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# FERTILE OBSESSION: Validity After Poststructuralism

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[P]ost-modernism involves the development of new rhetorics of science, new stories of knowledge 'after truth' . . . The postmodern world is without guarantees, without 'method' . . . All we can do is invent. We must construct and exemplify the rhetorics of the future . . . through . . . endless stories. Like this one.

Tomlinson (1989), pp.44,57.

## VALIDITY AS AN INCITEMENT TO DISCOURSE

Poised at the end of the twentieth century, the human sciences are in search of a discourse to help chart the journey from the present to the future. Withering critiques of realism, universalism and individualism take us into the millennium (Borgmann 1992). Conferences are held to explore the End of Science;<sup>1</sup> others argue for science as rhetoric (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 1987; Simons 1989), narrative (Polkinghorne 1988), and/or social practice (Woolgar 1988). Regardless of terms, each is part of some move "to grow up in our attitudes toward science" in an antifoundational<sup>2</sup> era characterized by the loss of certainties and absolute frames of reference (Fine 1986).

This article comes out of such ferment and is written against "the merely deconstructive and the endlessly prefatory" (Borgmann 1992, p. 2). Believing that "science is a performance" (Fine 1986, p. 148), my effort is to anticipate a generative methodology that registers a possibility and marks a provisional space in which a different science might take form. Seeking answers to such a project in inquiry as it is lived, the article works at the edges of what is currently available in moving toward a science with more to answer to in terms of the complexities of language and the world.

In pursuit of a less comfortable social science, I continue my seeming obsession with the topic of validity: the conditions of the legitimation of knowledge in contemporary postpositivism. Over the last decade or so of postpositivism, the boundaries surrounding the issue of research legitimation have been constructed from many angles: naturalistic and constructivist (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Guba and Lincoln 1989), discourse theory (Mishler 1990); ethnographic authority (Clifford 1983; Gordon 1990); poststructuralism (Cherryholmes 1988; Kvale 1989); forms of validity appropriate to an emancipatory interest (Alcoff 1989; 1991). Long interested in how the core but changing concept of

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validity is shaped across the proliferation of “paradigms”<sup>3</sup> that so characterizes post-positivism (Lather 1991b), my thoughts on validity are on the move again. While extending my earlier work toward counter-practices of authority that are adequate to emancipatory interests (Lather 1986a, 1986b), my primary desire here is to rethink validity in light of antifoundational discourse theory. Rather than jettisoning “validity” as the term of choice, I retain the term in order to both circulate and break with the signs that code it. What I mean by the term, then, is all of the baggage that it carries plus, in a doubled-movement, what it means to rupture validity as a regime of truth, to displace<sup>4</sup> its historical inscription toward “doing the police in different voices” (Con Davis 1990, p. 109).

In this exploration, I position validity as “an incitement to discourse,” much like how Foucault saw sexuality in the attention it receives within the human sciences (Gordon 1988, p. 23). Validity is a “limit question” of research, one that repeatedly resurfaces, one that can neither be avoided nor resolved, a fertile obsession given its intractability (Fraser 1989, p. 80). Cornell West (1991) notes that antifoundationalism has displaced concerns about relativism with disagreement over the importance of appropriate restraints and regulations. He cautions that attempts to settle such disagreement by appeals to something outside of practice is to revert to foundationalism. Instead, West argues, such debates would be more fruitful if framed “as a way of rendering explicit the discursive space or conversational activity now made legitimate owing to widespread acceptance of epistemic antifoundationalism” (p. 25).

I brood on these sentences as my interest grows in a reconceptualized validity that is grounded in theorizing our practice. I write out of a feminist poststructural frame where “getting smarter” about theory/practice issues valorizes practice: “In periods when fields are without secure foundations, practice becomes the engine of innovation” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p. 166). This entails a reflexivity that attends to the politics of what is and is not done at a practical level in order to learn “to ‘read out’ the epistemologies in our various practices” (Hartsock 1987, p. 206). Yet, as Spivak writes, “The field of practice is a broken and uneven place,” heavily inscribed with habit and sedimented understandings (1991, p. 177).

“Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?” Lyotard asks (1984, p. xxv). This article addresses Lyotard’s question via a dispersion, circulation, and proliferation of counter-practices of authority that take the crisis of representation into account. What are the antifoundational possibilities outside the limits of the normative framings of validity in the human sciences? What might open-ended and context sensitive validity criteria look like? Why is validity the site of such attraction? How much of this obsession with legitimation/validity issues in research methodology is part of the disciplinary nature of our society of confession and conscience? This paper is situated at the nexus of such doubled questions. Fragmenting and colliding both hegemonic and oppositional codes, my goal is to reinscribe validity in a way that uses the antifoundational problematic to loosen the master code of positivism that continues to so shape even postpositivism (Scheurich 1991). My task is to do so in a way that refuses over-simple answers to intractable questions.

## THE MASKS OF METHODOLOGY

Now the rhetorically minded seem prescient . . . for the masks of methodology are wearing thin.

Nelson et al. 1987, p. 3.

Either let Truth carry the day against deceitful appearances, or else, claiming once more to reverse optics, let us give exclusive privilege to the fake, the mask, the fantasy because, at least at times, they mark the nostalgia we feel for something even more true.

Irigaray, quoted in Whitford 1991, pp. 71–72.

The nostalgia Irigaray writes of has something to do with the distinction between viewing ethnographic stories as about “found” versus “constructed” worlds (Simon and Dippo 1986). The effacement of the referent in postmodern culture has made “the real” contested territory. To shift our sense of the real to “discourses of the real” (Britzman 1991) is to foreground how discourse worlds the world. Whether this is an opening for liberatory politics or the end of politics/history is much debated (e.g., Harvey 1989; Hutcheon 1989; Nicholson 1990). Whether to celebrate or lament the felt loss of found worlds depends on how one reads the political possibilities that open up when “truth” is positioned as made by humans via very specific material practices.

