Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data

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In this essay the author identifies transgressive data — emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data – that are out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research methodology. She also attempts to identify the methods that produced those data. In addition, she suggests that if data are the foundation on which knowledge rests, it is important to trouble the common-sense understanding of that signifier in postfoundational research that aims to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently. By using poststructural critiques and Deleuze's image of the fold, the author was able to think about data differently in her study of the construction of subjectivity in the older, white, southern women of her hometown. Furthermore, her identification of transgressive data in this study suggests that other studies may also yield transgressive data that might shift the epistemologies that define the possibilities of qualitative research in education.

As the effects of the crises of legitimization and representation disperse in a rhizomatic[1] fashion throughout the traditional disciplines produced by the epistemology of humanism, qualitative researchers in the social sciences who are fond of poststructural critiques search for strategies that might enable them to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently. Many of us have begun to suspect that "the epistemological point of departure in philosophy is inadequate" (Butler, 1992, p. 8); that knowledge is contingent and bound up more with power than with truth (Foucault, 1980); that "the discourse of a non-empiricist knowledge barely exists as yet" (Belsey, 1993, p. 561); and, finally, that in education, at any rate, the "'state of emergency' in which we exist is not the exception but the rule" (Benjamin, 1950/1968, p. 257). As a result, we believe it is urgent that we rethink our understanding of both knowledge and its production in order to envision revitalized academic and public discourses to guide our teaching and learning.

This charge is grand and glorious but seems to proceed at a snail's pace as we tackle one at a time those transcendental signifiers we have been given to think about our world: science, method, validity, truth, power, rationality, objectivity, identity, sexuality, culture, history, democracy, etc. Our work is surely limited by our received understandings of such words, but we do have the option of placing these signifiers *sous rature*,[2] of using them even as we attempt to escape their meaning.

However, once we begin to be suspicious of the everyday language we take for granted - "our mother tongue" or our "language with a history" (Spivak, 1993, p. 69) – the world becomes shaky indeed. We begin to see that nothing is innocent and that everything is dangerous. After all, language is the foundation upon which knowledge, the *logos*, rests; and if that foundation can be put under erasure, if meaning is not fixed in language, and if knowledge is therefore contingent, how can we proceed? How can we continue to live and work in a world where truth appears fleetingly and at once begins to decay?

Indeed, posthumanist critiques, such as deconstructive analyses, insist that we stand at the edge of the abyss – that fearful and terrible chaos created by the loss of transcendent meaning – and struggle with our loss. And if we still seem condemned to meaning, we may wonder whether it is possible to make a different kind of meaning as we survey this "site of failure" (Butler, 1993, p. 11), this "field of ruins" (Borinksi, cited in Benjamin, 1963/1977, p. 178). Rorty (1986) posits that "we only know the world and ourselves *under a description*" (p. 48) and perhaps "we just *happened on that description*" (p. 48). If we entertain the possibility that all might not be what we have been led to believe – that there might be worlds other than the one described by liberal humanism, then poststructural theorics offer opportunities to investigate those worlds by opening up language for redeployment in revitalized social agendas. Butler (1993) summarizes this position by saying that we can "resignify the very terms that, having become unmoored from their grounds, are at once the remnants of that loss and the resources from which to articulate the future" (p. 11). This is very good news for many people.

Those who have been much burdened and even violated by the language and practice of humanism, those who have been locked in painful categories and trapped on the wrong side of vicious binaries, are delighted to adopt an affirmative position and throw off the burden of a life weighed down by the transcendence of "higher values" (Deleuze, 1962/1983, p. 185), values whose worth is not at all self-evident to them. They see nothing nihilistic or apolitical or irrational or relativistic or anarchistic or unethical about the task of resignification. In fact, they believe it would be nihilistic and unethical *not* to practice "a constant 'civil disobedience' within [their] constituted experience" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 6). They believe that people "are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed" (Foucault, cited in Martin, 1982/1988, p. 10). They adopt the "joyful yet laborious strategy of rewriting the old language" (Spivak, 1974, p. xx) so that they may ask different questions and thus change the topic of the conversation entirely.

