

[Re]searching for Love: Subjectivity and the Ontology of the Q Factor

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ABSTRACT: This paper makes use of a Q study on understandings about love to illustrate how UK Q scholars construe the ontology of Q factors. By examining the variety of constructions of "love" revealed by the study, it is possible to see how interpretation of Q factors can be undertaken within our particular understanding of subjectivity.

Introduction

It is in order here to disavow any intention of expounding the real meaning or the essence of love. There is no such thing. ... If we are to be satisfied only with a unique, universally applicable, all-time definition of love, we may as well not even enter upon our adventure. (Morgan, 1964, p. 3)

A Peculiarly British Dialect of Q?

In this introduction we will employ Morgan's disavowal of essentialism as a means to open up the question of what it is that might distinguish the peculiarly British dialect of Q methodology (Stainton Rogers, R. Stainton Rogers, W., 1992; Kitzinger and Stainton Rogers, 1985;

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Stenner and Marshall, 1995; Stenner and Stainton Rogers, R., 1997) from the North American dialect which is usually heard from the pages of *Operant Subjectivity*. Put crudely, some of us British Q methodologists have not failed to notice that we speak a different language from our U.S. cousins, and that, dare we say it, our language is sometimes considered unnecessarily difficult and complex. While not wanting to deny the occasional textual excess, we maintain that the concepts we have come to use are necessary—like the heavy tools needed to make a clearing through a thicket—for the cutting of a new path of inquiry. At stake in the difference between the dialects might be a different vision for the scope, nature, and possibilities of the human and social sciences. For us, Q methodology has been integral to this revisioning.

Essence and Appearance

In the quotation above, Morgan presents himself as standing poised at the beginning of an adventure. He describes two possible ways to go, and he makes it clear that he considers one of them to be illusory, an unreachable goal and unsatisfiable desire. That illusory way is the way of essentialism: a way populated by those captivated by the dream of unequivocal, singular, and timeless definition. The diverse and irregular versions of mere "actuality" (the loves of we sleepwalking mortals) are but copies and counterfeit versions—tarnished by the corrosion of time and place—of the original and singularly perfect essence.

Morgan, as a researcher of course, is looking specifically for love, but his warning about essentialism is applicable to practically any subject matter a psychologist, sociologist, political scientist, historian, or anthropologist might question after. For the scientific essentialist, the patterns and regularities of everyday life are at best potentially deceptive "signs" which can nevertheless, with the benefit of scientific theory and method, be traced back to a real point of origin in an underlying (i.e. hidden) generative mechanism. For Morgan (and other non-essentialists) the chief illusion is the idea that we are dealing with illusions at all: there is no original behind the copies, no "real" to be unveiled beneath the "actual."

This little quotation also draws our attention to the role our expectations play in structuring the scope and vision of our research. We search when we are seeking to find something, and what we expect to find informs the way we search. The "re" in research should alert us to the double nature of the activity. The first search establishes our expectations concerning what can be found (we call this *ontology*), the

second search sets out to find what has been marked out as discoverable by the first. The essentialist, naturally enough, begins with the intention of expounding essences. Hence "essentialism" denotes a specific ontology—the fruits of a first search which are then harvested during the second search of a specific research project. Morgan is hence questioning essentialist ontology when he says that if we set out expecting an essential love (if that is the only thing that will satisfy us as to a "proper" *finding*), "we may as well not even enter upon our adventure."

Subjectivity and Objectivity

As William Stephenson well knew, there is a major flaw in applying essentialist ontology to psychological questions which imply (and which do not?) *subjectivity*. For the essentialist, subjectivity is counted among those impurities which veil and distort access to the absolute objectivity of the real. The ideal, neutral, and detached observer of essentialist science reaches this ideal only to the extent that they eliminate their own subjectivity (which they call "bias") and that of their "subjects." Perhaps, then, the other path that Morgan implies is that of subjectivity? But what kind of ontology belongs to subjectivism?

It seems both comfortable and convenient to place subjectivity in direct opposition to the objective path of the essentialist. Hence we ordinarily find subjectivity discussed as the photographic negative of objectivity (the latter remaining obstinately timeless and singular, the former historically specific and multiple). If aspiring scientists such as psychologists have typically forsaken subjectivity, this is not simply because they doubted its existence and value, but because they have, *a priori*, opposed the language of subjectivity to the language of the "scientific"; with the mastery of subjective language (the fictive, lyrical, or opinionated) being the delegated responsibility of artists and poets. Even the latest edition of *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (Reber, 1995) is happy to begin its "definition" of love by asserting that "psychologists would probably have been wise to have abdicated responsibility for analysis of this term and left it to poets."