In terms of legitimation issues, antifoundationalists argue that the thing itself, in its absence, cannot be witness to a representative validity. In poststructuralist terms, the “crisis of representation” is not the end of representation, but the end of pure presence. Derrida’s point regarding “‘the inescapability of representation’” (Arac, quoted in McGowan 1991, p. 26) shifts responsibility from representing things in themselves to representing the web of “structure, sign and play” of social relations (Derrida 1978). It is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing—spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge.

These are all concerns that de-center validity as about epistemological guarantees. Such post-epistemic concerns reframe validity as multiple, partial, endlessly deferred. They construct a site of development for a *validity of transgression* that runs counter to the standard *validity of correspondence*: a nonreferential validity interested in how discourse does its work, where transgression is defined as “the game of limits . . . at the border of disciplines, and across the line of taboo” (Pefanis 1991, p. 85; see, also, Foucault 1977).

In the discourses of the social sciences, validity has always been the problem, not the solution (Cronbach and Meehl 1955). Across such qualitative practices as member checks and peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985), triangulation (Denzin 1989), and catalytic validity (Lather 1986b), various postpositivist efforts have been made to resolve the problem without exhausting it, constantly providing answers to and freeing itself from the problem, but always partially, temporarily. More recently and more attuned to discourse theory, Mishler’s (1990) reformulation traces the irrelevance of standard approaches to validity through various postpositivist efforts to rearticulate it. Reframing validity as “problematic in a deep theoretical sense, rather than as a technical problem” (p. 417), Mishler surveys some “candidate exemplars” for generating new practices of validation that do not rely on a correspondence model of truth or assumptions of transparent narration.

In the absence of such livable alternatives, agents are constrained to revert to articulable forms—this does not necessarily imply intellectual consent (McGowan 1991, p. 257). But it does underscore that to not revert to the dominant foundational, formulaic and readily available codes of validity requires the invention of counter discourse/practices of legitimation.

Like Woolgar (1988), my own position is that the most useful stories about science are those which interrogate representation, “a reflexive exploration of our own practices of representation” (p. 98). This entails taking a position regarding the contested bodies of thought and practice which shape inquiry in the human sciences, negotiating the complex heterogeneity of discourses and practices. This ability to establish and maintain an acceptable dialogue with readers about “‘how to go about reality construction’” (Goldknopf, quoted in Conrad 1990, p. 101) involves making decisions about which discursive policy to follow, which “regime of truth” to locate one’s work within, which mask of methodology to assume. What follows is, in effect, a call for a kind of validity after poststructuralism in which legitimation depends on a researcher’s ability to explore the resources of different contemporary inquiry problematics and, perhaps, even contribute to “an ‘unjamming’ effect in relation to the closed truths of the past, thereby freeing up the present for new forms of thought and practice” (Bennett 1990, p. 277).

### TRANSGRESSIVE VALIDITY

In the absence of foundations, principles of legitimation are going to have to . . . be articulated, ratified, and put into practice through political processes that involve social actors engaged in specific political negotiations . . . We recover the political as the domain of social making when we pay attention to norms of legitimation—both their existence and their possible transformation through processes of social construction—that define the site of possible political action.

McGowan 1991, pp. 279–280.

Within Derrida’s injunction that “‘We extend ourselves by force of play against the limits of the already said’” (quoted in Ferguson 1991, p. 330), the following “plays”<sup>5</sup> with the question, what do you do with validity once you’ve met poststructuralism?<sup>6</sup> I proceed via what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) term “activating by invention” in order to move from “yesterday’s institutions” to some other place of social inquiry. In this move, I position validity as a space of constructed visibility of the practices of methodology and “a space of the *incitement* to see” (Rajchman 1991, p. 85), an apparatus for observing the staging of the poses of methodology, a site that “gives to be seen” the unthought in our thought.

In the remainder of this article, I first present four “framings” of validity that take antifoundational discourse theory into account. Within each, I present an exemplar<sup>7</sup> of empirical work which moves discussion from the epistemological criteria of validity as a relation of correspondence between thought and its object to the generation of counterpractices of authority grounded in the crisis of representation. I then flesh out the intelligibility of such practices via an effort toward self-reflexivity in my study of women living with HIV/AIDS. I conclude with some brief thoughts on poststructuralism and the impossibility of science.

## COUNTER-PRACTICES OF AUTHORITY

The following is a dispersion, circulation, and proliferation of counter-practices of authority which takes the crisis of representation into account. In creating a nomadic and dispersed validity, I employ a strategy of excess and categorical scandal in the hope of both imploding ideas of policing social science and working against the inscription of another "regime of truth." Rather than the usual couching of validity in terms of disciplinary maintenance, disciplining the disciplines, my goal is to open new lines of discussion about changed conditions and possibilities for a critical social science (Fay 1987) and the discourse theories that so problematize that project. Rather than prescriptions for establishing validity in postpositivist empirical work, like Walter Benjamin, I offer "a forthrightly personal and deliberately ephemeral antithesis" (Werkmeister 1982, p. 114) to more conventional and prescriptive discourse-practices of validity.

*Frame 1: Validity as simulacra/ironic validity:* Simulacra are copies without originals (e.g., the Virgin Mary, Disneyland, the foetus as constructed by the New Right, see Kroker 1983). The Baudrillardian argument is that we have shifted from a culture of representations to one of simulacra. Simulacra function to mask the absence of referential finalities. Baudrillard's definition of simulacrum comes from Ecclesiastes, "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (quoted in Bogard 1988). In the world of simulacra, "[T]he referent is secondary at best" (McGowan 1991, p. 18).

