectivity is elided by terminology such as "meaningful content" and "meaning systems", which come together in a process of experience and expression and are then made available (through Q sorting) for the inquirer's thematic (narrative) analyses. The inquirer can plausibly be said to be engaged in "understanding subjectivity", as claimed in the opening lines of Stenner, et al., (2006).

In a clearly parallel fashion, Stephenson notes that communicability *is* shared knowledge: "all subjectivity is rooted in conscire, in the common knowledge, the shareable knowledge known to everyone in a culture" (Stephenson, 1980, p. 15). Further, Stephenson proposes that "all new meaning forms in relation to statements in a concourse. . ." (p. 9). It is formed "in relation". A deeply empirical stream (or 'society') of events is continually realised in Whitehead's philosophy as Stenner invokes it. Stephenson focuses on events that *trigger* communicability. Whitehead's process fuses subjectivity and objectivity. Stephenson's process is intersubjective.

Together, the three profiled studies convey the common ground noted above: a community (outdoor leaders, adolescents); some sense of a common pool from which a Q sample is drawn; one experiment with one Q sample and one sorting instruction, and reported interpretations

made possible by the researcher's ability to look through some window otherwise closed but for the techniques of Q methodology. None of the examples offer an explicit treatment of subjectivity. Each has a different character, and different ways of approaching its purposes. Yet each also conveys a sense of something that stands in for subjectivity at the heart of the enterprise. The first study, an exemplar of studies of perceptions, conveys a sense of subjectivity as the whole of an individual's own experiences and intentions with regard to some topic. The second study, an exemplar of a cross-over between a study of attitudes and a study of discourse, locates attitudes in discourse not in a person. Attitudes are selected parts of an ensemble of ideas, embedded in social reality, and with which an individual subjectively aligns by identifying the selections. The third study privileges meaning systems in accounts/discourses. Meaning systems are able to be understood through accounts only because accounts are made by a person and hence require that person to express meaning.

Unpacking an Analogy:
Concourse is to *Q Sorting* as *Subjectivity* is to *Feeling*

The three exemplars suggest different senses of subjectivity, which I consider philosophically distinct, but bridgeable. I turn next to look more carefully at Q methodology's underpinnings: concourse, Q sorting, subjectivity and feeling. My discussion is designed to meet from the direction of Stephenson studies the arguments of those that claim Q methodology as a constructivist methodology.

Concourse

Stephenson's concourse is an abstract noun. Etymologically it refers to something that is run together. It was first applied to gatherings of people, and later to immaterial things as well (*Oxford English Dictionary*, online). It evokes a familiar, everyday stream of consciousness or internal dialogue. Even at the everyday level, streams appear to co-occur, some more prominently than others from moment to moment, such that people are quite accustomed to a multiplicity of internal strands of thought. But Stephenson conceived concourse as something more like a sea, shared by a *community* or *society* or *culture* (terms that bear distinction today but which Stephenson did not differentiate). Concourse-as-sea suggests something out-there, in the community. It suggests a space filled with talk, at different levels in rising and falling prominence. Members of the community enjoy equal a priori access to the currents in the sea. Although each will only ever engage (communicate within) a relative few, from time to time, one experiences unexpected currents. While such a definition of concourse may resonate with spiritual dimensions in a range of belief systems, Stephenson hewed to a non-spiritual interpretation, not unlike that of Hofstadter's

musings on finding himself in a place in which he enjoyed continued, and very real, access to the thoughts of his wife after her death (2007).

A concourse-as-sea is infinitely wide and deep. Stephenson postulates a concourse for every topic or situation or, following Kantor, "psychological event", and for every culture. Every-culture-and-every-situation implies an infinite number of concourses, spatially and temporally. Yet each is experienced by indigenous cultures as a 'locally available ecology' (Stephenson, 1953, p. 221; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990; Brown, 1993). As with an internal stream of consciousness, and as befits an infinite thing, one's access to the shared sea of concourse is sensed as only partial, with deeper, faster currents just beyond and more beyond that, *ad infinatum*.