Resignification lends itself to a variety of approaches, including a "pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1984, p. 343), a "non-stupid optimism" (Kushner, cited in Lather, 1995a, p. 3) and even "an audacious sense of hope" (West, 1995), and these approaches are shot through with ethical concerns, since ethics is no longer transcendental and clearly defined in advance for everyone in every situation. Rather, ethics explodes anew in every circumstance, demands a specific reinscription, and hounds praxis unmercifully. In a postmodern world, the individual's responsibility is much different than in the world of liberal humanism. If the self is not given, if there is no core, essential self that remains the same throughout time, if subjectivity is constructed within relations that are situated within local discourse and cultural practice - both of which can be resisted to some extent, then "we have no excuse not to act" (Caputo, 1993, p. 4). We can no longer justify positions that are hurtful because "that's just the way it is (I am)."

The foundations may have crumbled, but we are obliged to continue. We are in play, working on the verge of intelligibility with no guarantee of liberation. We understand that we may never "'adequately' 'solve' the problems of being, truth, or subjectivity" (Flax, 1990, p. 193). On the contrary, we must learn to live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within rather than assuming it in advance of the ambiguity of language and cultural practice. In addition, we must be on the lookout for each other as we negotiate meaning and

create new descriptions of the world. We can never get off the hook by appealing to a transcendental Ethics. We are always on the hook, responsible, everywhere, all the time.

If we wish to engage in this risky poststructural practice of redescribing the world, where do we begin? Derrida (1967/1974) encourages us to begin "*Wherever we are*; in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (p. 162). However, given that we must use the language we have inherited even as we put it under erasure, how can we think differently? We can, perhaps, employ a device like the metaphor to help us move toward the unthought. A metaphor reorients experience by helping us understand one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). After humanism, however, the metaphor can no longer provide a structural, truthful coherency in the midst of confusion. Rather, it assists in a radical interpretation, in a "reading that *produces* rather than *protects*" (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxv).

What knowledge, then, might be produced if an educational researcher uses a metaphor to open up a received signifier of qualitative methodology that no longer seems adequate when "looking awry" (Zizek, 1991) at the world? This essay[3] represents an attempt to think differently about one word commonly used in research, *data*. By employing Deleuze's (1988/1993) image of the fold to trouble the received meaning of *data* in a study (St. Pierre, 1995) that uses Foucault's (1984/1986a) ethical analysis, care of the self, to examine the place of education among the arts of existence used by a group of older, white, southern women in constructing their subjectivities, I have been able to shift my understanding of the research process to some extent and thus to think about different kinds of data that might produce different knowledge in qualitative research in education.

First, I briefly describe my research project and explain how foregrounding my own subjectivity in my study of others' subjectivities with the help of Deleuze's image of the fold enabled me to make intelligible the imbrication between the inside and outside of the research process. Second, I describe the different kinds of data I was able to theorize once I placed *data* under erasure: emotional data, dream data, and sensual data. In addition, I identify the methods that I believe produced those kinds of data in my particular study. Fourth, I name and discuss another kind of data, *response data*, that I believe has been folded into the research process all along under several other signifiers such as member checks and peer debriefing. Finally, I join a conversation recently begun that addresses the ethical and epistemological implications of foregrounding the fold of response data and of acknowledging its significance.

Troubling subjectivity: employing the fold

I found myself pursuing deferred meanings of the signifier *data* as I wrote about my methodological practices in a research project, a combination of an interview study and an ethnography, that examines the construction of subjectivity in a group of older, white, southern women who live in my hometown. I was an insider in this project since I had grown up in the community I studied and had known many of my participants since I was a child. I was also an outsider who had left the community as a young woman of 25 to return from time to time to visit my family over another 20-year period before my official research began.

Since my study focuses on the construction of the subjectivities of these others, it necessarily examines the construction of my own subjectivity that was folded into theirs in particularly fruitful and disturbing ways. After all, my participants, the older women

of my hometown, had taught me how to be a woman, and I heard myself as I listened to them. I was like them but different too, for I had moved away from their community and had been reconstituted by other discourses and practices. I was both identity and difference, self and other, knower and known, researcher and researched. Foregrounding this doubling of subjectivity became crucial to my theorizing and my methodological practices. As I worked in this "collapse of identity" (Kondo, 1990, p. 17), I determined to pay attention to what this folded subjectivity might enable as I practiced qualitative research in a postmodern world.