The poststructural move is to foreground the difficulties involved in representing the social rather than repressing them in pursuit of an unrealized ideal. Enacting in language a supplementary simulacrum, poststructuralism "breaks all adequation between copy and model, appearance and essence, event and Idea" (Young 1990, p. 82). This disruptive move foregrounds the production of meaning-effects. To quote Cummings:

Simulacra wreak havoc with an obsessional economy. Unlike good copies, which identify themselves as counterfeit, simulacra (know enough to) keep quiet about their origins and are thus taken for the genuine article. They have this much in common with hysterical symptoms: to the uninitiated, the two are perfect fakes. Both are the bane of metaphysics because they collapse the distinction between original and copy, subtending binary logic and the law of degree. (1991, p. 108)

Using simulacra to resist the hold of the real and to foreground radical unknowability, the invisible can be made intelligible via objects that are about nonobjecthood. Contrary to dominant validity practices where the rhetorical nature of scientific claims is masked with methodological assurances, a strategy of ironic validity proliferates forms, recognizing that they are rhetorical and without foundation, post-epistemic, lacking in epistemological support. The text is resituated as a representation of its "failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach" (Hayles 1990, p. 261), an ironic representation of neither the thing itself nor a representation of the thing, but a simulacrum. This move into the hyper-real implodes copies via an operation of displacement rather than representation where the distinction between the copy and the real ceases to have meaning. Ironic validity is a Baudrillardian move of a "cultural guerilla multiply[ing] simulations beyond any possibility of control by a code" (Angus 1989, p. 346). It is a deconstructive move which avoids simple reversal and simple replacement:

by inscribing heterogeneity within an opposition so as to displace it and disorient its antagonistic defining terms . . . to subvert it by repeating it, dislocating it fractionally through parody, dissimulation, simulacrum, mime, a mimicry that mocks the binary structure, travesty it . . . a doubling that can easily be mistaken for the real thing. (Young 1990, p. 209)

James Agee and Walker Evans's (1988) *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, originally published in 1941 and recently claimed as a postmodern text (Rabinowitz 1992; Quinby 1991), illustrates what I mean by ironic validity. Documenting the devastation of rural America by the economic disasters of the 1930's through the study of three white tenant farm families, the text is prefaced by Evans's uncaptioned photographs which set the stage for the focus on the politics of knowing and being known. Agee's text, which serves somewhat as one long caption for the photographs, foregrounds the insufficiencies of language via prose that is meandering, incantational, and deeply inscribed by musical forms. Beginning with three vignettes and concluding with multiple endings, Agee presents his awkwardness and hesitations where his anxiety about "his relationship to his subjects becomes an anxiety about the form of the book" (Rabinowitz 1990, p. 160). Both seeking and refusing a center, he combines documentary and autobiography to describe with "words which are 'not words'" (p. 161) as he moves from representations of the tenant families to the disclosure of his own subjectivity. Agee's "self-indulgent, confessional narrative of middle-class seeing" is both redeemed and problematized by Evans's photographs which resist narrative, sentimentality and sensationalism while still "re-veal[ing] the ways differences can be organized and contained" (p. 163).

As such, the book both reinscribes familiar regimes of truth and narrative and anticipates a much less comfortable social science in its embodiment of the anxiety of voyeurism. Disrupting their intelligence mission, the authors resist both "the claims of disciplinary power to represent objective reality" and obscene prying into the lives of others in the name of science, "the commodification of one set of human beings for the consumption of another" (Quinby 1991, pp. 104–105). Deferring any final saying, the text is an "excursion into the radical unreliability of meaning," the "rupture between language and the world" (pp. 108–109), the unrepresentable. Enacting a doubled movement, Agee both uses words and casts doubt on any transparency between the word and its object via a kind of genealogical specificity that is counterespionage data well outside the conventions of social science discourse.

Endlessly shifting the location of the unknowable and ironically using researcher power to undercut practices of representation, Agee and Evans create a text that is dense with the absence of referential finalities. Foregrounding the production of meaning-effects, they, nonetheless, construct a text of such specificity that the human cost of economics run amuck is made "visible" in ways that are amplified in flesh.

Refusing closure and turning the analytical categories of the human sciences against themselves, Agee and Evans enact the struggle of an "I" to become an "eye" that both inscribes and interrupts normalizing power/knowledge (Quinby 1991). Fifty years after its original publication, their self-scrutinizing, non-normalizing production of knowledge is generative of research practices that, by taking the crisis of representation into account, create texts that are both double without being paralyzed and implode controlling codes.

*Frame 2: Lyotardian parody/neo-pragmatic validity:* Legitimation by parody is "a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its

basis difference understood as paralogy" (Lyotard 1984, p. 60). It is to legitimate without recourse to either metanarratives or "the hegemony of the performativity principle" of traditional pragmatism which has arisen in the face of the decline of metanarratives (Kiziltan, Bain, and Canizares 1990, p. 366). Displacing both the criterion of efficiency and the Habermasian drive for consensus, Lyotardian paralogy is that which "refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" via "the constant search for new ideas and concepts that introduces dissensus into consensus" (Fritzman 1990, pp. 371–372). Its goal is to foster differences and let contradictions remain in tension, "as opposed to the recuperation of the other into the same that is always imposed at the end (telos) of a traditional philosophy" (McGowan 1991, p. 106).

Rather than evoking a world we already seem to know (verisimilitude) in a story offered as transparent, the move is toward "attempts to create indeterminate space for the enactment of human imagination" (Lubiano 1991, p. 177) which introduce "a destabilizing 'obligation to complexity'" (Lyotard, quoted in Smart, 1992, p. 176). Paralogy legitimates via fostering heterogeneity, refusing closure. It entails "knowledge of language games as such and the decision to assume responsibility for their rules and effects" (Lyotard 1984, p. 66). Part of the current pragmatics of science, paralogy adopts rules within language games that "would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown" (p. 67). It is about the search for instabilities and the undermining of the framework within which previous "normal science" has been conducted. It recognizes the multiplicity of language games and the "temporary contract" of any consensus. Its goal is something not entirely subordinated to a system's goals, yet not so abruptly destabilizing of a system that it is ignored or repressed.