Concourses can thus be conceived as divisible into currents of dialogue that are available to a person. Subdivision pertains to *experience*, and is not deducible in any way from a priori theory. Suppose I walk up the hill behind my house, and emerge on the ridge buffeted by strong winds. Doing so, I experience untold numbers of concourses: Wellington wind today, Wellington wind yesterday as I recall it, the new wind-farm, regretting not allowing more time on the top, and so on—all locally available (in my head and my geographical locale in space-time), in my dialects, but in no way private or personal for all that. Wellington wind figures in the concourses available to at least 150,000 others. 'My' experience of concourse is and conditioned and informed by my experiences of wind-for-others, from stories, literature and so on. You, reading this—in an · office, on the train—experience my narrated experience, which belongs to a different set of concourses.

Moreover, concourses are emergent. The wind concourse is not a machine from which I can receive a dose when circumstances demand. Unlike a gathering of things, material or otherwise, concourses are emergent in the sense that there is nothing there, apart from potential, until a situation is brought to mind. Instead of bringing wind to mind as I emerge on the ridge, it could be 'cow-pat' or 'fluffy-cloud'. Crucially, for Stephenson the situation is brought to *my* mind, not to some collective mind. (A situation can be brought to several minds at once.) The consequent flow that starts is one's own self-referencing awareness of the concourse, from which distinct elements (e.g., statements) emerge.

Finally, the qualities of infinitude and emergence combine. Concourses in the primordial, pre-emergent condition are entirely interwoven, wholes within wholes in undifferentiated potential. Each concourse comprises an infinite number of statements (or similar items), each "equipotential" and "equipossible" (Stephenson, 1980). Before the person says anything—to him- or herself or to others—any communication is equally possible, conceived of as a potential bank of

conversational possibilities. As in quantum theory, the concourse element could be anywhere before it is brought to mind.

Summarising, the wind example conveys that with a concept of concourse-as-sea (a) an experience can be 'mine'; (b) one experience, however mundane, opens out to an infinity of concourses; (c) 'my' experience of 'my' concourse is communicable with others; and (d) as in the case of Wellington wind, so for any other situation or event. Concourses, then, are simultaneously personal (mine; engaged by me) and shared (available to all; engaged from time-to-time by some). Infinite numbers of elements (statements) can be brought into a position of self-reference from the concourse and the concourse can serve the entire community in this way.

Stephenson also held that elements in a concourse are understandable by all in the culture, although their salience will vary for different people. There are two keys to appreciating this comment. First, the culture may be defined by what is understandable to it: 'Obama' is understandable to a fair portion of the world's people, who thus define the 'Obama culture'. 'Wellington wind' is understandable to Wellingtonians present and past, but also to anyone with a sense of geography and an experience of wind, a meteorologist, or a person who has read Maurice Gee or Katherine Mansfield, or indeed, anyone with some fluency in English. Second, 'understandable' means 'able-to-be-understood'. It does not mean understood in some normative fashion, as a judgement of what a person should be able to understand. Poets and meteorologists and wood pigeons understand wind. Both keys suggest that a concourse is a topic-community pair.

Concourse is not readily pegged using conventional ontological categories. It is not surprising that it poses significant challenges in a Q-methodology experiment. Somehow, a concourse needs to be 'identified' and a sample 'selected'. Rarely do authors describe the Q-sample-selection stage of their experiment with attention to Stephenson's abstract, infinite, emergent, topic-community understand-ability sense of concourse. However, if the concourse is abstract and emergent, it can only 'appear' when summoned: which is to say it appears in the context of some situation, in which a person (or several) represent what is on their mind(s). A concourse is "purely empirical" (Brown, 1992) and our only access to it is through 'talk'. Thus, to identify a concourse, an inquirer needs to create a situation or experience (perhaps hypothetical), which defines a topic-community pair. In many experiments, it suffices for the inquirer to posit a situation that has occurred naturally—a political event, for instance. This is what Stephenson illustrates when he offers sample statements as examples of what (along with 'hundreds' like them) could be given in a few minutes by a person in a given situation, a person experiencing a given

psychological event. Stephenson's method to select a sample casts a single lure (Obama, cup of tea, connectedness, love) into the seas, to gather up what comes along, and only then to reduce it in some systematic way.

