

Chapter 1

Shifting Imaginaries in the Human Sciences

A Feminist Reading

A book about a book.—Turns in the social sciences.—Post post theory?—
(Post)critical ethnography.—A poststructural science ‘after truth.’—
Working the ruins.—Loss and lost, lost, lost.—Derridean rigor as a
double(d) science.—A praxis of stuck places.—Naked methodology.

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It
requires ignorance—nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city—as one
loses oneself in a forest—that calls for quite a different schooling.

—Walter Benjamin, quoted in Solnit, 2005

This is a book about a book about getting lost at the limits of representation. Its starting point is the aftermath of poststructuralism. Its central focus is the sort of practices of critique and inquiry that put the “post” to work in delineating the science possible after our disappointments in science. Grounded in the instructive complications of a feminist qualitative study of women living with HIV/AIDS (Lather and Smithies, 1997), *Getting Lost* abstracts a philosophy of inquiry from an archive of work in order to move toward a fruitful sense of dislocation in our knowledge projects.

My interest in this introductory chapter is in a shifting imaginary for research in the human sciences.¹ That imaginary has been buffeted about a great deal over the last several decades. From “linguistic turn” to “science wars” to “risk society” (Beck, 1992), the end of the value-free notion of science and the resultant troubling of confidence in the scientific project are

much announced. Shifts include the movements of continental and analytic philosophies, varied minoritarianisms, and, of late, a worldwide audit culture with its governmental demands for evidence-based practice and the consequent (re)privileging of scientific methods.

There is a proliferation of ways to frame these various turns in the social sciences. I position this proliferation within the “science wars” as more traditional scientists take on what they see as the dangerous focus on science as social construction versus “truth” about “nature.”² The claims of science to a certain privilege in terms of authoritative knowledge are much debated. The myriad turns that have characterized research in the human sciences over the last few decades are not so much linear as multiple, simultaneous, and inter-ruptive. Rather than evoking nostalgia for a lost world of certain knowledge, to engage and transvalue³ these shifts is to move toward a thought of dissensus rather than consensus, a dissensus not easily institutionalized into some new regime of truth. This is about the “ruins” of methodology, the end of transcendent claims and grand narratives: methodology under erasure.⁴ In such a place of thought, inquiry is seen as a social practice, and what is at stake is not so much the nature of science as its effects. Questions of accountability and responsibility are ethical and social. Hence, my central argument is the need to rethink the terms in which we address, not the end of science, but the end of a narrow scientificity.⁵

Surveying the various turns in the social sciences, one is struck by the difficulties of deciding on even what terms to feature.

- *linguistic (Rorty, 1967; Derrida, 1978; Norris, 1996)
- *structural (Althusser, 1971)
- *critical (Fay, 1987; Angus and Langsdorf, 1993)
- *deconstructive (Derrida, 1976; Norris, 1984)
- *rhetorical (Nelson et al, 1987; Simons, 1990)
- *cultural (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Jameson, 1998)
- *narrative (Polkinghorne, 1988; Casey, 1995)
- *historical (McDonald, 1996)
- *ethnographic (Van Maanen, 1995)
- *postmodern (Best and Kellner, 1997; Clarke, 2005)
- *ethical (Garber, Hanssen and Walkowitz, 2000; Baker, 1995)
- *visual (Laspina, 1998)
- *pragmatic (Hanssen, 2001; Ockman, 2000)
- *policy (Bennett, 1992; McGuigan, 2001)
- *theological (Derrida, 1989; Caputo, 1997c; Ward, 2000)

Figure 1. Turns in the Social Sciences

To complicate matters even further, there is of late the language of “return.” This includes a return to the real (Foster, 1996), the empirical (Seidman and Alexander, 2001), and to objectivity, whether after deconstruction or after feminist and postcolonial critiques of objectivism (Stanfield, 1994; Harding, 1987, 1991, 1993; Cudd, 2001). Feminist philosopher of science, Sandra Harding (1993), for example, argues for “strong objectivity” based on “systematically examining all of the social values shaping a particular research process” (p. 18). Art historian Steven Melville (1996) argues for an “objectivity in deconstruction” that emphasizes how “‘deconstruction is not what you think’” in its moves of reversing, undoing, and complicating the linguistic turn. To turn everything into discourse is not exhaustive of our engagement with things and how they happen. There is a being in excess of our languages of knowing, whether we know it or not. This is a deconstructed objectivity that refuses “to let its notion of objectivity be constrained by the dominant paradigms of truth” (p. 140).