It seems to us, however, that far from being a radical alternative to objectivity, subjectivity is simply the flip side of the same coin (and must, as such, have currency in the same ontological economy). There is of course, a difference between subjective and objective, this is not in doubt—what we are "opposed to," however, is the positing of this difference as one of *externality*, i.e., of the type we perceive between

discrete entities or concepts. Instead, we see it only as an *internal* difference or, more accurately, an existentially determinate *relationship* between two aspects or modes of a single procedural category (which we might wish to call "social being," "social subjectivity," or some such). If the path of subjectivity does indeed find itself intrinsically related to that of objectivity, and we are prepared to rethink subjectivity as such, then it certainly cannot be the radically alternative route contemplated by Morgan.

Yet the concept of subjectivity features centrally in the North American dialect of Q research. The image of Q as a vehicle for making subjectivity operant certainly expresses the operation of some sort of ontology, but nowhere, to our knowledge, is this ontology clearly specified. The question as to the nature of subjectivity thus remains a pertinent one. Doubtless this conceptual opacity exists partly because users of Q—interminably caught, as they are, in the essentialist language of oppositions—so often find themselves implicated in theoretical battles with objectivists. Hence, as is typical of situations of conflict, those involved are content to operate with negative definitions (we are *not* concerned with issues of reliability and validity in the same way as you objectivists, we are *not* seeking random samples of subjects, we are *not* striving for objectivity, etc.). It is also partly because Stephenson provided us with such an effective methodology that clear and useful results can be obtained on an infinite variety of subject matters without the need arising to positively specify the ontological status of the resultant factors. In this sense, a Q study is typically more of a search than "re"-search. Let us be clear that this is not a critique of the method (theoretical and technical discussion concerning methodological issues in Q is rife), but of the status of the claims that are made on behalf of its results.

To cut a long story short, our admittedly challenging and often dense language is due to the fact that users of Q in Britain see in it a method well suited to a distinct and radical ontology. The concepts used hence carry the burden of expressing this ontology as well as explicating the specific study-at-hand. That ontology (and we are aware that many will take issue with our use of this term), which is variously called "constructionist," "poststructuralist," "postmodernist," or even "critical polytextualist" (see Curt, 1994 for a cheerful explication and justification of this monstrous neologism) is still in the process of formation and clarification (and many of us would prefer to see it remain unsettled). A key moment in this formation, however, was the recognition, which gave rise to the so called "discursive turn" in the

human and social sciences, that subjective experience should not be considered, in any simple sense, as "being" prior to language or discourse.

The strong statement of this position is that subjectivity (how we feel, what we perceive, the way we think, the nature of our experience) is *constituted in and through discourse* (that is, the talk and texts in and through which we find meaning and significance always-already articulated and organized). If cognitive psychology points to *a priori* forms (mechanisms and processes) of mind which structure any possible *content* of experience, then discursive psychology extends this claim beyond the confines of the individual mind to point to the discursive and material conditions which structure *a priori* the field of human experience (elsewhere these conditions have been called "sense"—cf. Deleuze, 1994; Heidegger, 1994). In the simplest terms, one cannot experience oneself as, say, a "love addict," prior to the intervention of an established and believable discourse on love addiction (cf. Sternberg, 1986).

Subjectivity is hence dethroned from its position as distinct and original the moment it is recognized that the individual is not separable from the regulative regime of acceptable statements that are imposed upon them by any cultural context (and remember here that practices, events, and actions also "make a statement"). An expression of subjectivity cannot "stand alone" but must be seen as a provisional point immersed in an ongoing cultural conversation. Hence a Q factor does not represent for us the capturing of an otherwise illusory and invisible form of subjectivity but the voicing of a wider discursive position or "enunciative assemblage" (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), which crystallizes only through the *relatedness* of individual subjectivities and the quasi-objective parameters that constitute a cultural field of sensibility or normality. The best way to further illustrate what we mean is by turning to some data!

In Search of Some Love

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways."

From *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1888).

There is certainly nothing remarkable about the study we report here, aside, of course, from it providing an excellent illustration of an earlier assertion; namely, that Q methodology has an uncanny ability to provide both "clear and useful results." Yet the primary intention of this paper is not solely to "present" these results, but to use love (an

entity which has done as much as any to "trouble" the objective) as a platform from which to begin a wider consideration, even to stimulate a debate, as to the nature of subjectivity and, by association, the ontological status of Q factors per se.

For this reason (and since the details are unremarkable in every respect) we will skip the official formalities of a "Method" section. Suffice to say the following: a single Q-sort pack of 70 propositions, all relating to opinions regarding "the nature of love" was produced (see Appendix), which was sorted along a continuum ranging from least to most descriptive. Since the major tenet of our thesis (explicating the Q factor as a "discursive position" or "enunciative assemblage") rests upon the *intrinsic* cultural embeddedness of any subjective voice, we felt it pertinent (in the true tradition of strategic sampling) to present the Q set to as extensive a range of ethnically and religiously diverse participants as was possible. We are fortunate at the University of East London to have a student body that satisfies these requirements, although some "older" participants were sought elsewhere (ages ranged from 18-89). The bias that emerged in favor of female participants (31-19) was simply the result of their expressing a greater enthusiasm to be involved, rather than one of intention: even here, of course, one could infer the intervention of established gender discourses (at the level of the "individual" subjectivity) in the final constitution of this participant assemblage.

