Methodological Essay in Qualitative Research in Nursing: Foucault, Benjamin, and ethical-aesthetic effects in academic writing

Thaís Maranhão¹; Maria Henriqueta Luce Kruse²

¹School of Nursing Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, and Institute of Health Sciences University Feevale, Brasil. maranhao.thais@gmail.com.
²School of Nursing Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil. kruse@uol.com.br.

Abstract. Reflective essay on the theoretical-methodological possibility of qualitative research in the area of Nursing that proposes to articulate philosophical and scientific discourses, with the intention of producing a possible theoretical-methodological path for an academic doctorate study. In this sense, in proposing an essay on possibilities of academic research, based on an ethical-aesthetic perspective of academic writing, in which the researcher subject allows himself to think differently, we see a relation with the nomadic thinking perspective, insofar as creates new possibilities, deterritorializes the researchers of its bases, which in the area of Nursing, is hegemonically housed in the field of positivist and predictive thinking. This methodological exercise constitutes an exercise of possibility of existence in academic life.

Keywords: Essay; Nursing; Foucault; Benjamin; Academic writing

1 Introduction

The following writing is meant to be an exercise. Exercise to explore a certain path of thought. It is a reflective essay on the theoretical-methodological possibility of qualitative research in the field of Nursing that proposes to articulate philosophical and scientific discourses, in a call to the exercise of elaboration of research with focused both on what was agreed named of object as well as subject.

Influenced by readings in Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin, in addition to researchers of his works, such as Rosa Fischer and Jorge do Ó - among others, we sought to establish possible relationships between research perspectives in the humanities and health sciences, more specifically in nursing, with the aim of producing a possible theoretical-methodological path for an academic doctorate study.

We recognize the influence of the modern positivist paradigm on the production of scientific research. In the area of health, the hegemony of research that adopts so-called neutral methods is well-known, in order to locate the true answer, among others considered mistaken. It is noted, as explained by Feyerabend (2016), a world view in which science is considered as the only regime of truth capable of presenting universal, cohesive, replicable answers. In this perspective, producing research that can be consumed by the academic public has to comply with the normative requirements of the protocols and research methods, which have as principle the clarity in the choice of samples, collection analysis technique and data analysis.

The precept that the researches find extensive and common answers to the researchers who are interested in a certain subject, pervades the said humanities. In an attempt to avoid criticism such as opinion, pseudoscience, belief and metaphysics, "the forced history of the human sciences is the supposed fabrication of a mathematics of subjectivity", and that "in a neutral, ready and calculable
world, technical discovery of truth – never participation in the invention of other possible worlds” (Mizoguchi, 2015, p.201).

In an attempt to create escape lines, as Deleuze (2011) would say, in the invention of other possible worlds, the methodological question of research turns out to be a central axis of problematization. In spite of establishing a method to appropriate the reality of the subject of study, the present essay is understood by us as "modifying experience of itself in the game of truth" (Foucault, 2017, p.14), that is, as an exercise critical thinking about the very thought of truths that constituted the practice of the researchers, through an academic writing. Is it possible to think differently than one thinks? How to construct problematizing paths of the certainties at the same time that we traced paths for research in Nursing? More than an exercise in self-criticism, it is a philosophical exercise, of ethical-aesthetic concern of "conversion of the gaze in academic writing, as caring for oneself, as writing of oneself, as the art of existence" (Fischer, 2005, p. .125).

2 Academic writing as ethical-aesthetic vector

The issue of academic writing seems to us to be an important vector in the problematization of the methodological aspects of the research. Taken from an ethical-aesthetic constitution, in addition to a communication between people, the possibility of writing, or even of academic production mediated, modified, transformed by writing, opens up as an intercessor of different forms of existence.

In analyzing the experience of writing in Foucault, Jorge do Ó & Julio Aquino (2014, p.215) present that for this author, the office of researcher "corresponded to a perpetual practice of unfolding itself," an unfinished search for interrogation of truths considered as timeless that aim at different ways of looking.

Foucault, throughout his books and articles, sought to modify both the way certain truths were apprehended by himself and his contemporaries, as "to know to what extent the work of thinking his own history can free the thought of what he thinks silently, and allow him to think differently" (Foucault, 1984, p. 14). Thus, when we present the ethical question, the doors of a transforming writing of the subject are opened. A subject who knows, who thinks, and who, in writing, thinks and constitutes himself as subject, at the same time that constitutes the universe that surrounds him.

Aesthetic choice is concerned not so much with meaning, but mainly with its effects. Effects that go beyond reason, this incessant search of scientific rationality. Thus, from an aesthetic perspective we could go beyond the analysis of objects, relating them to individuals and to life, one of Foucault's concerns. Why circumscribe the aesthetic experience to art? "Could not everyone's life be transformed into a work of art?" (Foucault, 2013, p.306).

In our understanding, the ethical-aesthetic vector appears in the academic writing as the writer chooses each one of the words used, releasing the thought, wishing that in writing "to change what you think entirely and to find yourself at the end of it quite different from what you were at the beginning" (Foucault, 2010, p.289).

3 Academic writing operated by a collector's ethic

In a short essay about an experience in his library, Walter Benjamin writes about the collecting activity. In narrating a moment when he unpacked books, after being kept for two years, the author

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1 All citations throughout the text were translated from Portuguese into English by the authors of this work.
asks himself: "In fact, what this collection is but a disorder in which the habit has settled in such a way that it can present itself as an order." (Benjamin, 2013, p.90).