A recent dissertation on African-American women and leadership positions in higher education gives some feel for the parameters of paralogic validity (Woodbrooks 1991). Woodbrooks's study was "designed to generate more interactive and contextual ways of knowing" (p. 93) with a particular focus on openness to counter-interpretations: "The overarching goal of the methodology is to present a series of fruitful interruptions that demonstrate the multiplicity of meaning-making and interpretation" (p. 94).

In analyzing interview data, Woodbrooks made extensive use of two familiar qualitative practices of validity, member checks and peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Using both to purposefully locate herself in the contradictory borderland between feminist emancipatory and poststructural positions, she attempted to interrupt her role as the Great Interpreter, "to shake, disrupt, and shift" her feminist critical investments (Woodbrooks 1991, p. 103). Peer debriefing and member checks, both coherent within present forms of intelligibility, were used to critique her initial analysis of the data, her "perceptions of some broadly defined themes that emerged as I coded the transcripts" (p. 132). Reanalyzing the data and her original analysis, Woodbrooks then sent a second draft out to participants and phoned for responses. This resulted in a textual strategy that juxtaposed the voices of the white female researcher with those of the African-American female participants.

In her textual strategy, Woodbrooks first tells a realist tale which backgrounds the researcher's shaping influence and foregrounds participant voices. She interrupts this with a critical tale that foregrounds how her theoretical investments shaped her analysis of the data. Finally, in a third-person voice, she tells a deconstructive tale which draws on participant reactions to the critical tale. Here, she probes her own desire, "suspicious of . . . the hegemony [of] feminism" (p. 140) in her analysis which marginalized both



African-American identity as a source of pride and strength (ascribing it totally to gender) and participant concerns with male/female relations. "This strategy [of feminist consciousness-raising] perpetuates feminism as a white middle class project and trivializes the deep emotional ties that black women share with black men" (p. 200).

Holding up to scrutiny her own complicity, Woodbrooks creates a research design that moves her toward unlearning her own privilege and displacing the colonizing gaze. Foregrounding the availability of multiple discourses and how they can be used to de-center the researcher as the master of truth and justice, she enacts her knowledge of language games as she assumes responsibility for the rules and effects of her investments. Such a strategy refines our sensitivity to differences, introduces dissensus into consensus, and legitimates via fostering heterogeneity. Woodbrooks' expanded use of the familiar techniques of member checks and peer debriefing, a using of what is already available "rather than hoping for something else to come along or to create utopia from thin air" (Kulchyski 1992, p. 192), results in a search for instabilities and a foregrounding of the multiplicity of language games.

*Frame 3: Derridean rigour/rhizomatic validity:*<sup>8</sup> Derridean rigour enacts a hard specificity as to what counts as facts and details. It undermines stability, subverts and unsettles from within; it is a "vocation," a response to the call of the otherness of any system, its alterity. It is Derridean play in the face of the absence of the transcendental signified as it supplements<sup>9</sup> and exceeds what order has tried to make stable and permanent. Most importantly, such rigour is about a "meticulous diffidence" in its refusal of some great transformation (McGowan 1991, p. 109). Rather than presenting deconstruction as a counter ontology, a method, a concept or an origin, Derridean rigour is a nominalist counter-logic: it is what it does (p. 122) as it situates itself in the interstices of the no longer and the not yet.

The rhizome is a metaphor for such a reinscription of rigour. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) suggest the tree as the modernist model of knowledge with the rhizome as the model for postmodern knowledge. The Chomskyan tree of structural linguistics, for example, presents "a limited number of paths along which words can enter a relationship" (Lecerle 1990, p. 132). Rhizomes are systems with underground stems and aerial roots, whose fruits are tubers and bulbs. To function rhizomatically is to act via relay, circuit, multiple openings, as "'crabgrass' in the lawn of academic preconceptions" (Ulmer 1989, p. 185). There is no trunk, no emergence from a single root, but rather "arbitrary branchings off and temporary frontiers" which can only be mapped, not blueprinted (Lecerle 1990, pp. 132–133). Rhizomes produce paradoxical objects, "[t]hey enable us to follow an anarchistic growth, not to survey the smooth unfolding of an orderly structure" (p. 134). Rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks and the complexity of problematics where any concept, when pulled, is recognized as "connected to a mass of tangled ideas, uprooted, as it were, from the epistemological field" (Pefanis 1991, p. 22). Rather than a linear progress, rhizomatics is a journey among intersections, nodes, and regionalizations through a multi-centered complexity. As a metaphor, rhizomes work against the constraints of authority, regularity, and commonsense, and open thought up to creative constructions. They are "on the ground," immanent, with appeal not to transcendental values but to "their content of 'possibilities', liberty or creativity." The "new", however, is not so much about the fashionable as it is the creativity that arises out of social practices, creativity which marks the ability to transform, to break down present practices in favor of future ones (Deleuze 1992, pp. 163–164).

To probe what rhizomatic validity might mean in the context of an empirical study, I draw from the work of an Australian dissertation student, Erica Lenore McWilliam. In a study of student needs talk in pre-service teacher education, McWilliam (1992a; in press) developed a research design that involved 1) an initial reflexive phase where researcher theoretical and political investments were put under scrutiny by moving back and forth among various contestatory discourses in a way that resituated the researcher away from the “transformative intellectual” come to “save” the oppressed; 2) an empirical phase that focused on student-teacher constructions of teacher work; and 3) a final reciprocal phase designed as reflection in action and an extended co-theorizing process that contested and reconstructed the researcher’s reading of the phase II data. Each stage paid particular attention to discrepant data, the facts unfit to fit categorical schemes in a way that both uses and collides poststructuralism and feminist emancipatory discourses. Of note are McWilliam’s learnings that research practices which interrupt researcher privilege must be more about constructing “an interrogative researcher text . . . a questioning text.” Such a text overtly “signals tentativeness and partiality” in decentering expert authority and moving toward practices of co-theorizing (1992a, p. 271). Paying particular attention to the tendencies of much advocacy research toward inaccessible language and “intellectual bullying” of the researched (in press), she attempts to create the conditions in which it becomes possible for both researcher and researched to rethink their attitudes and practices.