The fifty completed Q sorts were analyzed using a dedicated Q computer package (PCQ, Stricklin, 1987). Nine centroid factors were extracted and rotated, of which eight were interpretable. A full exegesis of factor A appears below along with summarized outlines of the other factors. In reading each factor the relevant position of particular items was supplemented, where appropriate, by participant comments and information drawn from informal conversations undertaken during the process of exegesis.

Factor A: Love as Economic Exchange

The Q sorts of five participants define this factor; three female and two male, the ages of whom ranged from 22 to 56 years, suggesting that this position is employed by a wide spectrum of individuals. At first glance, love, in this account, appears to be characterized as the unconditional, powerful integration of two persons into a single relational unit, as evident in the following positionings:

Love is ...

- | | |
|--|----|
| 29 An intense commitment to another. | +5 |
| 55 The joining of two individuals into one. | +4 |
| 32 To desire the best for another, regardless of any personal sacrifice. | +6 |

On closer examination, however, it is revealed that the seeking of a unity is not a priority. This account wholeheartedly embraces the role of the autonomous individual, accepting the responsibility of dealing with life and achieving happiness independent of any relationship in which they may subsequently become involved. Love, in this sense, is not a necessary condition for the satisfaction or valorization of one's selfhood. This is true both emotionally, as shown in these placements:

Love is not ...

- | | |
|--|----|
| 12 The central purpose of life. | -3 |
| 8 A means for raising your own self esteem. | -4 |
| 15 An attempt to fill a perceived deficit in one's own life. | -3 |

and sexually, as shown by these:

Love is not ...

- | | |
|--|----|
| 47 The only route to true sexual pleasure. | -5 |
| 61 A biological drive for sexual contact. | -6 |

It is clear that these individuals expressing this account intend to maintain and protect their status as an isolable unit, even within the parameters of a relationship. Love is not "the sacrificing of personal freedoms" (-4); but it is "allowing your partner complete freedom to express themselves" (+3). The decision to become "involved" is based then, not on necessity, but on the perceived rationality of a discourse which we might call the "modern pragmatics"; a position which suggests that being able to rely on the romantic and practical support of another individual remains a preferable alternative to a solitary

existence. Hence the following positionings:

Love is ...

42 The sharing of problems.	+6
4 The sharing of interests an activities.	+4
41 Attempting to always understand.	+4
64 Constantly encouraging another.	+4

For this to prove functional for two "individuals," it is necessary that the providing of one's own support is considered to be of personal value: love being "the satisfaction of a need to be of value to another" is endorsed (+3). At the same time, each (potential) partner needs also to consider the other capable of giving, and worthy of receiving, their support, as shown by the placements:

Love is ...

33 A strong respect for another individual.	+3
13 A belief in the value and goodness of another.	+3

The continuing success and value of the love enterprise is, as such, dependent on a "balance of trade" being maintained in the traffic of the relationship. What each partner "imports" in terms of support, must be justified by the effort to "export" their own resources in assistance of the other. This economics-of-love can be seen in:

Love is ...

43 Always the responsibility of both partners.	+2
5 A mutual support relationship.	+2

The economic resource exchange is an ongoing project; constantly in need of examination and re-evaluation by both partners, as the maximizing of personal fulfillment (and the worth of continuing) is dependent upon a preservation of the status quo. The following items show this in their placement in the 0 position:

3	Worthless if it's not fun.	0
10	A duty of positive response to others.	0
39	The pursuit of personal pleasure and happiness.	0

Love, therefore, is only ever worthwhile if it provides additional benefits to the autonomous individual. It cannot ever be allowed to become a destructive personal experience. Love should be "always a fulfilling personal experience" (+3) and never "damaging to rational thought processes" (-4). Otherwise a return to the "natural," solipsistic condition is then the only action that could make "sense."

Factor B: Searching for Love

Four participants' Q sorts defined this factor. All were women aged 30-40 years. In this account love is a natural extension of, and the ultimate representation of the regard we have for our friends (items 30 +6, 54 -5, 35 +4). A love relationship should, from this perspective, provide all the benefits usually associated with friendship (items 33 +5, 45 +5, 42 +4), although a greater intensity of commitment is expected from this special relationship (items 29 +6). Lamentably, love, as it is depicted here, appears to have been elusive (items 7 -2, 8 -3). The account describes an ongoing process of searching for love (items 48 +4, 39 +4). Indeed, one participant reflected her own disappointment by taking issue with the fact that "the questions (presented with the Q sort) were directed as if we all have a partner!"