I immediately encountered all sorts of problems, many of which dealt with issues of language and linearity. The disjunction between my praxis and the signifiers I had been given to represent it was not unbearably troublesome, however, until I began to labor in the thinking that writing produces. Indeed, it was only when I struggled to write a traditional description of my ethnographic practices, my fieldwork, and to insert those practices into the categories provided by the grid of traditional qualitative methodology – categories like *data*, *method*, *peer debriefing*, and *member check* – that I experienced what Spivak (1993) calls "moments of bafflement" (p. 248). I realized that those categories do, as Foucault (1977) explains, "suppress the anarchy of difference, divide differences into zones, delimit their rights, and prescribe their task of specification" (p. 186). The categories, the words, simply did not work; and I knew that, in order to continue writing and producing knowledge, I had to find a different strategy of sense-making, one that might elude humanism's attempts to order what can never be contained. The risk of deconstruction is, after all, to "say yes to that which interrupts [our] project" (Spivak cited in Hutnyk, McQuire, & Papastergiadis, 1986/1990, p. 47). Thus, as the unthought and unnamed hovered near all the words I wrote, I determined to become a stranger in my own language and learn some of what it was hiding.

Escaping the mother tongue is not easy, so I decided to employ Deleuze's (1986/1988; 1988/1993) image, the fold, which he derived from Foucault (see Deleuze, 1986/1988), as a strategy to help me think differently. Deleuze (1986/1988) writes that the fold disrupts our notion of interiority, since it defines "the inside as the operation of the outside" (p. 97) by "treating the outside as an exact reversion, or 'membrane,' of the inside, reading the world as a texture of the intimate" (Badiou, 1994, p. 61). The fold's function is to "avoid distinction, opposition, fatal binarity" (Badiou, 1994, p. 54); thus, it breaks apart humanist dualisms like inside/outside, self/other, identity/ difference, and presence/absence. And "it is the individual who causes the outside to fold, thereby endowing itself with subjectivity, as it bends and folds the outside" (Boundas, 1994, p. 114). I believed, since I had such difficulty separating myself from my participants, that I was working within a fold and that that fold was constructing a subjectivity, my own, that enabled me to think differently. Like a fold, my subjectivity had no inside or outside; the boundary, the division, the violent binary partition was not there. "What always matters is folding, unfolding, refolding" (Deleuze, 1988/1993, p. 137). That image seemed to describe the "shifting boundary of otherness within identity" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 51) that I had experienced in the field and that the practice of writing demanded be taken into account. And it is perhaps inevitable that a subjectivity that thinks and acts within such shifting boundaries will find that much else begins to shift as well.

Troubling data

It is this shiftiness that has led me to my trouble with data and has enabled me to identify at least two problems with the signifier *data* as it is used in traditional qualitative research methodology. I must admit that it is difficult to describe these two problems in isolation, since all sorts of accompanying problems emerge as we reach the limits of the epistemology that grounds the humanist narrative of qualitative methodology. When we put a signifier like *data* under erasure, the entire structure that includes it begins to fall apart, and clarity becomes impossible. Attempting to follow the rhizomatic disintegration of the narrative of knowledge production in qualitative research is more than one researcher can manage. Thus, I encourage readers to follow their own " lines of flight" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/1987, p. 125) based on their own work as they think about data with me in this discussion.

The first problem I address is the notion that data, whatever they are, must be translated into words so that they can be accounted for and interpreted. In their early work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe data as "the observational and interview notes accumulated in the field, documents and records, *unobtrusive traces* [italics added], and the like" (p. 333). Data are generally understood to be words, photographs, and other artifacts that are "*constructions* offered by or in the sources" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 332). Researchers collect data using methods such as observation, participation, and the interview. They are encouraged to immerse themselves in the field in order to collect rich data and produce "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). Van Maanen (1988) explains that "'Textualization' is Ricoeur's term for the process by which unwritten behavior[s] become fixed, atomized, and classified as data of a certain sort. Only in textualized form do data yield to analysis" (p. 95).

With this received understanding of data in mind, we believe we must translate whatever we think are data into language, code that language, then cut up pages of text (in order to sort those coded data bits into categories (we do this either by hand or computer), and produce knowledge based on those categories, which, in the end, are simply words. We are very concerned that we have pieces of data, words, to support the knowledge we make. Yet how can language, which regularly falls apart, secure meaning and truth? How can language provide the evidentiary warrant for the production of knowledge in a postmodern world? In my study I knew that I had analyzed much data that had never been textualized into words on a page. Data that escaped language (perhaps those "unobtrusive traces" that Lincoln & Guba refer to above) exploded all over my study – data that were uncodable, excessive, out-of-control, out-of-category. But since I was obliged to work within the narrative of qualitative research methodology, I decided to try to identify and describe those data in order to demonstrate that the commonplace meaning of the category, data, no longer held. In effect, I put the signifier *data sous rature*. In doing so, I identified at least three non-traditional kinds of data – emotional data, dream data, and sensual data – and named another, response data, which I believe has been folded into our research projects all along under other signifiers such as member checks and peer debriefing. I am sure there are still other unidentified, unnamed data working in my study. Searching for those data is one of the seductive aspects of poststructural work. Redescribing the world is, after all, a playful and joyful activity.