Some writers depict the initial fished-up set of items as the concourse. While such a long-list from the concourse results from an exercise to gather up possible items for the Q sample, it is not itself the concourse. But fishing by lure is a rare practice in published Q studies. When the concourse is not evoked by a simple and everyday 'cup of tea' or 'Wellington wind', inquirers may first try to bound the topic, so to circumscribe some "volume of comment on a topic" (Stephenson, 1978) from which to sample. With bounds set, inquirers are free to go fishing with a purpose-designed net, which is uniquely fit to catch on-topic statements from regions in which they are expected to be found. The net fetches up a mix of interviews and published materials from the "locally available ecology", the suitability of which is gauged in topic terms. Good statements are good because they are about the topic, such as sexual health, rather than because they are what people said, for example, in response to some provocation in a workshop on sexual health. Net fishing can take weeks, compared with Stephenson's minutes. Once the contents are fished up they tend to be culled according to an ex ante, or pilot test, gauge of 'understandability'.

Another aspect of the perceived challenge of identifying a concourse stems from choosing topics of interest with multiple dimensions. van Exel, et al. (2006) and Stenner, et al. (2006) start with such topics, and make no reference to concourse. Instead, this type of approach posits an *ensemble* of ideas, transformed and given meaning in practice (Hajer, in van Exel, et al., 2006, p 2629). Whereas Stephenson had in mind a single wish, a declarative statement, and so on, others define the topic in a multi-voluminous manner, as a relevant field of discourse encompassing many angles on the topic. In line with this, Eden et al. (2005, pp. 414-415 define concourse as the "sum of discourse, including cultural knowledges and social constructions each of us can access". Concourse is thereby depicted as some sort of vast virtual library, present, but impossible to catalogue. Therefore, to shift metaphors from fishing, sampling requires a planned excursion throughout the presumed corridors and shelves.

In common is a shared, out-there, not-factual collection of some things (statements or constructions) and including the penumbrae of meanings around and between statements. Concourse for Stephenson is the ontological substrate of and for shared communicability. For constructionists, an ensemble of ideas and the sites of processing and of meaning-making take the place of concourse.

Q Sorting

In Q sorting, sorters follow instructions to provide data for correlation and factor analysis, consisting of an array of items on a positive-to-negative scale. Yet, for all the wide acceptance of this basic description, just what Q sorting is and does is far from clear.

Stephenson describes Q sorting as *measurement*—both as process and as result. Measurement is done by a person on that which is on his or her mind and recorded by a ranking of statements. In self-referent fashion, the sorter crystallises the meaning of statements in the context of some conditions of instruction. My reading of Stephenson suggests that Q sorting develops a portrait or picture as a person measures interactions and connections stimulated by raw material from the concourse. Stephenson maintained that new ideas are formed as statements are compared and juxtaposed. Individuals bring their "schemata", their "modes of communicability", based on lived experience, to how they see things. These perspectives, based in experience and relatively consistent, but at the same time vital and flexible, are brought out in the sorting process. Every statement has associated with it "innumerable" vector components, each in multidimensional space, and each with reference to "preconceived possibilities", which are in terms of an individual's schemata and the immediate situation. Thus, "in Q methodology, [vectors] are *put upon* the concourse by the individual" (Stephenson, 1986, p. 55, my emphasis) in ways that can be compared to theoretical propositions.

The resulting portrait is rich and completely empirical. It is rich because it contains a huge amount of information in its pairwise juxtapositions of statements. It is empirical due to its connection to the experience of the sorter, where experience includes events and previous consciring associated with those events. Yet, as data, a Q sort remains just one portrait, in one instant of time, for one event.