The difficulties experienced by these individuals appear strongly related to their "needing" love (a friend's support) in order to feel complete and secure as a person (items 22 +6, 21 +4, 26 +3). They confirm their desire for love as a source of enhanced personal security, but only implicitly; when it can be construed as potentially beneficial to both partners (items 40 +1, 23 +2). Understandably, in a society that has pathologized dependence, the personal need is explicitly denied (items 15 -3, 51 -3). Nonetheless, this personal weakness becomes clearly visible "in relationship," for they feel unable to offer their partner any freedom, encouragement or personal sacrifice (items 38 -1, 64 0, 32 0, 9 -4), while expecting substantially more in return (items 49 -3, 29 +6); a recipe for failure in an individualistic society. They will continue to search for their special friend, however, because they believe that "true" love is out there (item 67 -5), and that only through it's discovery can they achieve personal fulfillment (item 18 +5).

Factor C: Cultural Accommodation

Nine participants' Q sorts defined this factor, seven women and two men aged 20-35 years. All but two of the group reported having religious backgrounds, and all but one had at least one parent of foreign descent. This account stressed collectivist and community-centered values in relation to love, emphasizing cooperation and practical, mutual support (items 65 +5, 32 +6, 19 +4). Love *per se* was held in high regard, foundationed as it was in this account on a strict moral and religious code (items 12 +2, 11 +6). It's proper enactment is seen as very importance, as offers benefits for both the lover and the loved (items 34 +5, 31 +2).

Given this powerful moral undercurrent, it might be expected that, in this account, love would be seen as a necessary precondition for sex, but this is not so (item 53 -5). Love need not be the only route to sexual pleasure (item 47 -3). What we may well be seeing here is an accommodation between a traditional construction of love (derived from the parental generation) and a more individualist construction (arising from the peer generation) (item 69 -6). Love, under this accommodation, need no longer be provided unconditionally (items 10 -3, 70 -5, 35 -1). A level of freedom is demanded (items 9 -2, 38 +2)—to love whom one chooses (items 30 +4, 13 +4), and for one's own personal benefit (items 39 +3, 1 +2). However, within the accommodation, while refuting the determinate power of this moral love (item 68 -3), the account is based upon *choosing* to love (and to operate individuality) in a collectivist fashion and, perhaps naively, expecting the same of others (items 29 +6, 28 +3, 55 +4, 5 +5, 49 -4). In this sense, the accommodation does not always work—it can lead to discovering (the hard way) that the subjective "freedoms" of most individuals are not necessarily based on a concern for other people (items 7 -2, 40 -2, 8 0). One participant summed up the contradictions nicely: "Love can be beautiful. Love can be crazy! Love can be a million things at once. But love can also be painful, traumatic, and soul-wrenching."

Factor D: Selfless Love

Seven participants' Q sorts defined this factor, five women and two men aged 19-32 years. All but one described themselves as Christian. Love, from this account, is determined by external moral regulations (usually of the Biblical variety) which must be strictly adhered to. An understanding of these regulations ensures that love's performance is

both consistent (items 67 +3, 46 +6) and rationally controlled (items 25 -4, 26 -2). Biblical love (or Agape), stresses the necessity of prioritizing a concern for others (items 19 +6, 28 +4, 20 -6), a goal which, from this perspective, is made problematic by discourses of human compartmentalization in our increasingly narcissistic society (item 57 +3). Love here provides a system of practical support and fellowship (items 65 +4, 30 +3), which must be offered equally to all (items 35 +5, 54 -6, 11 +6), regardless of any subjective preference (items 10 +1, 33 0, 43 -1, 39 -1). There is no expectation that this love will be reciprocated (items 8 -5, 32 +5, 7 -2, 40 -2), for what matters is simply to act correctly (items 62 +2, 12 +3, 34 +2). Indeed, the individual requires no reward (items 8 -5, 15 -4, 14 -4), for they believe their love is received direct from God; they merely pass on their own good fortune to those in greater need (item 59 +2). Although one has a degree of flexibility in love, it is always "within" the framework of the moral guidelines (items 38 +1, 44 +1). This is not regarded as a restriction of freedom (item 9 -2), however, for freedom is not considered to be the right to do as we choose, whenever we choose; but the opportunity to become all that we can be, and without God and His love this can never be achieved.

