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Call to Resistance: A Review of Denzin and Giardina's Qualitative Inquiry: Past, Present, & Future

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Abstract

This book is a compendium of papers presented at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry from 2005 to the present. It serves as a call to arms for critical researchers, to engage deeply with theory and praxis, directing their efforts against our conservative neo-liberal culture. The book is suitable for academics and students alike and will not disappoint in its capacity to perturb and challenge.

Keywords

Theory, Social Justice, Critical Inquiry

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Call to Resistance: A Review of Denzin and Giardina's *Qualitative Inquiry: Past, Present, & Future*

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This book is a compendium of papers presented at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry from 2005 to the present. It serves as a call to arms for critical researchers, to engage deeply with theory and praxis, directing their efforts against our conservative neo-liberal culture. The book is suitable for academics and students alike and will not disappoint in its capacity to perturb and challenge. Keywords: Theory, Social Justice, Critical Inquiry

I attended the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) in Champaign, Illinois for the first time this year. I was an isolated qualitative researcher, working in a Science Faculty, standing halfway between empiricism and critical inquiry, nervous about take the leap but increasingly frustrated. I had found a home, to some degree, in meta-modernism, pushing qualitative research, but still placing an emphasis on impact factor, design, trustworthiness and rigour. ICQI was for me a tipping point, perfect timing, revealing my emphasis on method and casting me into a more significant engagement with sociological theory and activism. I met a diverse range of researchers; phenomenologists, social constructionists, critical realists, New Materialists, Indigenous scholars, anthropologists and more. I had found my "tribe." I left more as a learner than a teacher.

Denzin and Giardina's book serves as a compendium of selected papers from the past ten years of ICQI. It also serves as an authoritative mandate for qualitative researchers to engage in social justice, not just as interpreters of experience, but as active agents of social change. The Editors reject the notion that quantitative and qualitative methods are compatible and call for "*inquiries that provide a moral authority to move people to struggle and resist oppression*" (Denzin & Giardina, 2015, p. 12). They urge us to turn away from the soft pragmatism of mixed methods and move forward into the post-structuralist and post-humanist world. The book is also an important record of the past ten years of critical research. It addresses many of the crucial developments in this period; the rejection of the apolitical inquiry of the 1990's, our response to the rise of neo-liberalism and the tantalizing emergence of post-humanist and post-qualitative thought.

The opening chapter is the Editors' call to arms, their manifesto for social action. The closing chapter is the record of a conversation between seven of the authors, reflecting on the current state and future of qualitative research. The main chapters are presented in four sections, built on the themes of previous volumes: Philosophy of Inquiry, The Politics of Evidence, Methodological Imperatives, and Indigenous and Decolonizing Interventions. I will provide a short précis of four chapters, one from each of these sections, before assessing the value and utility of the book.

Adams St. Pierre, E. Refusing Human Being in Humanist Qualitative Inquiry

St. Pierre claims that qualitative research, across the board, is still rooted in the humanist philosophy of the enlightenment, with Descartes' thinker at the centre of our methodological universe. The human of humanism, however, is historical ephemera, constantly becoming and inherently entangled with everything else, the animate and inanimate. St. Pierre makes a provocative argument against prospective methods, urging for

the primacy of theory and retrospective design. She draws on a wide variety of influences, including quantum physics, Deleuze and Guattari and the classics of social constructionism.

Giroux, H. Public Intellectuals Against the Neoliberal University

Giroux's chapter articulates our frustrations with the commodification of Universities, where the administrative tail wags the dog and where we witness the "*ethical tranquilisation*" and "*technically trained docility*" of our students. He positions the University more as a knowledge factory for corporations than a "*democratic public sphere*." This is seen as a public tragedy for America, a dystopian society where thinking itself has been censored by anti-intellectualism. Giroux's article aims to challenge academics, to wrestle free from audit culture and lifeless theoreticism and take a stand both within the University and wider society. He calls for a "*pedagogy of wakefulness*," which refuses education that is disconnected from social concerns. "*What are educators going to do... to make sure that they do not succumb to the authoritarian forces circling the University, waiting for the resistance to stop, and the lights to go out. Resistance is no longer an option, it is a necessity*" (Giroux, 2015, p. 201).

Brinkman, S. Interviewing and the Production of the Conversational Self

Brinkman's chapter focuses on challenging the value of the empathic, rapport-based qualitative interview. He sees this as a potential by-product of the "*interview society*," where narcissism and self-disclosure have become commodified. In the traditional qualitative interview the researcher serves as a Rogerian non-directive "*friend*" or Confessor, probing deeply into the private psyche of the individual. Brinkman argues instead, for a more active Socratic process, where the respondent is interrogating about the socio-political context of their own perspective. The traditional interview assumes that intimacy enhances trustworthiness. The Socratic interview positions respondents as accountable citizens engaging in public conversation.

Kovach, M. Thinking Through Theory. Contemplating Indigenous Situated Research and Policy

Kovach's work opens with the description of the Plains Cree Wisakedjak, a trickster who visits as a "*paradoxically aloof provocateur*." This serves to sensitize us to the covert role that theory can play in the relationship between research and policy in indigenous education. She begins by differentiating between personal and framework theory. The first is our own embodied situated knowledge, the second our more formal research tradition. If indigenous research is to challenge the colonial, "*one-eyed*," "*mummifying*" gaze both the personal and framework theories must be drawn from an indigenous paradigm.

My own assessment of *Qualitative Inquiry: Past, Present & Future* is that it is a unique tour de force. So many collections or edited works in qualitative research focus on method, with each chapter dedicated to a different school of inquiry. This book focuses instead on philosophical and sociological questions with a compelling sense of passion and urgency. The authors push boundaries in their respective fields, amplifying the critical instincts of the reader or perturbing them to question their own beliefs. There is some hubris in the book; declarations of the "*shattering of the myth of objectivity*" and even the "*death of data*," but these are appropriate for a manifesto of this type.

There are many potential audiences for this book. Firstly, it will appeal to established researchers seeking the cutting edge of qualitative inquiry. It provides excitement in this

regard, a constant thrill, and can be difficult to put down. It is sufficiently diverse to appeal to a wide range of critically-oriented academics, but may not suit those who are significantly committed to mixed methods. This book will also be of interest to students, especially the more gifted ones at post-graduate level. Most chapters are written in an honest and direct style, with limited jargon, and would be intelligible after some degree of struggle.

References

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Author Note

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