Q sorting thus reifies, or provides a trace of, what was previously only emergent, in flux. The modelled statements (the Q sample) are *just like* any others that could have been chosen. Stephenson seemed unbothered by the ambiguous tendency of language. Nevertheless, he was interested in ensuring that samples be balanced, and so favoured a Fisherian balanced-block design (Stephenson, 1953). He held that essentially identical measures would be made using different sample stimuli. The sample retains the sense of the whole, in a manner evocative of fractal geometry as well as, perhaps, of Bohm's "wholeness and the implicate order" (Bohm, 1980). Thus, Q sorting operates on the concourse, not simply on the sample.

At this juncture, a contradiction may have occurred to readers. On the one hand concourse—infinite, emergent, topic-community-time

specific, is sampled by actions of the researcher (fishing metaphors were used). On the other hand, the Q sorter, confronted with the sample, acts on the sample to create a uniquely self-referential rank-ordering that is a rich, empirical portrait of the depths of meaning as measured by the sorter's experience. Surely, from the foregoing discussion, the concourses sampled from and measured against cannot be *exactly* the same (even if the inquirer is the Q sorter, time will have elapsed between selecting a sample and sorting it; similarly, although a sample may be drawn by the inquirer from conversations with the Q sorters, the actual sorting occurs later). But, moreover, concourse seems to function in the Q experiment in two different ways. The resolution of the apparent contradiction requires acknowledging that, in setting up the experiment, one sample is as good as another because its function is to enable the Q sorter to interact with his or her own concourse. Meaning doesn't reside in statements themselves. It is the projection of perspectives across them and into the Q sorter's concourse that is relevant for measurement. The link between concourses, for Stephenson, is a common invocation of an everyday, *understandable* topic that can be brought to mind: the researcher prepares the Q sample *so that* the Q sorter will bring to mind the topic of interest to the researcher *so that* the Q sorter's perspective can be investigated and understood *so that* theories can be clarified, rejected or proposed anew.

Discourse-analytic uses of Q sorting differ subtly but significantly from the foregoing. In a discourse analysis experiment, the inquirer anticipates that a Q sorter, confronted with the Q sample, will bring to mind the *meanings* in each statement, and will orient these with one another. Unlike a Stephenson-inflected understanding of Q sorting, the Q sorter engages in constructing a viewpoint.

The difference hinges on whether the Q sorter *puts meaning upon* the statements in a way that makes sense to the person, in view of his or her schemata, or *draws meaning from* the statements in a way that makes sense to a person as a story that is one's own. Stephenson writes, "the subjectivity at issue, operantly released by the technique . . . is intrinsically interactive, and projective, not merely reactive" (quoted in Goldman [1990] from Stephenson's unpublished manuscript, *Newton's Fifth Rule.*) In discourse analysis, the sample is typically held to be representative of the sub-topics that may combine in various patterns, stories, or accounts. For instance, if the purpose is to find shared viewpoints on, say, school bullying, the sample needs to include statements about different types of bullying (physical, emotional), different contexts of bullying (peer-to-peer, teacher-to-child), factors associated with bullying (ethnicity, socio-economic status) and so on across the spectrum of variables associated with bullying in academic treatment or popular culture. The Q sorter is thus enabled to draw into

his or her account any aspect of bullying that is personally salient. The importance of enabling this salience to emerge is evident in the care taken to tidy up the sample. To be sure, this is not a simply reactive process. What is projected is a judgement of salience. It is an important expression of a person, but nevertheless, an attenuated form of Stephenson's vector of a person's lived experience.

A final comment on Q sorting concerns the inquirer's instructions, which reinforce the distinction just made. Stephenson saw the condition of instruction in *theoretical* terms. It guides the experiment, helping the Q sorter to measure the structure of their engagement with concourse in a manner of theoretical interest to the inquirer. The condition of instruction serves to "focalize attention" (Stephenson, 1978) on the central situation. 'Condition of instruction' puts an emphasis on the *condition*—a situation—which the Q sorter is instructed to bring to mind, such as the condition of imagining one's self as a child. By contrast, most recent studies emphasise the *instruction*, on the lines of "sort the statements according to the degree to which you *agree* or *disagree*", or similar, such as most/least like you/your experiences.