Factor E: Love is for Losers

Two participants' Q sorts defined this factor. Both were male, one aged 19 years, the other 29. The fundamental question being raised here is: how far can the definition of love be stretched? Within this account the love relationship, such as it is, is entered into purely for personal pleasure and gain (items 39 +6, 23 +6, 3 +5). Any form of responsibility is utterly rejected (items 10 -6, 35 -5, 32 -2), as is the chance that the relationship might develop (items 9 -5, 24 -5). Therefore love in this context is seen as a powerful urge toward a transitory fleeting experience (items 1 +6, 48 +4, 26 +3). Implicitly this account seems to want to argue that love is nothing more than having sex. Yet on closer examination it becomes apparent that the boundary between sex and love is acknowledged (albeit in a negative fashion), for love is positioned as damaging in sexual terms (items 53 +5, 47 -5). It also appears, despite attempts to justify such actions (item 70 -6), that there is an appreciation that the campaign of manipulation and exploitation being undertaken in the name of love (item 58 +2) would not be recognized by most people as "loving" (item 57 +4).

It is not that what is generally meant by love is misunderstood—it is

understood perfectly well (items 13 +4, 5 +3, 32 +3, 30 +2). The point is that from this account, it is something to be avoided, for it puts one's emotional well-being in the hands of another (item 50 +5). This is not a risk worth taking, since it makes one vulnerable (item 59 +3). But rather than admit to fear of being hurt, the account offers a cynical explanation of why others are "needy" for love—it is because they are incomplete (item 15 +3), victims of their own emotional frailty (item 25 +3).

Factor F: Love Betrayed

Two participants' Q sorts defined factor F. Both were women, one aged 25 and the other 28. One of these women gave the information that, as a child, she had been repeatedly sexually abused by her father, and had protected her younger sister from his advances. This account is of love that has been abused. The result is that security and self-worth have been undermined (items 40 -6, 8 -4). Not surprisingly, love is held in low regard (items 34 -3, 27 +3, 60 0), for it only encouraged these distasteful events when it could, and should, have prevented them (items 26 +5, 53 -4). It looks as though an attempt is being made at understanding the actions of the betrayer (item 41 +3), but understanding does not erase memories, nor does it automatically bring forgiveness (item 63 -2). The provision of practical, financial support cannot atone for the physical and metaphorical rape of love that has been endured, or for the cruel failure to satisfy subjective, emotional needs (items 24 -5, 14 -3). This heightens the will to "be there" for their own loved ones (item 59 -5, 11 +5).

Sadly, up to the present time, the love of which they dream (items 30 +4, 33 +4, 13 +3, 29 +5, 5 +2) has only existed for others. Understandably, they now have a powerful desire to experience this for themselves (items 48 +6, 39 +3), believing it to offer the possibility of a fresh start; a release from the past (items 66 +6, 23 +3). The struggle for freedom has, however, involved much personal trauma and difficulty. One participant said, "You must think I'm weird" at least a dozen times during completion of the Q sort. Its benefits will not now be surrendered lightly (items 9 -6, 28 -4). The "new" love must, as such, be approached with caution (item 50 +3) and will require for its success a very special partner, for expectation is running idealistically high (item 49 -4).

Factor G: Traditional Marriage

Two participants' Q sorts defined factor G, two men aged 80 and 58 years. They were the oldest participants to complete the Q sort. This account articulates love through two counterposed themes. First, as an emotion, love is viewed as powerful "urge" which a decent and honorable man needs to control rather than indulge (items 27 +6, 61 +3). On a personal level, therefore, love, as such, is unimportant (item 12 -6)—it is a weakness (items 40 -4, 51 -4, 17 -4, 14 -4). But love is also seen as having a more practical aspect, sited within a traditional network of male social and moral responsibilities (items 6 +2, 21 +6, 16 +4), based upon the institution of marriage (items 68 +4, 55 +2). A man needs to "tame" their emotional need for love, but ultimately, to become an accepted member of society, he must be seen to embrace the loving responsibilities of husband and father (items 26 +6, 18 +2, 67 +2).

Unsurprisingly then, marriage is viewed very traditionally, as a life commitment (items 29 +5, 25 +4). Men, in order to fulfil their social and moral duty, should only ever share their love, both mental (items 35 -5, 10 -3) and physical (item 47 +5), with a single women. It is necessary, therefore, that she be selected with care (item 50 +4), because the expected inter-dependence of a good marriage requires great patience and sacrifice (items 9 +5, 36 +5, 63 +4) from a male who consistently gives the impression that he would rather do otherwise (items 54 -6, 53 +1). It is of vital importance that his own identity is maintained, independent of the love relationship, and he constantly struggles for, and asserts, this freedom and individuality (items 28 -6, 56 -5, 32 -2). Love, in this sense, is rarely fulfilling (item 7 -4) and its demands, socially determined as they are, have shown little sign of diminishing with the passage of time (item 66 -1).