Ranging across rather standard attitudinal surveys, dialogic, reciprocally self-disclosive interviews, and sustained interaction, McWilliam works to de-center both her own expertise and the participants’ commonsense about teaching practices. Her “double-edged analysis” breaches both “congealed critical discourse” and the dominant traditional discourses (1992a, p. 30). She remarks on the “untidiness” of “this straddling of agendas” (1992a, p. 91) and the “state of tension” (1992a, p. 257) that exists between feminism and those who unproblematically side with or against Enlightenment projects. As such, her work enacts what it means to let contradictions remain in tension, to unsettle from within, to dissolve interpretations by marking them as temporary, partial, invested, including her paradoxical continuing investment in transformative praxis.

More interested in networks than hierarchies and research that gestures toward the problematics of representation, McWilliam fleshes out a rhizomatic journey among intersections, nodes, and regionalizations through a multi-centered complexity that is, like Woodbrooks, particularly noteworthy for attending to the creation of interactive social relations in which the inquiry can proceed. Rather than focusing exclusively on textual strategies that disrupt illusory notions of found worlds, both Woodbrooks and McWilliam illustrate how a poststructural focus on textual strategies can go hand-in-hand with developing interactive social relations in inquiry. Invested in not only the textual foregrounding of new voices, but also of creating sites in the inquiry where those voices can hear themselves and one another fruitfully, Woodbrooks and McWilliam’s straddling of both poststructural and feminist agendas is atuned to Whitford’s (1991) caution: “Playing with a text, from Irigaray’s point of view, is a rather solipsistic activity; it is not a dialogue with the other which includes process and the possibility of change” (p. 48; see, also, Lutz 1993, p. 145).

*Frame 4: voluptuous validity/situated validity:* My last “framing” of validity posits the fruitfulness of situating scientific epistemology as shaped by a male imaginary. It asks what the inclusion of a female imaginary would effect where the female is other to the

male's Other. Irigaray (1985) terms this the maternal/feminine, the residue which exceeds the categories, a disruptive excess which reveals the limits of the hegemonic male imaginary. Her project is to create a space where women in their multiplicity can become—body, nature, maternal, material.

Baudrillard (1987) talks of voluptuousness as a term “which sex and psychoanalysis have succeeded neither in annexing nor in discrediting with their discourse” (p. 32). Serres (1982) writes:

It's the revolution of voluptuousness, the physics of Venus chosen over that of Mars . . . The nature of Mars, of martial physics, is one of hard, rigid, and rigorous bodies; the physics and nature of Venus are formed in flows . . . It is difficult to think of a rigorous and exact science that might have been conditioned by Venus and not by Mars, for peace and not for destruction . . . since Western science has always followed the weight of power (pp. 101–106).

Irigaray argues that “the murder of the mother” is the founding act of Western culture. Embodiment is relegated to the female, freeing the phallogocentric Idea to transcend the material, creating the deadly split between epistemology and ethics (Whitford 1991). The feminist debates over objectivity are situated in overcoming this split. Haraway (1988), for example, argues that self-conscious partiality is a necessary condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. This constructs a politics and epistemology of positionality versus universal/objective claims. The “view from everywhere” (which is the universalized “view from nowhere” of objectivism) is contrasted with explicit incompleteness, tentativeness, the creation of space for others to enter, the joining of partial voices (Kirkpatrick 1991). Authority then comes from engagement and self-reflexivity, not distanced “objectivity”, and the bugaboo of relativism is displaced, positioned as a foundationalist concern (Lather 1991a; Cherryholmes 1988; Alcoff 1989).

Whether it is possible to produce the maternal/feminine and be heard in the culture raises the issue of the politics of excess. The eruption of the mother in feminist discourse was the unthought which was originally perceived as unreadable. This exceeds Lyotardian paralogy in exploring “the potent marginality” (Kristeva 1978–79, p. 6) of feminist critique, a deliberate excessiveness, what Fraser (1989) terms “leaky” or “runaway”: practices “which have broken out of discursive enclaves . . . a species of excess . . .” (p. 169). This sort of *going too far* “is always some variety of the marginalized, unwilling to stay out of ‘the center,’ who transgresses . . . who behaves, in this moment, as though she or he has a right to lay claim to a place in the discursive spotlight” (Lubiano 1991, p. 150). As an example, I played with calling the license that feminists have taken to theorize from the body “clitoral validity/pagan validity”.<sup>10</sup> Such a term constructs an antifoundational field of possibility for opening up to that outside the limits of the normative framings of validity in a language so excessive as to render the term unthinkable/unreadable. Such a term marks the “emergent but not yet ‘readable’ discourse of women” (Con Davis 1990, p. 106) as some other to Lyotardian neo-pragmatism, something more akin to “risky practice” in terms of “the politics of uncertainty” that underlies feminist praxis in an antifoundational time (Sawicki 1991, p. 103).