Agree-disagree scales may (but need not) stymie efforts to find, through Q sorting, a *vector* of the person's lived experience, something characteristic, picked out from infinite possibility. In Q sorting, a person values (measures) a statement by way of feeling and self-reference (Goldman, 1990) conditioned by the instruction, and this is what gives rise to operant factor structures. A person, in short, does something *to* the statement—values it—within the stated conditions. Giving value is similar to, but not the same as, agreeing with a statement with more or less strength: that does something *with* the statement—compares it with an idea or standard. The difference, subtle as it may be, can be illustrated: Prior to Q sorting, all statements are gray. Stephenson's Q sorter values them, assigning each some shade and tint in the requested hue (say green): "sort according to how green are these greys", where green can mean 'like you yourself as a child', or 'what seems *right* to you'. An agree-disagree task is multifaceted *and* ambiguous: "sort according to how you 'agree with' the shade, tint, *and* hue of these greys". In this case, 'agree with' begs a qualifying standard—'with respect to what should I agree: good for me (how *green*)? good for most people (how *red*)?' In such an instruction each statement can be individually judged (and, for example, assigned a rank on a 1 to 5 scale). But pair-wise comparisons and full ranking forces the sorter to supply their own organising condition, or to adopt a unique mix-and-match strategy. Sorters may be unaware they are operating that way, and inquirers may not capture the information, which can assist in interpretation.

Subjectivity

The examination of concourse and Q sorting focused on subtle distinctions in the design and purpose of an experiment. I now turn to a somewhat briefer consideration of the opposite terms in the analogy. Like concourse, subjectivity fills the more ontological spot, and feeling fills the epistemological place opposite Q sorting. However, we have found that Q methodology, as variously applied, carves out a blended or interactive space. In looking at the opposite terms, the focus shifts from Q methodology as experiment to the conceptual foundations of the experiment.

Stephenson uses a modest set of phrases to describe his concept of subjectivity. Subjectivity is the condition of viewing things from one's own standpoint; the situation as a person sees it; what a person says to him- or herself and others; sheer talk (Stephenson, 1980, 1981, 1986). Subjectivity is that part of concourse experienced (pictured or talked) as a person's own. Subjectivity is one's situation in concourse. Such experiences arise everyday and all the time, as well as in the context of a Q-methodology experiment.

Like concourse, subjectivity is boundless and infinite in potential. Stephenson claims that subjectivity is reducible to concourses of communicability (1986, p. 88). Reducibility is a particularly challenging notion, given the infinite scope of concourse and subjectivity. Yet, subjectivity *reduced to* concourse animates concourse; concourse condenses subjectivity in the way a cold window pane condenses moisture; subjectivity is concourse with life—an individual's pictures and talk—breathed into it. This happens automatically and continuously (not only in a Q-methodology experiment). Without subjectivity, concourse remains mere potential. Without concourse, subjectivity remains in some proto or primitive state. Each of us can represent pictures and talk in respect of some concourses, and not all others, when we have some situations (personal, temporal, and cultural) connection to those concourses. Even in Q studies of several individuals (perhaps, as is often the case, selected with the aim of capturing a diversity of views), the conversational possibilities remain centred on individual self-reflection, "from the standpoint of the individual involved concretely in concourse situations" (Stephenson, 1986, p. 52).

Subjectivity is behaviour: it pictures, it talks. This, too, is a challenging notion, far from our common usage. Talk is behaviour, an objective phenomenon in the way an inner emotion, such as a sense of peace, is not. Talk as behaviour is expressible as consciring. As process, picturing and talking *is* subjectivity: a person's own engagement in concourse. Subjectivity, for Stephenson, describes behaviour that is subjective in the sense of being experienced by 'me. As phenomena,

pictures and talk can (with an appropriate method) become objects of study by another person. Yet, for others, including Stenner, subjectivity is one part of the fusion of the experience and the experienced in a 'unified event'. Because subjectivity in this conception cannot be disaggregated, it cannot be singled out for objective study.