Factor H: Love as a Partnership

Two participants' Q sorts defined this factor, a 41 year old man and a 30 year old woman. Interestingly, and conveniently in terms of neatness, this last factor is the manifestation of the type of love that initially seemed to be offered by factor A; namely two people's agreement to be unconditionally integrated into a single working unit (item 55 +1). Love is extremely highly valued and idealized (items 11 +3, 34 +3, 48 +3) and is considered to be entirely necessary for the attainment of personal fulfillment, both mentally and physically (22 +6, 18 +6, 47 +5). But this individual fulfillment can only be

achieved by, and through, the prioritizing and satisfaction of partnership requirements (items 10 +3, 6 +3, 19 +6). The love relationship is, clearly, to be distinguished from the more diluted strain of love we may offer our friends (items 54 +4, 30 -1, 67 -3), for it is of central importance to one's well-being (item 12 +4, 3 -5, 20 -6). The loved one must, therefore, be entirely trustworthy and reliable (items 33 +5, 13 +5), for the future happiness of the two individual partners depends on their giving priority to, and applying themselves equally to the relationship (items 5 +5, 43 +2, 28 0, 38 0). This application is a rigid responsibility and possible failures, in this regard, are not on the agenda (items 36 -4, 49 -3). A position which is confirmed by the comment made by one participant: "My husband has done many loving things but they are taken for granted and it is expected of him." The goal, then, is not personal gratification (items 39 -4, 7 -4), something which is quite usual in our society (item 57+2), but the ultimate success and contentment of the family group. There is no individual sacrifice involved (item 9 -4), for there is no individual this interdependent relationship is seen as the only realistic possibility (item 69 +4).

Discussion—Difference as a Factor?

[D]ifference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing.
(Deleuze, 1994, p. 57)

We searched for love and found it, but find ourselves in that curious place where we must still ask, "What is it that we found?" Certainly, at a cursory glance we seem to have failed an essentialist ontology: nothing objective, no finished definable products, original, deep, or hidden meanings, extracted from a disengaged representative domain that somehow eludes the passage of human history. We fall short of a fixed definition, representation, or concept. No essence it seems, but eight *essentially recognizable* "loves."

Yet, as is already apparent, we are not prepared to leap from objectivity to subjectivity with quite the usual facility. To do so is, we believe, simply to reiterate and re-establish the dualism established by essentialism. Used in this fashion, Q would be restricted to being a vehicle only for discovering "opinions" or points of view (demonstrative, doubtless, of the glaring gaps in knowledge or degrees of falsity exhibited by the "lay" person). The alternative, of course, is not so simply stated. In what follows, we will draw heavily on the philosophical work of the late Gilles Deleuze in an attempt to make a case for a

workable account of the ontological status of our factors.

Difference and Repetition

Love would not exist without human social action. It does not wait "out there" in any essential configuration, to be discovered beyond the play of subjectivities and subjective relatedness. On the contrary, it is an *effect* of their action. In practice, we are suggesting that the essence of love, any fixed and infinitely applicable conceptual generality that we might care to adopt, is only ever *drawn from* the continuous qualitative variation inherent in the manifestation of everyday subjective performance. Within this "ontology of difference," constant can no longer be *opposed* to variable and, by association, objective can no longer be *opposed* to subjective; each merely represents a differential treatment of subjectivity *per se* (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 103). The scientific language of the objective establishes its clarity of representation (or conceptual identity) only through an artificial levelling of *difference*, by recognizing only those statements that are *repeated often enough statistically* (amidst the flux of subjective variety) to be appropriated as a "probable" constant. The ambiguity and multidimensional complexity of the subjective (or sub-representative) domain thus becomes systematically *overlaid* by a grid of statistically generated and logically independent constructs that come to be "counted upon" as the "real"-thing (cf. Danziger, 1997).

Hence, the established identity of the surface concept exists only by virtue of a banal generality, through a radical failure to acknowledge the temporal and fragmentary nature of the manifold of subjective singularities which lend to it both form and depth; that upon which its objectivity is grounded. Here, beneath the calm exterior imposed by the organization of the conceptual grid (or plane) "that which *only afterward* appears as linear limitation and flat opposition lives and simmers in the form of free differences" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 50, emphasis added). If Deleuze is correct, objectivity in the social sciences is illusory: it is dependent upon, and is merely a quantitative mediation into, the field of subjective variety and difference.

From Subjectivity to Points-of-Subjectification

For every participant involved in our study we have a different version of love, 50 independent sorting patterns—a profound illustration of continuous variety and difference at the level of subjectivity. Yet our

explication of subjectivity, our own enunciative assemblage, remains incomplete, for subjects are clearly *not* free to produce entirely random variability. At the outset of our exegesis for factor E we posed a crucial question about difference: *How different can a version of love become before it becomes something else?* This is of course unanswerable. Despite the fact that certain ways of "making" sense are instantaneously recognizable as senseless, the line between sense and non-sense is anything but clear-cut (although it should not be if concepts really *were* essentially fixed and distinct). Nonetheless, our embeddedness in any field of culturally accepted representations and concepts has the effect of installing for us pre-defined structures of meaning: limitations on what any individual subjectivity can do "in the name of love" (cf. factor F). If, for example, our partner is to feel loved, it is obviously necessary that they *perceive us to be loving*. To be perceived as such (to "make sense") we must necessarily produce a style of love that remains *within the confines* of the boundaries fashioned by such meaning structures. Anything that falls on the "outside" is relegated to the ranks of the *unloving*—the unacceptable or abnormal.