An example of “going too far” is Richardson's (1992) essay about her larger interview study of unmarried mothers. “Consciously self-revelatory” in probing the lived experience of the researcher (p. 125), Richardson cheekily hopes that she has not “ventured

beyond Improper” as she “breache[s] sociological writing expectations by writing sociology as poetry” (p. 126). First presenting “a transcript masquerading as a poem/a poem masquerading as a transcript” (p. 127), her primary goal is “to create a position for experiencing the self as a sociological knower/constructor—not just talking about it, but doing it” (p. 136). Speaking autobiographically in order to provide “an opportunity to rethink sociological representation” (p. 133), Richardson writes of her need to break out of the “dreary” writing of “‘straight’ sociological prose” (p. 131). The part of her that had written poetry for eight years is called on to “provide a new strategy for resolving those horrid postmodernist writing dilemmas” (p. 131). Deliberately choosing a transcript from a woman quite different from herself in order to encounter the “postmodernist issues of ‘authorship’/authority/appropriation,” she works toward a text that is “bounded and unbounded, closed and open” (p. 132).

Richardson concludes with five consequences to herself of the experience of producing and disseminating the story-poem of “Louisa May”. We hear about changed relations with children; spirituality; Richardson’s integration of “[t]he suppressed ‘poet’ and the overactive ‘sociologist’” (p. 135), including her return of the advance from the book contract as she is no longer able to write conventional sociology; her increased attunement to differences in others and herself, including more caution “about what ‘doing research’ means” (p. 135); and, finally, some disillusionment at “the hold of positivism on even those I consider my allies” as she has presented this work (p. 135). “I experience isolation, alienation, and freedom, exhilaration. I want to record what they are saying; I want to do fieldwork on them. Science them” (p. 136).

Richardson exemplifies a disruptive excess which brings ethics and epistemology together in self-conscious partiality, an embodied positionality and a tentativeness which leaves space for others to enter, for the joining of partial voices. Authority comes from engagement and reflexivity in a way that exceeds Lyotardian parody via practices of textual representation that, by hegemonic standards, “go too far” with the politics of uncertainty. This effect is achieved by blurring the lines between the genres of poetry and social science reporting. Theorizing out of autobiography where her “leaky” practice collapses the private/public distinction, Richardson is mother, wife, scholar, and poet in her desire to move toward some way of doing science more in keeping with her feminist-poststructuralism.

Offered as more problem than solution, my scandalous categories and the exemplars I have recruited as provocateurs of validity after poststructuralism are performances of a transgressive validity that works off spaces already in the making. Situated in the crisis of authority that has occurred across knowledge systems, my challenge has been to make productive use of the dilemma of being left to work from traditions of research legitimacy and discourses of validity that appear no longer adequate to the task. Between the no longer and the not yet lies the possibility of what was impossible under traditional regimes of truth in the social sciences: a deconstructive problematic that aims not to govern a practice but to theorize it, deprive it of its innocence, disrupt the ideological effects by which it reproduces itself, pose as a problem what has been offered as a solution (Rooney 1989). Derrida terms this “a ‘science of the possibility of science’ . . . a nonlinear, multiple, and dissimulated space . . . Thus we discover a science whose object is not ‘truth,’ but the constitution and annulment of its own text and the subject inscribed there” (Sollers 1983, pp. 137,179).

## RESEARCHING THE LIVES OF WOMEN WITH HIV/AIDS:

### A Small Narrative Toward Self-Reflexivity

In this section, I flesh out the intelligibility of validity after poststructuralism via my in-process study of women living with HIV/AIDS (Lather 1992). A Lyotardian "small narrative," the following story about the early phases of my inquiry offers a situated context for fashioning a field of possibilities that is not yet.

The research project on women and HIV/AIDS began for me in January of 1992. Chris Smithies, a feminist psychotherapist with four years of experience with women and AIDS support groups in Ohio, broached a qualitative research colleague of mine about a feminist research partner who could serve as a "chronicler". Once broached, I became quite interested, to my amazement given my lack of desire to "get data" at that time. What became clear to me at this initial meeting was the fruitfulness of this study for my own struggles with the methodological and theoretical implications of poststructuralism for the doing of qualitative inquiry. I saw an opportunity to wrestle across the "deconstructive excesses and extreme forms of social constructionism" characteristic of some poststructuralisms via the political responsibility to "real bodies and political rage" (Stockton 1992, pp. 114,117) entailed in such a study. Hooked on the possibilities, I attended a women and HIV/AIDS retreat in May at a rural convent where Chris and I presented a research opportunity to the women. Serving as access and immersion, the retreat seared me into some different understanding of the politics of knowing and being known.

Methodologically, my primary interest in this study is the implications of researcher/researched positionings for practices of inquiry, a nexus of issues Foucault (1980) has coded with the phrase, "the politics of the gaze." My particular interest is "the unnoticed dangers in the precise techniques we employ to conceive and resolve our problems" (Rajchman 1991, p. 141). The origin of this curiosity is not from a world view one wants to convert others to, but rather from "an experience of 'deconversion,' from a loss of assurance or certainty as to who we are and may be, opening up spaces in which no one is as yet the master" (p. 141). Questioning the emergent rules or norms of feminist inquiry (Opie 1992; Patai 1991; Fine 1992), my goal in this study is to be required to invent other practices out of the methodological issues that I bring to this study.

Growing out of my immersion in a study that feels both urgent and as something about which I want, at this time, to speak softly and obliquely, I am wrestling with a myriad of questions grounded in the crisis of representation. How does a researcher work to not see so easily in telling stories that belong to others? Does s/he try hard to understand less, to be nudged out of positions we customarily occupy when viewing "the Other" (Brown 1992)? Who are my "others"? What binaries structure my arguments? What hierarchies are at play? How can I use Irigaray's concept of the "We-you/I" to disrupt those very oppositions, to create a constantly moving speaking position that fixes neither subject nor object, that disrupts the set boundaries between subjects? (Game 1991, p. 88). What is the role of autobiography here? For example, what does my getting tested for HIV mean within this context. I am considering when to do this: now? at the end? midway through writing? There is a methodological interest here. Is this instrumental? exploitative? What does it mean to position these women and this project as a Gramscian historical laboratory in which to explore a science marked by practices of productive ambiguity that cultivate a taste for complexity?