In sum, subjectivity takes form in pictures and talk, and it is these forms that are studied. Subjectivity is "reduced" in concourse, crystallised and made operant through Q sorting, understood through the inquirer's abductivity on the grounds prepared by the Q sorters. Clunky as it is, a more accurate description of Q methodology is the "study of artefacts of the processes of subjectivity".

Feeling

There is one last key concept in the analogy: that of feeling. I start by noting that a Q methodology experiment has the following profile (based on Stephenson, 1978, p. 28): Topic of interest→concourse identifying→sampling→condition of instructions→ Q sorting→operant factors→understanding.

The inquirer starts with some out-there, undifferentiated 'substrate' of potential communicability. Through set technical steps, the inquirer acquires data in the form of measures made by individuals using materials from that substrate. These measures are treated with some statistical and, often, judgemental procedures. Then the inquirer develops interpretations and understandings with reference to the specific aim of the experiment.

The inquirer's *abductive role* is a distinctive feature of how Stephenson viewed the study of subjectivity. Abductivity is the logic that offers new ideas; it is the logic of engagement in new situations, and hence is the logic of everyday sense-making. Stephenson reminds us that understandings reached via factor analyses and interpretations are the inquirer's own and not the individual Q sorter's (Stephenson, 1986, p. 57). But both sets of sense-making are abductive. The factors show 'common conversational modes' or 'schemata' or "natural classes of subjectivity" (Brown, 1999, p. 6) that can be discovered by the inquirer. The inquirer' abductive process involves the inquirer placing him- or herself "in the mind of the Q-sorter" (Stephenson, 1986, p. 53). The inquirer observes a synthesis of meanings (Stephenson, 1978, p. 30) and finds "insights" that are "*indicative* of the inherent form in concourse" (Stephenson, 1980, p. 11, my emphasis).

In addition, according to Stephenson, from the perspective of the Q sorter, the starting point is 'self'—the in-here stream of what is said to oneself, but picked out in pathways, in vectors, according to one's readiness to act or tendency in some ebbing and flowing flux (consciring), which in turn is due to one's schemata/perspectives of

existence, or in a word, *feeling*. Feeling, stemming from abduction, animates or motivates measurement. Subjectivity animates concourse as feeling animates Q sorting. The inquirer abducts from inscriptions made by the Q sorter, whose feeling evokes those inscriptions from the concourse substrate. The connection between the inquirer and the Q sorter has a common ground in social context. The sorter's subjectivity arises in consciring, in shared knowledge. Therefore, individual experiences have the characteristic values that the inquirer may find through factor analysis.

Subjectivity is 'reduced' in concourse, so feeling must be taken as the cause or motivation for the process of Q sorting. The *concourse : Q sort* pair is set up by the inquirer; the *subjectivity : feeling* pair is behaviour that manifests the inquirer's design. Concourse carries no inherent significance or meaning: only in a specified *condition* can statements be compared—operation must precede measurement: "*Feeling* supplants initial equipotentiality and leaves the imprint of mind on the ordering of statements" (Brown, 1992; my emphasis). Thus, *concourse* is to *Q sort* as *subjectivity* is to a *shared, animating feeling*. Just as a Q sort is a measure by a person operating on the available potential of concourse, so feeling is motivator, or actualizing impetus that makes the measure made in concourse a measure of subjectivity. The roles of both the inquirer and the Q sorter are *methodologically* intertwined: they are distinct, but joined entirely in something like the manner of Douglas Hofstadter's "strange loop" (2007).

I have chosen to emphasise feeling to complete the analogy, even though the word takes on a different meaning for Stenner. For Stenner, subjectivity is a deeply empirical process of construing or constructing meaning done by a person. The aim of discourse analysis is to understand meanings, shared in social context. Q methodology provides a potent means to cut through to the site of a person's connection with and expression of meaning. At the point of coming to own a meaning, there occurs a 'conjunctive synthesis', a unified fusing of subjective and objective; Stenner uses the word 'adoption'. I believe the concepts of *fusing* and *adopting* convey a close parallel to Stephenson's feeling. Conversely, feeling for Stenner, following Whitehead, refers to the passing along of actual occasions in the thread of one's life.

