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To Validate is to Question.

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Outline for

TO VALIDATE IS TO QUESTION

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"To validate is to question" calls for more questions:

(a) Who or what holds the answer?

- Three kinds distinguished: (i) disowned data, texts, discourses or problems  
(ii) the discourse of the community of the researcher  
(iii) the context (source) that generated the data being analysed.

(b) How is the validity of the answer (to the validity question) established?

- There are again three : (i) by reference to an authority  
(ii) by use of a linear analytical procedure, a formal method of transforming data into conclusions.  
(iii) by involvement in a recursive process.

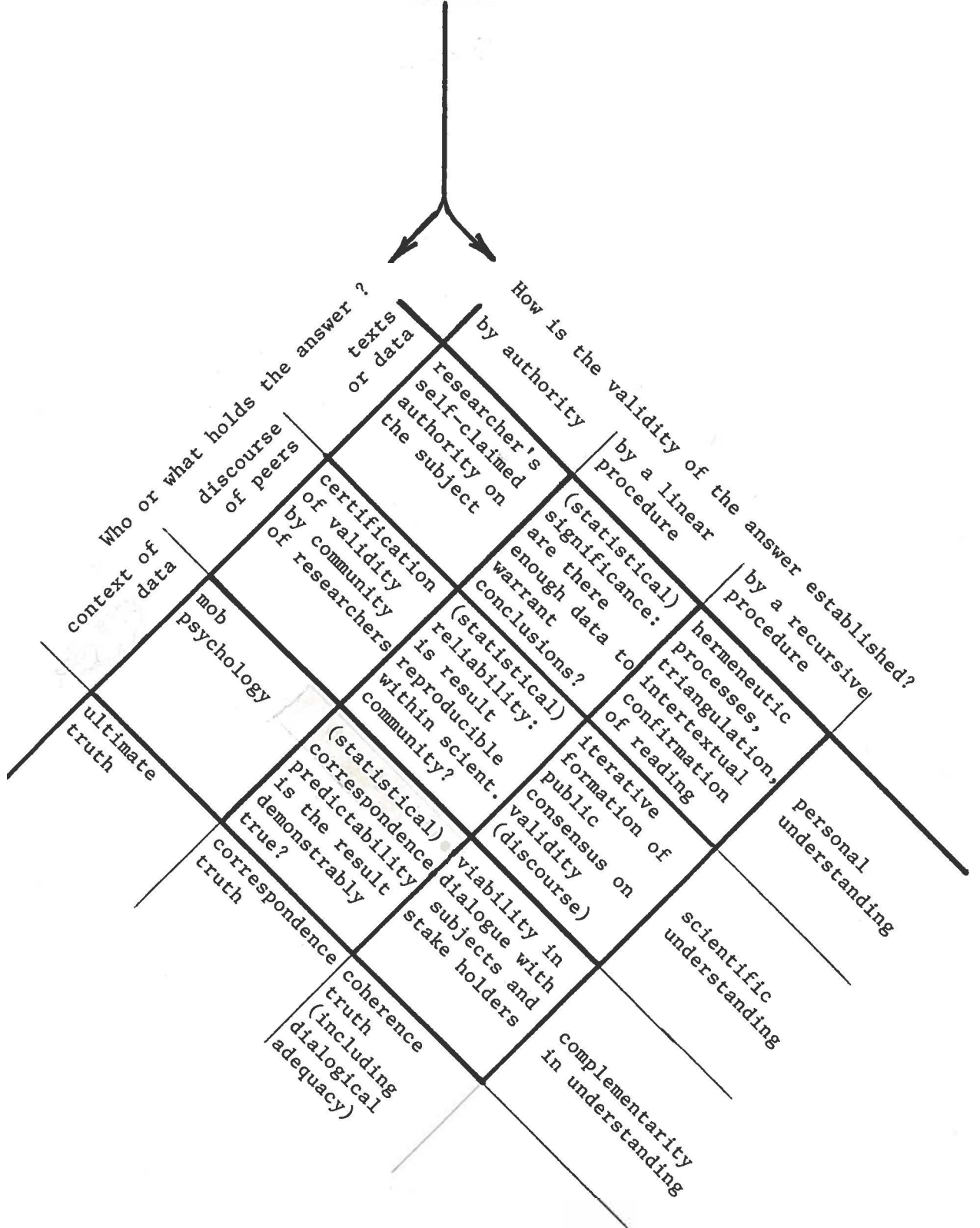
I suggest that (iii) is the ultimate way of answering question (b), but is unsettling for it is an inherently self-referential

→ answer to the question of the validity of the →  
↓  
can be iterated infinitely often and involves ideally all stake holders in the research being questioned. The recursive process entailed either converges to an eigen behavior different from where the process started, or escalates the uncertainty implied in the validity question to the point of possible inhibition or madness.

This is the bifurcation of a questioning (inquiring) mind.

See the following table:

To validate is to question



Types of recursive validation procedures: (i) hermeneutic circle applied to text  
(ii) iterative formation of public consensus  
(iii) viability in dialogue

Requirements and implications of validating in dialogue with subjects (similar or identical to those generating the data/texts/discourses/problems being analysed):

- (1) Research results must inform a generative mechanisms that produces assertions all of which are acceptable within the very kind of dialogue from which the data were taken.

The possession of (and the ability to operate) the generative mechanism (theory or research results) makes the researcher markedly different from the other participants in the dialogue. Being different does not mean superior.

- (2) Since all dialogical validation efforts are acts of intervention and necessarily change the subject being questioned and questioning, the traditional correspondence truth criterion becomes meaningless here. This probably is the most fundamental difference to positivist research. The eigenvalue of the dialogue is what the dialogue "naturally" converges to, given the research results whose validity is being questioned and altered in the process

- (3) The dialogical confrontation with questions derived from the generative mechanism informed by the research results of theory naturally raises the awareness of those involved in the dialogue in ways not initially present. (Subjects are not informed about the mechanism the researcher is aware of but experience its working).  
The increased awareness ideally (perhaps necessarily) diminishes the initial difference between researchers and their subjects.

Thus conceived, recursive validation procedures are inherently awareness producing and emancipatory for both, the researchers and the participating subjects, and about each other.

A remaining problem is the limited generalizability of a procedure that is intrinsically embedded in the social process it changes,

Observation: Most qualitative research results whether from discourse analysis, cultural studies, ethnography, ideological critiques, etc.

show little if any effort of validation and are accepted by the authority of the inquiring researcher or by claiming legitimacy of the discourse in which they are cast.

In using linear procedures (traditional scientific methods):

significance assures that there are enough data to warrant conclusions, reliability assures that the research is replicable by equally equipped peers, and correspondence/predictability assures that results represent what they claim.

These criteria or qualitative equivalent ones ought to be accepted and applied by all research efforts aiming at a description of what exists regardless if whether these efforts are qualitative or quantitative, descriptive or predictive, cultural or experimental, critical or applied, etc.

If research aims at factual knowledge, the qualitative researchers' rejection of them as "positivist" is as unwarranted as the quantitative researchers' rejection of qualitative research on grounds that it does not quantify. The quantitative/qualitative distinction tends to cover up their naturalist/objectivist/positivist commonalities.