The second problem I encountered is the ruthlessly linear nature of the narrative of knowledge production in research methodology that goes something like this: first, we employ methods, such as interviewing and participant-observation, which produce

data; then we code, categorize, analyze, and interpret those data; finally, from that analysis and interpretation, we develop theories of knowledge. What happens, however, when this linear process is interrupted because the researcher enters this narrative in the middle?[4] For example, in my study, I first identified data and then, despite my disinclination to work in a humanist fashion, had to go backward to identify the method of data collection that I thought had produced the data and then forward to learn how those data had produced knowledge.

Identifying the method of data collection was amusing, thought-provoking, and not too difficult; but I had no idea how to link some of the data with the knowledge that was produced. I surely did try to overlay the linear narrative of methodology on my practice, but it never fit. I still cannot find data bits that produced certain sentences. Indeed, I often felt that all the activities of the narrative – data collection, analysis, and interpretation – happened simultaneously, that everything happened at once. In protest, I wrote the following (St. Pierre, 1995) about my distaste for the requirement that I construct a linear story describing my methodology:

> This project has transgressed its legitimate bounds into the realm of the unnamed, and the requirement of this format to represent a clear, linear process of research which can be judged as worthy becomes violent, coercive, and distortive. Even though I have journaled ceaselessly during this research process, I can hardly remember what I thought on many working days or why I woke up one morning knowing I must next do this or that. This text appears to represent the real, but this inscription is a simulacrum, today's story, and the following attempt to unfold the methodological processes of this project is limited and partial and a bit absurd, like all attempts to capture the real (p. 114).

Resistance to humanism's requirement that we simplify the complex may begin in frustration and even anger, but, as Spivak (cited in Rooney, 1989) reminds us, "deconstruction is not an exposure of error, certainly not other people's error. The critique in deconstruction, the serious critique in deconstruction, is the critique of something that is extremely useful, something without which we cannot do anything" (p. 129). She goes on to explain that deconstruction deals very seriously with a very familiar concept and that the aim of deconstruction is to examine a concept "with literal seriousness, so that it transforms itself" (Spivak cited in Rooney, 1989, p. 129). Since the concept, data, is so crucial to the research process and since my desire is that it transform itself so that we can use different methodology and different knowledge to describe the world, I intend to treat *data* with the utmost seriousness in the following discussion that describes data I consider to be transgressive: emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data.

Emotional data

The first of these transgressive data, emotional data, was almost overwhelming at times. I found, indeed, that it was impossible for me to ignore the emotions that sometimes threatened to shut down my study. I talked with very old women near the end of their lives, women who have lost almost everything and struggle to make sense of that loss, women who work very hard at remaining good Christian women in the face of disaster after disaster. I also talked with women in their early sixties who are just coming into their own, women who are breaking all the rules, assuming public positions of power

and making decisions among alternatives that were not available even a decade ago. I had no doubt but that my interpretation was influenced by emotional data, data that I could hardly textualize, code, categorize, and analyze. Are emotions data? Kleinman and Copp (1993) say that we should indeed count our emotions as data to be analyzed. In fact, Van Maanen, Manning and Miller (1993) write that fieldwork is "yet another addition to our repertoire of ways to make ourselves uncomfortable," that "emotional labor is thus central to the trade," and that "we might be made somewhat more comfortable if less of our efforts were devoted to the avoidance, denial, and control of emotions and if more of our efforts were directed to the understanding, expression, and reporting of them" (p. viii). So my question became the following: if emotions are data, then what is the method that produces them? Surely, the method used to collect emotional data varies from study to study. However, I came to believe that my emotions were most often produced when, in a search for some kind of scandalous, rhizomatic validity,[5] I forced myself to theorize my own identity as I theorized my participants'. I wrote the following about my painful search for validity (St. Pierre, 1995):