In terms of a methodology that “comes clean” about how power shapes an inquiry, how do I use disruptive devices in the text to unsettle conventional notions of the real? How do I foreground the dilemmas involved in researcher struggles with the anxiety of voyeurism without entangling myself in an ever more-detailed self analysis, an “implosion” into the self? What is my goal as a researcher: empathy? emancipation? advocacy? learning from/working with/standing with? What is the romance of the desire for research as political intervention? How is this work tied into what Van Maanen (1988) refers to as the by no means trivial “demands of contemporary academic careers” and disciplinary logics (p. 53)? What is this fierce interest in proving the relevance of intellectual work? To what extent is my work tied to “the pretensions of sociology toward politics” (Riley 1988, p. 54)?

Such questions assume that, in generating counter-practices of authority, the new canon is reflexivity (Rajchman 1985). As Anderson (1989) notes, while this is a common enough point, there are few guidelines for how one goes about the *doing* of it, especially in a way that both is reflexive and, yet, notes the limits of self-reflexivity. To attempt to deconstruct one’s own work is to risk buying into the faith in the powers of critical reflection that places emancipatory efforts in such a contradictory position with the poststructuralist foregrounding of the limits of consciousness. Johnson (1981), too, draws attention to the inadequacies of immediacy, of belief in the self presentation of meaning which “seems to guarantee the notions that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said” (p. viii). Rather than take refuge in the futility of self-critique, however, I want to attempt it as aware as possible of its inevitable shortcomings, all that which remains opaque to myself. There is much in my performance as a researcher that I cannot reach, much that eludes the logic of the self-present subject. But situated so as to give testimony and witness to what is happening to these women with HIV/AIDS, my methodological desire is to probe the instructive complications of this study in order to generate a theory of situated methodology that will, hopefully, lead me to a place where I do NOT conclude that “I will never do research this way again.”<sup>11</sup>

How might “transgressive validity” as set out thus far in this paper help me in such an effort toward generative methodology? Can the scandalous categories heretofore enunciated be of use? To continue the scandal, let us imagine a checklist:

### Transgressive Validity Check-List: A Simulacrum

#### Ironic validity

- foregrounds the insufficiencies of language and the production of meaning-effects, produces truth as a problem
- resists the hold of the real; gestures toward the problematics of representation; foregrounds a suggestive tension regarding the referent and its creation as an object of inquiry
- disperses, circulates and proliferates forms, including the generation of research practices that take the crisis of representation into account
- creates analytic practices which are doubled without being paralyzed

### **Paralogical validity**

- fosters differences and heterogeneity via the search for "fruitful interruptions"
- implodes controlling codes, but still coherent within present forms of intelligibility
- anticipatory of a politics that desires both justice and the unknown, but refuses any grand transformation
- concerned with undecidables, limits, paradoxes, discontinuities, complexities
- searches for the oppositional in our daily practices, the territory we already occupy

### **Rhizomatic validity**

- unsettles from within, taps underground
- generates new locally determined norms of understanding; proliferates open-ended and context-sensitive criteria; works against reinscription of some new regime, some new systematicity
- supplements and exceeds the stable and the permanent, Derridean play
- works against constraints of authority via relay, multiple openings, networks, complexities of problematics
- puts conventional discursive procedures under erasure, breaches congealed discourses, critical as well as dominant

### **Voluptuous validity**

- goes too far toward disruptive excess, leaky, runaway, risky practice
- embodies a situated, partial, positioned, explicit tentativeness
- constructs authority via practices of engagement and self-reflexivity
- creates a questioning text that is bounded and unbounded, closed and opened
- brings ethics and epistemology together

Rather than actually evaluating my small narrative using this checklist that mimics checklists,<sup>12</sup> my interest is in a return to Cornell West's argument at the beginning of this paper that practices are perpetually becoming available if we render explicit the spaces opened up by the growing acceptance of epistemic antifoundationalism. Moving the discussion of validity from epistemological criteria of truth as a correspondence between thought and its object to criteria grounded in the crisis of representation, the practices I have sketched are "micro-becomings" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 70). Defined by a dispersal, circulation, and proliferation of becomings from what has been proceeding obscurely underground, they function rhizomatically, foraging across/between middles, "the area where things take on speed" (p. 58). A supple line, a flux, a "line of flight . . . where the thresholds attain a point of adjacency and rupture," my ephemeral practices of validity after poststructuralism are "an arrangement of desire and of enunciation" (p. 107)

rather than a general recipe. My intent has been to forge from a scattered testimony a methodology that is not so much prescription as “curves of visibility and enunciation” (Deleuze 1992, p. 160). Experiments “that baffle expectations, trace active lines of flight, seek out lines that are bunching, accelerating or decreasing in speed . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, p. 111), my evocation is the “horizons toward which experiments work” (Ormiston 1990, p. 239) as we try to understand what is at play in our practices of constructing a science “after truth”.

## CONCLUSION: POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SCIENCE

To make the thought possible, one occupies the place of the impossible.

Althusser 1990, p. 209.

While I have by no means exhausted the range of counter-practices of authority that can become possible, my reflections on how we are constituted through certain practices, certain ways of going on, foreground how new practices are perpetually becoming available (West 1991). Derrida posits “the impossible” as the source of invention that creates a space “‘to think the unthought,’ ‘to say the unsayable,’ ‘to see the unseeable,’ or ‘to represent the unrepresentable’” (quoted in Rajchman 1991, p. 159). Deleuze, in writing about Foucault, helps us grasp this idea via a move into a virtual multiplicity, “a disparate set of things of which we cannot yet have the concept; and its ‘actualization’ therefore involves the invention of something which, by the lights of our concepts, is impossible” (quoted in Rajchman 1991, p. 160). Impossibility, then, serves not as a logical concept, but as an historical one: “the impossibility of what is not yet or no longer possible for us to think . . .” Foucault’s project was to ask how we might “‘inhabit’ those moments of ‘actuality’ in which we are becoming something else than what our history has constructed us to be, those heterotopic moments of our current historical ‘impossibility,’ the moments of invention” (p. 161).