Across this dizzying array of in-movement shifts, one might think it is, finally, as if the critiques of truth in Nietzsche, self-presence in Freud, referential language in Saussure, and metaphysics in Heidegger were coming home to roost in the social sciences. But there is a new scientism afoot that belies such a linear narrative. Growing out of a worldwide audit culture with its governmental demands for evidence-based practices (Strathern, 2000), scientific methods are being (re)privileged as if the last several decades of the critique of positivism had not existed (Lather, 2004a, b; Lather and Moss, 2005). Add to this much talk of “post-post” and “the end of theory” (Antonio, 2000; Payne and Schad, 2003; Hoy, 2004) and one begins to feel lost, indeed, in negotiating what it means to (re)think critique and practice in such “dark enough” times (MacLure, 2004).

This book explores what it might mean to claim getting lost as a methodology for such times. Theorists from Walter Benjamin to the modern French masters of posthumanism have long theorized what opens up in the face of the loss of absolute knowledge. Yet it seems that the social sciences have not much attended to a problematic of loss as “an experience of mourning and promise” (Derrida, 2001, p. 67). To take fuller account of the fall into language and the consequent loss of the unmediated referent is to “place hope in this disappointment” and “general shake-up” (ibid., pp. 73, 69) in order to negotiate the mourning and melancholia, pathos and nihilism attendant upon the loss of pure presence.

This raises considerably the stakes of critical practice in our day. Situated in the present postcritical period, *Getting Lost* delineates the open-endedness of practical action as a structure of praxis and ethics without foundations in a context of demands for practices with more to answer to in terms of the complexities of language and the world. In sum, through a

development of getting lost as a way of knowing, the book will posit research approaches that no longer confidently assume that we are “in the know” in moving toward a new generation of postcritical work. What enablements can we imagine from loss? What Spivakian “setting-to-work” (1999) might help us engage the limit of the saturated humanist logics that determine the protocols through which we know? These are the questions at the center of the book.

While the “view from nowhere” is much contested, traditional foundations of knowledge continue to undergird much of contemporary research in the human sciences (Spanos, 1993). Rather than focusing on the persistence of this traditional world view in the face of its loss of plausibility, my interest is to explore how feminist research methodology registers cultural shifts and intellectual movements in order to situate itself as a rich ground from which to ask my questions of a less comfortable social science. In this chapter, I introduce the major concepts that undergird twentieth-century turns toward epistemological indeterminacy so as to underscore contemporary interest in situatedness, perspective, relationality, narrative, poesis, and blurred genres (Greene, 1994).

My sense of task is to delineate the weakening of any “one best way approach” and to foreground, instead, how discourse-practices of methodology enter into the circulation and dialogue that make up the ongoing interplay of the field. From poststructuralism to (post)critical ethnography, across methodological practices of working the ruins, a praxis of aporias or stuck places, and naked methodology, I delineate the central terms of my title: getting lost and double(d) practices. Trying to enact a text that both “interrupts itself and gathers up its interruptions into its texture” (Derrida commenting on Levinas in Bennington, 2000, p. 203), I use a Deleuzean sort of plateau format to fold and layer concepts in ways that are multiple, simultaneous, and in flux rather than presenting them as linear and discrete.⁶

Such a style that enacts what it announces describes, as well, my paradoxical desire to “eschew any deconstructive coquetry or stylistic ambition.” Instead I produce a rather straight-ahead “if unsatisfactory” movement of the text (Bennington, 2000), given the sort of reader I am hoping for, a reader with “severe” demands of academic work that it make a difference in struggles for social justice. While chapter 4 will be much occupied with issues of accessibility in academic work, my effort here is to introduce a hybrid textual style that mixes the experimental and the straightforward. My guide in this is Helene Cixous:

The only book that is worth writing is the one we don’t have the courage or strength to write. The book that hurts us . . . Writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written it . . . a book stronger than the author. (Cixous, 1993, *passim*)

Plateau 1: Post-Post Theory?

What are we calling postmodernity? I'm not up to date.

—Michel Foucault 1998

The central investment of this book is in coming to terms with the complexities involved in the “post” turn in the human sciences. Talk of “post-post” (Marcus, 1994) and “post-theory” (McQuillan et al., 1999) makes the issues even more complicated. This plateau is framed by “the many obituaries for postmodernism” (McHale, 2004, p. ix), and begins with a cursory overview of postmodernism and poststructuralism.⁷

Whatever postmodern and poststructural mean these days, they are pervasive, elusive, and marked by a proliferation of conflicting definitions that refuse to settle into meaning. Indeed, refusing definition is part of the theoretical scene. While the terms poststructural, postmodern, and, sometimes, even deconstruction are often used interchangeably as code names for the crisis of confidence in Western conceptual systems, there are distinctions to be made. Postmodern generally refers to the material and historical shifts of the global uprising of the marginalized, the revolution in communication technology, and the fissures of global multinational hyper-capitalism. In art and architecture, it refers to a juxtaposition of classic and modernist elements, sliding meanings and contested boundaries in ways that challenge “uniqueness, authenticity, authority and distance” where “*this new intensity of dis/connection is postmodern*” (Foster, 1996, pp. 219, 221, emphasis in the original).