> In the end, you must take me at my word, and whether and how you do that is undoubtedly beyond my control. I will give it my best, since I care immeasurably for the women of this study. I find my own validity when I write and cry and then write some more. As the bones of my soul break ground for my intellect, I push through into spaces of understanding I did not particularly want to occupy. Why do the tears come? My posture as academic researcher and writer is jolted and deflated and displaced by connections and thoughts and folds erased from awareness until they are worded. As I write and theorize the lives of my participants, I theorize my own, as Fay (1987) says we must. The outside folds inside and I am formed anew.
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> My writing disturbs the fear which skulks among my own identity relays and flushes my attachments which furtively dodge analytical attention. In the thinking that writing produces, I wobble in the move Trinh (1989) describes between other and not other; I am provoked into Butler's (1995) subversive citation: I am flayed by Spivak's (1992) wounding process of deidentification. This is deconstruction at its finest, most caustic and abyssal – my own displacement and irruption into difference – self-formation (p. 114).

It was during this very emotional process of deconstruction that I found myself working much harder to understand my participants, to respect their lives, to examine my relationship with them, and to question my interpretations. The examination of one's own frailty surely makes one more careful about the inscription of others'.

Lather (1995b) writes of a "situated/embodied" transgressive validity (p. 41) that emerged from her study of women with HIV/AIDS. With Lather, I began to understand that validity in my study must be situated within the construction of subjectivity – my own as well as my participants' – since that was the focus of my research. I also believe that it was this search for validity within self-formation that produced corrosive, painful emotional data. I therefore name the "desire for validity" a method of data collection in my research project. The effects of that rhizomatic and deconstructive method were ongoing and wrenching, and my obligation to take into account this method and the data it produced forced me to continue to theorize my own life and, in the process, to reconstitute my subjectivity.

Dream data

There is another form of transgressive data produced throughout my study, dream data, that surely influenced my interpretation. I textualized these data only once, at the very beginning of my dissertation, but never deliberately analyzed them. Foucault (1984/1986b) calls the "space of our dreams ... the space of our primary perception" (p. 23). If this is so, how can I discount dreams? Can I name dreaming a method of data collection and mine my extra-consciousness? Since my study examines my own subjectivity, which has always already been at least partially produced by dreams, it seems appropriate and even necessary to adopt the view that dreaming is a process of inquiry (see Durck, 1989; Mullen, 1994).[6]

A confrontation with dream data occurred as the deadline for beginning to write the representation of my research slipped farther into the past. I was deeply troubled by the charge to produce a text with an identifiable origin and a proper closure since I knew there was no beginning or end of my project. I could not envision a text that reflected coherency, unity, equilibrium, and linearity, and I began to dream and dream the same dream. Finally, I decided to begin by writing that dream, to display it but not to analyze it. The following is a portion of that dream data, which is supplementarity, excess, and overflow:

I am uneasy about beginning. The Beginning promises the End, with the evidentiary warrant strategically propping up the weighty, tidy essay in the middle. I am suspicious of straight lines.

Dissertations are about backgrounds, problems, positionings, literature reviews, methodologies, validities, conclusions, and even implications, for Heaven's sake — all constituting a carefully staged academic *fictio*, a construction approved by the authorities, a rite of passage into citationality, a normalizing function of the gaze of the institution. I would rather speak for a time about the book I wanted to write when I returned to Ohio after I interviewed all those southern women and studied their place but didn't because I had to save my energies for this overcoded dissertation. That book is lost forever. I cannot speak of it.

But I dream smidgens of it in the early dark interiority of winter mornings. I see my old and new friends — my participants, my subjects – posed in their exquisite satin wedding gowns, smiling around the years at their daughters who smile back at them wearing the same gowns as they pose regally in pictures hung side-by-side on living room walls. I eavesdrop on the conversations between the lovely young women of the wedding photographs who tell each other stories of their lovers, who praise each other's children, who cross their ankles properly as they sit in the Sunday School circle of chairs, who stand beside each other in their good suits and sing the Clubwoman's Song at every Woman's Club meeting, who hold their sick husbands' hands as they die, who wear widows' weeds for a time and then are reborn into selves that are a bit shaky, more careful, and increasingly fragile and strong and even more lovely. The bones of their faces have sucked in time and exude it in whispers through delicately fragile skin. They say "I think," "I suppose," and "I guess," more often now. They qualify their new-found knowledge for your sake.

... This story never begins but has always been, and I slip into it over and over again in different places, and it is as if I too have always been there. As I dream ... I listen eagerly for the snag, the loose thread in the conversation, that I can grab

hold of and use for entry. But their southern voices are as fluid and vertiginous as time. I hear them laughing delightedly at some old story whose moral will answer my main research question, and I can't quite make it out. In my dream I begin to understand that I will never hear that answer, that I will only hear a phrase, a syllable, the beginning of a tune. That is all I can know.