A Return to the Exemplars: Is There a Bridge?

Unpacking the analogy distinguishes inquiry (the actions of the researcher) and that-which-is-inquired-into (the researched). A methodologically distinctive feature of Q methodology is the dual nature of *that which is inquired into*. The inquirer is interested in new or revealed meaning in views or attitudes or adopted stories, and sets out to inquire into them via a person's 'subjectivity'. The Q sorter is also an

inquirer, however, applying-feeling-to or making-sense-of in the context of some experimental situation. 'Researcher' applies to both the inquirer and the participant; and 'researched' to both the participant and 'subjectivity'. Moreover, we saw that ways of defining the subjectivity as researched (by the participant) most differentiate Q methodology applications.

Thus, two key distinctions arise, one centred on the inquirer and the other on the Q sorter: First the interpretive role of the inquirer may be to *abduct*—to propose something new, or to *discover*—to find what is there. Abductive inquiry asks the inquirer to open his or her attention to insights in data that individuals, behaving de novo as instructed, have presented. Discovery inquiry positions the inquirer such that he or she can see something in the otherwise inaccessible background milieu, as if picked out by torchlight by the Q sorters' activities. Second, the Q sorter's distinction hinges on whether the Q sorter imposes feeling upon undifferentiated potential or puts together a story from a collection of discrete, if tangled, elements.

To my mind, finding something new or revealing something there, and imposing upon or drawing from are philosophically distinct, but nevertheless close conceptually. The differences reveal a deep but narrow chasm across which one can toss a rope. That rope, if it is to provide a basis for even a flimsy bridge, needs to find firm ground on either side.

An obvious initial effort to find firm ground would be to provisionally equate concourse and discourse, perhaps accepting that concourse is the "sum of discourse" (Eden, et al., 2005, pp. 414-415). Accepting that subjectivity is the "raw material" of discourse analysis *and* social constructionism (Brown, 1999) would create additional firm ground. Discourse is talk or communication, extending beyond sentences to include part of the social milieu beyond, and the understandings that are constructed in that milieu. For Stephenson, sheer talk is identified with subjectivity and consciring. One condition for the bridge, then, would be conceiving the individual *I* as *social* (as in Whitman's *Song of Myself*, e.g., "I contain multitudes"). Stephenson was adamant that subjectivity meant neither more nor less than "what *I* have to say", from "*my* point of view". Discourse, conversely, is a *social* and collective concept: it is relational; there is no atomistic-*I* point of view. Yet, Stephenson also made clear that *I* can only say what is communicable—what is sharable, understandable in common, when *I* am "conscious with" or consciring with others (1980). And *I* can only do this because *I* have lived (social) experience. Similarly, Stenner's understanding of subjectivity in terms of Whitehead's process ontology expresses a fusion of subjectivity and objectivity in a person's experience.

It follows that the Q sorter may *both* 'put meaning upon' and 'draw meaning from' statements presented in an experimental setting. In each instant in the stream of many during the Q sorting, the Q sorter *interacts* with a statement in a communicative process. That process relates the statement to others in the sample and to the concourse/discourse. The knowing and the known are collapsed in the moment, consistent with a constructionist tenet. The inquirer as interpreter detects the presences and manifest absences (Law, 2004, p. 161) in the factor patterns. For Stephenson, this is "a consistent feeling from one end of a factor array to another" (1980, p. 13).

Ex ante, concourse is undifferentiated; discourse is tangled. The social construction of reality position holds that we cannot expect one "truth"; many keys fit. Fit may be a function of the key not the lock (Glasersfeld, 1984, pp. 20-21). Yet, if the substrate is undifferentiated, it is like soft wax, and one can impose the negative of a key upon it, and hence ensure its fit. Conversely, one can confront some tangled substrate with one's key, selecting what matters to tightly fit/surround it. The Q sorter, whether putting meaning upon concourse, or drawing storylines from a tangle, *both* fits and makes fit the key. Q-research designs of either attitude or discourse type could accommodate to each other without transgressing their respective underpinning theories.

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