This article posits that the conditions of possibility for validity are also its conditions of impossibility. It is my hope that such a disjunctive affirmation of incommensurates has rendered contradictory claims productive in finding a way of putting into play the loss of the possibility of science, and of opening its practice to other possibilities, other histories, the “continent of thought just beyond the horizon” (Pefanis 1991, p. 138). Such an effort is more about “the changing shape of the thinkable” (Gordon 1991, p. 8) than it is about the actually existing practices of validity. My strategy has been to move from what Derrida refers to as “‘a novelty of the same’” which invents “‘the possible from the possible’” to “‘an architecture of ‘the impossible’, the ‘altogether-other’ of our invention, the surprise of what is not yet possible in the histories of the spaces in which we find ourselves” (Rajchman 1991, pp. 162–163).

## NOTES

1. At the Twenty-fifth Nobel Conference at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, in 1989 on *The End of Science*, feminist philosopher, Sandra Harding, put it this way:

As we study our world today, there is an uneasy feeling that we have come to the end of science, that science, as a unified, objective endeavor is over . . . This leads to



grave epistemological concerns. If science does not speak about extrahistorical, universal laws, but is instead social, temporal and local, then there is no way of speaking of something real beyond science that science merely reflects (quoted in Kiziltan, Bain and Canizares 1990, p. 354).

2. The anti-foundational claims of this article are in contradistinction to Michael Hardt (1993) who argues that poststructuralism is much more about immanent, material and open foundations (rather than the transcendental, given and teleological foundations of Hegel) than it is about the claim that we can do without foundations. Using Deleuze to investigate "a new problematic for research after the poststructuralist rupture" (p. xv), Hardt is particularly useful in terms of understanding Deleuze's anti-Hegelianism and the ontologically foundational role that difference and constitutive practice play in his thought. I use the term antifoundational to signal not that we stand on/act out of nothing, but that the historical space in which we find ourselves is "after truth," after certainties and absolute frames of reference.

3. I put "paradigms" in scare quotes because of the deconstructive argument that we are in a "postparadigmatic" era. See Lather 1991a. As Pauline Rosenau (1992) notes, "the half-life of paradigms appears shorter and shorter as human affairs become increasingly complex" (p. 183).

4. Displacement is "the process whereby a prior symbolic structure . . . is compelled to coexist with other centers of attention . . . that do not necessarily conflict with the original structure but are not swept up in its gravitational pull" (Greenblatt, quoted in Pease 1991, pp. 121–122).

5. McGowan (1991) explicates Derridean "play" as about the differ $\acute{a}$ nce that opens up language and thought and undermines the stability of identity. In the absence of the transcendental signified, the play of signification is both infinite and shaped by the "always already," the play of power across the social field. Quoting Derrida, "'This field [of language] is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because . . . there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.' In this exuberant passage, Derrida strives to find within our finitude the very possibility of play . . . There is much to suggest that the play of substitutions in Derrida is never very free, can always be recuperated within a tradition . . . 'Stabilization is relative, even if it is sometimes so great as to seem immutable and permanent. It is the momentary result of a whole history of relations of force . . .'" (pp. 103–105). Derridean "play", then, is like the "play" in a machine, to move "freely" within limits which are both cause and effect.

6. Distinctions between postmodern and poststructural can be made in various ways. The former raises issues of chronology, economics (e.g., post-Fordism) and aesthetics whereas post-structural is used more often in relation to academic theorizing "after structuralism". They are often used interchangeably, driving some cultural theorists to distraction. Whole books have been written on this topic. See, for example, Rose 1991. I am much more interested in distinctions between the postmodern and the post-colonial, e.g., Adam and Tiffin 1990.

7. I use the term exemplar not as a cookbook or "the best of", but as concrete illustrations of a number of abstract qualities. They are not used in the Kuhnian sense of paradigmatic cases that dominate a research community's sense of both normal and revolutionary science. To the contrary, my exemplars are, except for Agee and Evans, a quite idiosyncratic selection from the work of friends and dissertation students with which I happen to be familiar. Like Mishler (1990), I offer them as resources, "springboards" (p. 422).

8. My thanks to David Smith (1988) for alerting me to the importance of rhizomes via what he termed "rhisomatics."

9. The Derridean strategy of supplement "'intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of . . . the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance,'" a doubling which fosters a non-pluralistic politics of difference. "The supplementary strategy suggests that adding 'to' need not 'add up' but may disturb the calculation . . . Insinuating itself into the terms of reference of the dominant discourse, the supplementary antagonizes the implicit power to generalize, to produce the sociological solidity" (Bhabha 1990, pp. 305–306).

10. For more on paganism and epistemology, see Ormiston 1990; Lyotard 1989. Morton 1989, introduced me to the idea of “clitoral theoretics” in a review of Naomi Schor. A symptomatic reading of his review exemplifies the very point I am making in this section about the general unreadability of the maternal/feminine. For a very different exploration of “[T]he discourse of the clitoris in the mucous of the lips” in Irigaray’s work, see Spivak 1992.

11. This sentiment comes directly out of my experience of presenting a talk on my research project to a small gathering of women at the research retreat of our dreams in Wisconsin, August 7–8, 1992. It is also spurred by Paul Marienthal’s dissertation experience with “participatory research” and “member checks” where he concluded that “I will never do research this way again” (1992).

12. Welchman (1989), writing of dadaism and surrealism in art, says of the diagram, of which this parodic “checklist” is an example: “The diagram is, therefore, always useful and yet equally futile; it can only come into being as the will-to-use, but it only exists to be modified, to be altered, or enacted, or scratched (broken up)” (p. 92).

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