That is why these enforced Beginnings leading to Ends give me the willies, the heebie jeebies, and make my head hurt with plot promises I don't particularly care to keep. I am pretty jumpy about all this orderliness. Do you understand? (Lordy, Lord. Was that my dream or someone else's?)

My dreams, then, added a layer of complexity to my study, foregrounded problems I encountered, and reconstructed and reproduced data in representations that helped me to think about data differently. Dreams refuse closure; they keep interpretation in play. I slipped into that dream world night after winter night, often desperate for meaning that eluded me, and sometimes for refuge from the demand for clarity. I talked with many of my participants in my dreams, and I interviewed one woman repeatedly. And I confess that I wonder sometimes about the dreams I have forgotten and fear that many important data are still unintelligible. Even though they were never officially accounted for, the dreams remembered and those deferred linger in some dislocated space of my text, producing dissonance, alterity, and confusion. My dreams enabled and legitimized a complexity of meaning that science prohibits.

Sensual data

I believe that a third kind of data, sensual data, also became significant in my study and was produced by the very physical act of having lived in the community I studied when I was a child and a young woman. Ann Game (1991) writes about the "living in a place that refuses the objectifying gaze; and what cannot be seen cannot be spoken either" (pp. 183–184). Jill Ker Conway (1989) writes, "It took a visit to England for me to understand how the Australian landscape actually formed the ground of my consciousness, shaped what I saw, and influenced the way a scene was organized in my mental imagery" (p. 198). If our understanding of the world has been and is influenced by the earth itself, then my question is whether we can ignore those effects on our bodies and, in turn, on our mental mappings? I don't believe we should, yet how do we account for the sensual effects of our responses, for example, to the soft rolling fertility of the stream-laden Piedmont, to a field of tobacco turning golden in hot September afternoons, to the sharp and musty scent of pines and azaleas growing in shady red clay, to a fitting angle of the sun to which our bodies happily turn, to the rhythm of southern September days so very different from the same days in Yankee country, to a bone-deep attachment to one landscape in particular, a "sweet spot" (Hiss, 1990, p. xiii), which is the literal ground of our knowing? Our bodies' peculiar angles of repose have much to do with what and how we know, and the knowing that is mapped beyond the mind/body trap produces lines of flight that remain uncoded.

A whole body of literature about *place attachment* is being researched and theorized (see, for example, Altman & Low, 1992; Blunt & Rose, 1994; Hiss, 1990; Massey, 1994), and perhaps we need to think about our physical as well as our theoretical grounding in our research projects. How are these physical and theoretical sites of knowing related and what are the effects of those relations? A researcher who studies her

own growing-up place, as I did, may find that sensual data have long since mapped and fashioned in a subtle way her consciousness and extra-consciousness. Such sensual data add folds of situated richness that may only be accessible through something like "Walter Benjamin's attempts at 'revelation' or recovery of meanings sedimented in layers of language" (Fischer, 1986, pp. 194–195). I have only just begun to think about the sensual data that were always already present in my own study and now am curious about what their foregrounding might enable in others. It appears to me that there is much work to be done on the physicality of theorizing.

Folding and refolding: the irruption of response data

My understanding of emotional data, dream data, and sensual data seems to have emerged from a close analysis of barely intelligible transgressive data produced by my own subjectivity, and yet I hardly ever worked in isolation during my study. I was haunted by Spivak's (1993) warning that "what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything I must/can do, think, live" (p. 22). Research is so hard, and I knew I needed other people to help me think, since I feared I would commit some horrible and unforgivable blunder, disgrace myself in my own hometown, embarrass my mother who still lives there, and do irrevocable damage to the women I had grown to admire and love. If we believe that personal experience is a shaky basis for epistemology (Fuss, 1989, p. 17) and if we are increasingly suspicious of the "lone scholar" approach to knowledge construction (Hood, 1985), then perhaps we are obliged to bring the outside into our research projects. I deliberately sought the Other, many different others, at every stage of the research process, knowing that my very limited, partial, and situated position in the world was both productive and dangerous.