The author presents the collector as someone who has a relationship with his collection. Different relation of the objectivity of its usefulness, importance or history. Relation that gives texture to the pieces, when looking each one, lined up outside the cardboard boxes, amid the disorder created by the "recollection, thought and conscience" of the collector, that becomes part of the frame.

For Benjamin, what is most rooted in the will of the collector is to renew the old world, just as children have a capacity to rebuild in a classic and never complicated practice. In them, in children, collecting is only a process of renewal; others are the painter of objects, of cutting, of decal, and of the whole range of modes of appropriation of children, of touching and naming. "(Benjamin, 2013, p. 91).

What is the purpose of associating the collection activity with the research office? Is not the researcher's practice motivated by a quest to renew existence? Create habits that present themselves as an order? Coloring like pages with a pulsing novelty message? Cut out word images and paste in previously unthinkable places?

To do this, we believe that the activity of collecting would have as a presupposition subjects researchers capable of creating relations between things that apparently would not present connections, create analogies, mounts that could cross the borders of looking at an object as something finished, with a unique function - that would represent the idea of a certain author, for example.

We imagine that, in the ethical activity of collecting, the researcher / collector poses as a creative, curious subject, willing to cross and transgress borders to create knowledge by presenting, in an academic writing, a certain variability of situations that could be thought with the displacement of objects from their usual place.

4 Fragmentation and composition: writing-mosaic exercises

In our everyday curiosities, we know the man of the scissors, presented by Antoine Compagnon (1996). As the Scissorhands' answer to a literary magazine research, he confessed that in his library his books were different, they were all incomplete, some had not more than a few pages. He said: "I think you should do comfortably what you do every day; so I read with the scissors in my hands, excuse me, and I cut everything that displeases "(Compagnon, 1996, p.30).

The man with the scissors was marked in our memories. Although he presented an almost wild confession about his reading practice, such radicalism made us think. In the daily practice of our research practices, when we emphasize excerpts from books, when we cut down quotes that enchant us, would we not have something similar to the man with the scissors? We agree with Compagnon's observation (1996, p. 32) that "reading with a pencil in hand, recopying in the notebook of notes, this is very good. But cut and above all throw away the remains, throw them in the trash, what inconvenience!"

We believe it is possible to establish a similarity between the practice of cutting the scissors man and extracting fragments made by Foucault in the Bibliothèque Nationale. We learned from Philippe Artières (2004) that Foucault operated on the books in which he worked, that is, extracting fragments, even in the physical sense of the term, from lines, even book pages. For Artières (2004, p.29), there is in Foucault's "historical fictions" an art of citation, with highlights and decupation of statements. So "extracting the file is a real moment of thinking".

In works by Walter Benjamin it is also possible to identify the process of writing and thinking from the selection of fragments. For this, the writing would be sure of itself when it forces the reader to stop at "stations" to reflect. It would be proper to philosophical writing, to stop every sentence to
begin again, in which "thought continually returns to the beginning, returns in detail to the thing itself" (Benjamin, 2016, p.16).

Both in the radicalism of the scissors man, who keeps only sections that are pleasing to his eyes, as in the assemblages of Foucault's "historical fictions," which present us with another way of perceiving madness, sexuality, institutions, etc., as still in the philosophical writing of Benjamin and its fragments, we can associate certain type of methodology with a writing-mosaic. Like a mosaic, it is formed from multiple fragments, not necessarily made of the same material, of different sizes, diverse origins, etc., a mosaic-writing could cross boundaries of thought, by having a whole composed of parts, in which each reader could stop to look more closely at what caught his eye. With the care that the beauty of the mosaic depends not only on the less immediate relation of the background conception from which the fragment has its origin, but also on the quality of the glass paste which gives it the alloy.

5 Conclusions

As previously stated, in the science of nursing, scientific discourse has been hegemonic in most academic research. Dave Holmes and Marilou Gagnon (2017, p.4) present that "the fetishization of particular methodological approaches at the expense of others impedes both creation and creativity, while also undermining the heuristic process in nursing research". In this sense, the researchers ask themselves: "how could we expose the marginal, nomadic, minoritized, subjugated, and disqualified forms of knowledge?"

The authors propose for nursing research a form of resistance to the scientific mode of investigation they call "nomadic thinking", based on readings of philosophers such as Deleuze and Foucault. For Holmes and Gagnon, "nomadic thinking is vital of knowledge development in nursing, given that the discipline and profession continue to be shaped by the conservatism that thwarts the development of marginal knowledge" (Holmes & Gagnon, 2017, p.5).

In this sense, in proposing an essay on possibilities of academic research, based on an ethical-aesthetic perspective of academic writing, in which the researcher subject allows himself to think differently, we see a relation with the nomadic thinking perspective, insofar as creates new possibilities, deterritorializes the researchers who, in the area of Nursing, are hegemonically housed in the field of positivist and predictive thinking.

In this direction, we propose a writing-mosaic, willing to cross the boundaries between what would be scientific and what would be philosophical, taking advantage of fragments of nursing science, sticking them together to fragments of "season" type thoughts, so that we can observe the different elements of a given object, in its multiple possibilities of analysis. We imagine that this type of writing has an approximation with the nomadic thought, when creating escape lines in relation to a certain object considered as exact.

We assume that such an exercise in academic research has an intimate relationship with a research subject constituted by collector ethics. As we present in this brief essay, these are subjects who constitute themselves as curious, multiple beings, willing to fabricate new practices. We do not seek the truth, we do not seek to constitute manuals of theories or techniques, we seek different answers to new questions, this being one of the possibilities of creation, among many others.

Finally, we could even imagine that such methodological exercise constitutes an exercise of possibility of existence in academic life.
References