To reiterate, then, individuals do not produce entirely *random* variability precisely because the enterprise of "objective" categorizing, the scientific business of extracting constants and constant relations, is always coupled with the social and political enterprise of imposing their (albeit transcendently limited) "sense" back onto the speaking subject (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 101). The quasi-objective grid of representations thus recoils, and re-inserts itself back into subjectivity, affirming the conditions of possibility for the agentic production of renewed, but necessarily iterative, stylistic variety. This point is developed further by Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 79-80):

There is no individual enunciation ... enunciation itself implies collective assemblages ... the statement is individuated and enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so ... what comes first is not an insertion of variously individuated statements, or an interlocking of different subjects of enunciation [speaking subjects], but a collective assemblage resulting in the determination of relative subjectification proceedings, or assignations of individuality and their shifting distributions within discourse.

Subjectivity is hence dethroned from its position as distinct and original. The participants whose sorts formed factor A, for example, are only able to talk and think about themselves as "autonomous"

because our cultural assemblage ordains to permit it; we are, as Rose (1990) succinctly put it, "obliged to be free" and to be responsible for the successful operation of that freedom. All this leads us nicely from thinking "subjectivity" in a conventional sense, to re-thinking subjectivity as a "point-of-subjectification" (the point at which expression and content, language and materiality become blurred and entwined). Each subject's "dominant reality is given by the range of statements which are possible for it. One learns the range of possible options that one is allowed to think, believe, want, or love *from those given within society*" (Goodchild, 1996, p. 148, emphasis added).

This, of course, does not mean that we are all the same; the fact that we swim in the same river does not mean that we follow the same course, or that we are immersed in the same water, "each subject is a different center, and can be produced by a different set of statements [each undergoes different subjectification proceedings] ... Different subjects are then led to have differing faces and opinions, even though these are marked out within a culture on the same kinds of grids" (Goodchild, 1996, p. 149). Subjectivity is *always* a variable function of the systems-of-order at work in a wider cultural assemblage: "objective" regulations that (perhaps paradoxically) have been generated through the operations of previous subjectivities. It is an ontological mistake to *oppose* subject and object, they are part of the same.

The Problem of Love and the Ontology of the Q Factor

In effect, then, each of the statements (or hypothetical assertions) presented in a Q study can be seen as a particular "element-of-order"; an instruction asserting that love *is* this or love *is* that. The sorting process thus represents the manifestation of a subjective "re"-action to the imposition of *specific kinds of a priori* social ordering (in the sense that it is an action based on expectations produced by previous actions). In taking-up a relation with the propositional hypotheses each participant ultimately generates a unitary, multidimensional relatedness between all the elements; a recognizable and holistic "technique of engagement" with the issue or entity in question.

The pattern analytic procedure of Q, while remaining sympathetic to the underlying thesis of continuous subjective variation, undertakes a search of the river (at any given moment in time) for the points or positions at which the otherwise scattered subjectivities form in "*ordered*" groups or clusterings. Hence we locate regions of consistency within the variability; styles or dialects of re-action, if you will,

operating within the order of a single language (notice, however, that factor C provides an interesting example of the confusion that follows when two *languages* intervene in the same subject). The Q-factorial assemblage, then, is a gathering of similar points-of-subjectification. If subjectivities make operant a similar "solution," it is because they have, and are, being subjected to similar problems imposed by similar statements-of-order.

Since we are constantly faced with a myriad of diverse problems, the solving of love cannot, in any sense, be said to occur in a vacuum (despite the fact that we often analyze it as such). It is not distinct and isolable, but remains one among many *relative* problems that we must solve in order to operate our "freedom" competently (and note here the implications of remaining "[with]in order"). We have also begun to imply that the factors which emerged here constitute independent "fields of solvability" (Deleuze 1994, p. 179). However, and it is worth re-emphasizing this point, these are fields of solvability that are representative of solutions to a love that, in each case, has been "set-up" by the *differential conditions* of our subjectification proceedings as an essentially *different problem* (not variously "mistaken" solutions to a single problem).

Thus subjectivities can come to occupy apparently radically alternative discursive positions which cite love as being dictated by personal preference (cf. factor A), as being externally or culturally determined (cf. factors D/G), as having extreme value (cf. factors D/I), as being personally insignificant (cf. factor G), or even as being something to fear (cf. factor E). Yet for each of us, the essence of love (and the Q factor) is always *topological*: delimited, shaped and ordered by the conditions of the "place" in which we find ourselves. Different conditions generating different discursive positions, within which the solution remains intrinsically related to the "setting-up" of the problem (a message which carries not inconsiderable implications for any hypothesis based [re]search technique). We find the essence of love in, and "is," *difference*.