Spivak (1993) writes about the importance of breaking apart the investigator/audience binary by inviting the audience to be a coinvestigator (p. 22). I found that working in the fold disperses that self/other binary into a continuous tacking movement that finds no rest in a pause that is either self or other. As I positioned myself as a fold of the outside, I was able to foreground and legitimize my need for what I have begun to call *response data*.

Traditional qualitative methodology does provide a function for the Other in the research process through activities such as peer debriefing and member checks (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985, for descriptions). The purpose of both of these activities has been to lend credibility to qualitative research projects by bringing the outside – the outside chiefly in the form of members and peers – into the process, but only to a limited extent. The notion that there is some correct interpretation out there that the researcher can reproduce and that members and peers can recognize and verify, however, is suspect in postpositivist research.[7] Yet our members and peers do provide us with data that are often critical and that may even prompt us to significantly reconstruct our interpretation as we proceed. These data surely influence the production of knowledge, yet we hardly ever acknowledge them. How might our sense of inquiry shift if we began to focus on mapping responses and examining how they enable our mapping of the world?[8]

In any case, each researcher and each project will produce different possibilities for response and different kinds of response data. In my own study, I have collected response data from an official peer debriefer,[9] my dissertation committee members, members of writing groups at two different universities, my mentor, my mother, my aunt, my cousin, friends who are not academics, my informant who is a dear friend and

almost-participant, members of seminar audiences, members of several conference presentation audiences, participants, non-participants who live in the community I studied who could have been participants, the women of my dreams, the authors I read whose texts respond to my questions, journal editors, journal referees, etc. All these others move me out of the self-evidence of my work and into its absences and give me the gift of different language and practice with which to trouble my commonsense understanding of the world. They help me move toward the unthought. I hope that the naming of this practice, the collection of response data, will be an incitement to discourse and that other researchers will address this disruptive, unplanned, uncontrollable, yet fruitful fold in their work so that we can begin to collect data about response data and study the transgressions they enable.

Unfolding into ethics: the responsible audience

As I explained in the introduction to this essay, ethics is not abandoned in poststructural critiques but rather demands a specific reinscription. The simple task of troubling one signifier, data, has foregrounded an ethical relation – the relation between the researcher and those who provide response data – that generally escapes scrutiny. We certainly cannot define ethical practices for those outside the academy who provide us with response data. However, it seems to me that those of us in academe who are much concerned, as we should be, about the ethical practices of the academic researcher must begin to take a hard look at the ethical practices of the academic respondent. Such attention is critical since researchers may be encouraged by their colleagues, particularly by respondents in positions of power, to revise methodological practices and to reconstruct texts in ways that do not reflect either their theoretical or ethical positions and, even more importantly, in ways that do not honor their participants.

I am thinking in particular about the debate that has been engaged around the issue of clarity in the representation of research. Those who find the differences enabled by a poststructural concern with language confusing and sometimes difficult to understand demand clarity. On the other hand, those who find difference hopeful and productive continue to trouble language. To this point, it appears that the demand for clarity has won out. However, an emerging body of literature (Britzman, 1995; Elam, 1994; hooks, 1990; Lather, 1996; Spivak cited in Danius & Jonsson, 1991/1993; Trinh, 1989) addresses the politics and ethics of clarity and accessibility. It should not be surprising that such a reaction formation has emerged in response to those who reject in the name of Ethics a complexity that refuses to simplify issues that many, in the name of ethics, believe should remain complex.

Those who try to problematize the language of humanism and its demand for instant and transparent understanding believe that the language of the *logos* has produced very real structures in the world that have been terribly brutal to many people. Posthumanists are thus suspicious of language; they tend to use it differently; and their work may not, on first reading, seem so clear. The problem, of course, is that poststructural discourses continue to use the words of humanism but to use them differently. For instance, even though I will continue to use the word *data*, its meaning has forever shifted for me and will continue to shift as I prod and poke at this foundational signifier on which knowledge rests. I will, in the future, undoubtedly write sentences using *data* that may not be too clear.

However, there is no going back to a time before poststructuralism when language

was clear and transparent and innocent. As the breakdown of humanist language and practice accelerates, we will encounter difference at every turn: different theories that frame research, different research methodologies, and different representations of research. And these differences will surely require different language, experimental writing (Richardson, 1994), and perhaps "messy texts" (Marcus, 1994) that may be hard to understand but that require "a reading that is responsible to the text" (Spivak, 1994, p. 27). Lather (1996) writes that "reading without understanding is required if we are to go beyond the imaginary 'real' of history" and that, for some, "not being understood is an ethical imperative" (p. 528). There is much to consider in this debate, but the point is that neither a deliberate obfuscation nor the desire for clarity and accessibility is innocent; both are dangerous. As ethical readers of research and as ethical producers of response data, we might consider why we read and respond in the ways we do. This process is about theorizing our own lives, examining the frames with which we read the world, and moving toward an ongoing validity of response.

