CLA DEFINED

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Causal layered analysis (CLA) is offered as a new research theory and method. As a theory it seeks to integrate empiricist, interpretive, critical, and action learning modes of knowing at inner and outer levels. As a method, its utility is not in predicting the future but in creating transformative spaces for the creation of alternative futures. It is also likely to be useful in developing more effective — deeper, inclusive, longer term — policy.

Causal layered analysis consists of four levels: the litany, social causes, discourse/worldview, and myth/metaphor. The first level is the litany — the official unquestioned view of reality. The second level is the social causation level, the systemic perspective. The data of the litany is explained and questioned at this second level. The third level is the discourse/worldview. Deeper, unconsciously held ideological, worldview and discursive assumptions are unpacked at this level. As well, how different stakeholders construct the litany and system is explored. The fourth level is the myth/metaphor, the unconscious emotive dimensions of the issue.

The challenge is to conduct research that moves up and down these layers of analysis and thus is inclusive of different ways of knowing. Different perspectives (including those of stakeholders, ideologies and epistemes) are in particular brought in the third and fourth levels – at the levels of worldview and myth. This allows for breadth. These differences are then used to reconstruct the more visible levels – social policy and litany.

CLA as well can be applied not just to the external world but to the inner world of meanings – the litany of self-representation, the system of identities, the discourses of the architecture of the mind, and foundational myths and metaphors that define the construction of identity. Conceptual movement through depth and breadth, allows for the creation of authentic alternative futures and integrated transformation. CLA begins and ends by questioning the future.

Embedded in the emerging discourse of futures studies, causal layered analysis (CLA) draws largely from poststructuralism, macrohistory, and postcolonial multicultural theory.[1] It seeks to move beyond the superficiality of conventional social science research and forecasting methods insofar as these methods are often unable to unpack discourses — worldviews and ideologies — not to mention archetypes, myths, and metaphors.

Causal layered analysis is concerned less with predicting a particular future and more with opening up the present and past to create alternative futures. It focuses less on the horizontal spatiality of futures and more on the vertical dimension of futures studies, of layers of analysis. Causal layered analysis opens up space for the articulation of constitutive discourses, which can then be shaped as scenarios. In essence, CLA is a search for integration in methodology, seeking to combine differing research traditions.

These traditions are in flux, in the social sciences generally and futures studies specifically. Futures studies has decisively moved from ontological concerns about the nature of the predicability of the universe to epistemological concerns about the knowledge interests in varied truth claims about the future.

This has led futures studies from being "the bastard child of positivism",[2] (prediction) to interpretation and ethnography (the meanings we give to data). And the field's conceptual evolution has not stopped there. More recently, futures methodologies have been influenced by the poststructural thrust, with concerns for not what is being forecasted but what is missing from particular forecasts and images of the future. This is the layered approach to reality.

At the same time, the limits of instrumental rationality and strategic consciousness have become accepted, largely because of critiques of rationality by scholars associated with the environmental movement, the feminist movement, and spiritual movements — the new post-normal sciences — among others. Moreover, while globalisation has not suddenly developed a soft heart, the agenda now includes how we know the world and how these knowings are complicit in the disasters around us.[3] This has led to calls to move from strategy as the defining metaphor of the world system to health, or inner and outer balance.

However, the move to poststructuralism, within the CLA framework, should not be at the expense of data–orientation or meaning–oriented research and activism. Indeed, data is seen in the context of meanings, within the context of epistemes (or knowledge parameters that structure meanings; for example, class, gender, the interstate system), and myths and metaphors that organise the deep beliefs, the traumas and transcendence that over time define identity — what it means to mean and to be. CLA does not argue for excluding the top level of the iceberg for bottom–of–the–sea analysis; rather, all levels are required and needed for fulfilling — valid and transformative — research. Moreover, in this loop of data–meaning–episteme–myth, reconstruction is not lost. Action is embedded in epistemology.

Thus, I argue here for an eclectic, integrated but layered approach to methodology. The approach is not based on the idiosyncratic notions of a particular researcher. Nor is it a turn to the postmodern, in that all methods or approaches are equally valid and valuable. Hierarchy is not lost and the vertical gaze remains. But it challenges power over others and divorces hierarchy from its feudal/traditional modes. This eclecticism is not merely a version of pragmatic empiricism — "do whatever works, just solve the problem". How myth, worldview, and social context create particular litany problems remains foundational.

This politics of epistemology is part of the research process. Politics is acknowledged and self-interest disclosed. Of course, not all self-interest can be disclosed since we all operate from epistemes that are outside of our knowing efforts. Indeed, episteme shapes what we can and cannot know. While eclectic and layered approaches hope to capture some of the unknowns, by definition, the unknown remains mysterious. Acknowledging the unknown is central to futures research. This does not mean that the future cannot be precisely predicted, but rather that the unknown creeps into any research, as does the subjective. Moreover, the unknown is expressed in different ways and different ways of knowing are required to have access to it.

Freeing methodology from politics is a never–ending task; however, it can be accomplished not by controlling for these variables but by layering them

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[1] This is from the works of writers such as P.R. Sarkar, Ashis Nandy, and Edward Said.

[2] J. Dator, e-mail transmission, 24 December 1992. Quoted in: S. Inayatullah, 'From who am I to when am I?', *Futures*, Vol 25, No 3, 1993, 236.

[3] For example, the USA's lack of capacity to understand Pushtun culture and its foundational categories of honor create a conflict with no ways out. See, Hasan Jafri, & Lewis Dolinsky, 'Why bombing and warnings are not working', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 October, 2001.