In Conclusion: Moments of Intensity

Beneath and within the artificial strata constituted by any fixed and ahistorical representational system, a Q-methodological study enables us to locate a "plurality of centers, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments"; each "essentially distorting" the claims of the "finished" concept or objectivity (cf.

Deleuze, 1994, p. 55). To invest too heavily in the pursuit of a definitive version of love is, as such, a profound ontological misjudgment, committed by [re]searchers and the "lay" subjectivity alike (cf. factors B/F). In practice we must always "move on." The defining parameters of our problems, and their relative fields of solvability, fluctuate and change. We can never "solve" love, for it is always an ongoing project, we simply have a hand in reconstituting it as a problem. Love, as life, is essentially a process, not a structure: structure is imposed only by artificially stalling, or momentarily slowing down, the process.

Q studies, therefore, operate without claiming to find the transcendental: presenting immanent taxonomies, that display "ordered patterning of cultural understanding" (Stainton Rogers, R., 1995, p. 180). The fact that we succeed in capturing these positions does not, then, infer upon them some sort of prescriptive or predictive power, for structure has always-already returned to process (indeed, as assemblages they do not even *belong* to any specific subjectivity to so predict). They are, as Deleuze puts it, simply "moments" abstracted from an intense world of continuing difference and variety. A sub-representative world of "operant points-of-subjectification" which exists, and can be analyzed, *prior* to its seemingly inevitable articulation into the oppositional language of subject and object: a place where we find "the reason behind qualities and the being of the sensible ... the object of a superior empiricism" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 57). The object of a radical and distinct ontology. The object of Q.

Appendix

List of items

All items prefixed by "Love Is ..."

1. A feeling of excitement.
2. A means of achieving intimate contact.
3. Worthless if it's not fun.
4. The sharing of interests and activities.
5. A mutual support relationship.
6. A basic need for close attachment.
7. Always a fulfilling personal experience.
8. A means for raising your own self esteem.
9. The sacrificing of personal freedoms.
10. A duty of positive response to others.
11. A gift that should be given freely.

12. The central purpose of life.
13. A belief in the value and goodness of another person.
14. A concern about losing an important source of need gratification.
15. An attempt to fill a perceived deficit in ones own life.
16. Given because of the need to receive reciprocal love.
17. Encouraged by a concern about being alone.
18. Essential to a mature, fulfilled life.
19. A desire to assist your partner in achieving their full potential.
20. Only worthwhile when it fits in with your other life goals.
21. The satisfaction of a need to be of value to another.
22. Necessary for the satisfaction of sexual and emotional needs.
23. An opening up of new life opportunities.
24. A willingness to provide financial support.
25. An addiction to the company of another person.
26. An urge that we cannot control.
27. Damaging to rational thought processes.
28. A decision to give another persons interests priority.
29. An intense commitment to another person.
30. An extension of friendship.
31. A motivation to live a better life.
32. To desire the best for another person, regardless of personal sacrifice.
33. A strong respect for another individual.
34. The ultimate means of personal expression.
35. Always displaying great patience.
36. A general concern for other people.
37. Perseverance in the provision of support.
38. Allowing your partner complete freedom to express themselves.
39. The pursuit of personal pleasure and happiness.
40. A chance to gain greater personal security.
41. Attempting to always understand.
42. The sharing of problems.
43. Always the responsibility of both partners.
44. Always being flexible and open to compromise.
45. Built on good, open communication.
46. Always treating another person as you would wish to be treated yourself.
47. The only route to true sexual pleasure.
48. A feeling that we all want to experience.
49. Asking as little from another person as is possible.
50. To be entered into with caution, to avoid getting hurt.
51. A means for disguising personal vulnerability.
52. Stressful and best avoided altogether.
53. Limiting to the expression of personal sexuality.
54. Something that can only be shared with one individual at any point in time.
55. The joining of two individuals into one.
56. A complete honesty between individuals.

57. Made more difficult by the demands of modern society.
58. The manipulation of another persons feelings.
59. Easiest to give when your own needs are already satisfied.
60. An unnecessary emotional demand.
61. A biological drive for sexual contact.
62. The ultimate motivation to do good.
63. Attempting to always forgive and forget.
64. Constantly encouraging another person.
65. Only truly displayed by actions not words.
66. Constantly improving as we mature and gain wisdom.
67. Essentially the same, regardless of who is being loved.
68. Used by society to encourage the maintenance of marriage and family as institutions.
69. Represented and enacted identically across cultures.
70. An infatuation if it does not last a lifetime.

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