The ethics of those in the response position would seem to be about risking an engagement with the difference of the other, acknowledging the counterargument, and being open to the theory that we resist (Spivak, 1994). This positioning is about "moving from the critical phase into a more affirmative phase, into areas from where agencies of critique can come" (Spivak, cited in Danius & Jonsson, 1991/1993, p. 27). A charged engagement with alterity in the response relation then becomes a pedagogical and ethical moment of enormous importance in educational research. Teaching and learning become crucial in this place where language and theories ricochet and have the power to inscribe and reinscribe lives.

How can we offer responsible response to other researchers and their participants? I do not believe that an ethics of response can be defined for all situations. Rather, I suggest that ethics is invented within each relation as researcher and respondent negotiate sense-making by foregrounding their theoretical frameworks, by risking confusion, by determining to read harder when the text begins to seem inaccessible, and by being willing to attend to the absences in their own work that are made intelligible by the difference of the other.

In conclusion, I must admit that my troubles with language, in this case with the signifier *data*, have produced lines of flight I would never have imagined. Emotional data, dream data, and sensual data seem fairly tame compared with response data whose sprawling tendrils creep into and dehisce the staged unity of every research project. Troubling language can be big trouble, and I ask myself bell hooks' (1989) question, "do we have to go that deep?" (p. 1). Yet the charge to redescribe the world word by word is an endless if joyful task and, when weary and discouraged, I remember Spivak's (1993) reminder that even when "nothing seems displaced or cracked, what 'really happens' remains radically uncertain" (p. 145). To play in the possibilities of that space outside language that is opened up when words fall apart is my desire. Many such local, strategic subversions of self-evidence will be required if we are to reinvent education in a postmodern world.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) employ the image of the rhizome to describe a kind of adventitious multiplicity that is not rooted as are the roots of trees but which produces stems and filaments, like crabgrass, that penetrate what is rooted and put it to "strange new uses" (p. 15).

2. Gayatri Spivak (1974) explains in her "Preface" to Jacques Derrida's (1967/1974) *Of Grammatology* that there are some signifiers, such as truth, that we seem unable to do without. However, if we are to think differently, we must question the received meaning of such signifiers. Thus, we may choose to write *sous rature*, which Spivak (1974) translates as "under erasure.' This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)" (p. xiv). This task of troubling taken-for-granted signifiers is well under way with the work of other researchers with a poststructural bent, such as Patti Lather (1986, 1993, 1995b) and her work on validity and Jim Scheurich (1995) and his work on interviewing.

3. Portions of this paper were presented at the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Conference in Monteagle, Tennessee, in September, 1995, and at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in New York City, New York, in April, 1996.

4. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) explain that rhizomes (see Note 1) have no beginnings or ends but are always in the middle. Beginnings and ends imply a linear movement, whereas working in the middle is about "coming and going rather than starting and finishing" (p. 25). They explain that "the middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed...*Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without a beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 25).

5. Patti Lather (1995b) describes rhizomatic validity as one that "unsettles from within," that "supplements and exceeds the stable and the permanent," that "works against constraints of authority via relay, multiple openings, networks, complexities of problematics," and "puts conventional discursive procedures under erasure" (p. 55). Lather's rhizomatic validity is derived from Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) concept, the rhizome, whose "multiplicity cannot be overcoded" (p. 9). See Note 1.

6. Thanks to Noel Gough who listened attentively to a version of this essay at the Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Conference in Monteagle, Tennessee, in September, 1995, and generously pointed me to the work on dreams by Carol Mullen (1994).

7. Thanks to Laurel Richardson for helping me understand early on that member checking is about collecting more data rather than verifying that an interpretation is true. Our discussions in her class on qualitative methodology informed by poststructural critiques prompted me to think about all the other data we collect from other people during the course of our projects and to wonder how we account for it.

8. Patti Lather posed this question to me in an email conversation (January 28, 1996) about response data.

9. Kate McCoy continues to be my chief peer debriefer and to model ethical response. Kate provided me with thoughtful response data about this paper that extends my research project as well as my relationship with my participants and, as always, provides me with provocative possibilities for self-formation.

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