Poststructuralism refers more narrowly to a sense of the limits of Enlightenment rationality. It particularly foregrounds the limits of consciousness and intentionality and the will to power inscribed in sense-making efforts that aspire to totalizing explanatory frameworks, especially structuralism with its ahistoricism and universalism.

Deconstruction is both a method to interrupt binary logic through practices of reversal and displacement, and an antimethod that is more an ontological claim. Deconstruction “happens,” Derrida says, as an outcome of the way language undoes itself (Derrida, in Caputo 1997a, p. 9).

Some call for the end of theory, by which they mean poststructuralism. John Schad, for example, in a book entitled *life.after.theory* writes that “the moment of ‘high’ theory appears to have passed” including “Lacanian psychoanalysis, Kristevan feminism, Althusserian Marxism, Derridean deconstruction and Foucauldian history” (2003a, p. ix). This death is attributed to many things: the excesses of “careless readers of Nietzsche everywhere” (Payne in Norris, 2003, p. 79); the ethical unintelligibility that results from the leveling of distinctions between truth and falsity (Norris, 2003); a

“hopeless skeptical impasse” (Norris, 2003, p. 113) quite unprepared to deal with the shifting terrain of right-wing political and neo-Christian movements.

The death of theory is held to be hastened by neoliberal audit culture and its demand for a new scientism of transparent and quantifiable value.⁸ “[B]usy declining in a university ‘near you’ in the second half of the nineties,” Schad cites books with such titles as *After Theory*, *Beyond Poststructuralism*, and *Post-Theory*.⁹ In the subsequent interviews with Jacque Derrida, Frank Kermode, Toril Moi, and Christopher Norris, such linear thinking is interrupted, complicated, doubled, and, especially in Moi’s case, endorsed.¹⁰

Getting Lost explores how to live in such contradictory times by arguing that we are not so much at the end of theory as at “neither the beginning nor the end” of what Derrida terms “the age of . . . [impossible] formalization of deconstruction into methods” (2001, p. 69). Such an age is part of a general “seismic tremor . . . within the culture and within the University” given the “identification crisis” around decolonization (p. 61). Gayatri Spivak (1999) calls this moment, usefully, “the setting to work of deconstruction” in struggles for social justice. It is here that *Getting Lost* is located. Writing against the authoritative voice of the kinds of knowledge we are used to, knowledges of demarcation and certitude, this book challenges the social imaginary about research in the human sciences and addresses the problem areas where contemporary researchers are stuck. Its sensibility is toward that which shakes any assured ontology of the ‘real,’ of presence and absence, a postcritical logic of haunting and undecidables.¹¹ A central claim is that such aporetic suspension is ethical practice in disenchanting times.

Plateau 2: (Post) Critical Ethnography

I hope that the truth of my book is in the future.

—Foucault, in Dillon, 1980

In this shifting definitional field, philosopher John Caputo prefers the term postcritical to postmodern, given the latter’s “opportunistic overuse” (1997c, p. 119). In earlier writing on pedagogy, I delineated postcritical as that which foregrounds movement beyond the sedimented discursive configurations of essentialized, romanticized subjects with authentic needs and real identities, who require generalized emancipation from generalized social oppression via the mediations of liberatory pedagogues capable of exposing the “real” to those caught up in the distorting meaning systems of late capitalism. Within postcritical practices, emancipatory space is problematized via deconstruction of the Enlightenment equation of knowing, naming, and emancipation. “Especially placed under suspicion are the philosophies of presence that assume the historical role of self-conscious human agency and the vanguard

role of critical intellectuals [via] crusading rhetoric [stuck in a framework that] sees the 'other' as the problem for which they are the solution . . . [This] may have more to do with the end of some speaking for others than the end of liberatory struggle" (Lather 1992a, pp. 131–32).

For Caputo (1997c), postcritical means post-Kantian in the sense of a continued commitment to critique and demystification of truth but with a meta layer of being critical of demystification itself. He posits a postmodern modernity that mimes the Enlightenment desire for universals and demystification, a new Enlightenment of testimony and witness that differs from the authoritative voice of verification, proof, or demonstration (p. 154). Out of engagement with Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, Caputo sees post-structuralism and postmodernism as ways to continue emancipation but by another means.

As the last turn in the preceding box of turns, Caputo (1997c) calls on a shift from a Kuhnian to a more Benjaminian/messianic sense of crisis that calls on the resources of theology as a way through the aporias of modernity. Caputo elaborates that, in positing a shift from Kuhn to something more messianic, Derrida writes not about a paradigm shift in understanding but about "a more Jewish . . . ethico-political" grasp of difference that "shatters understanding, that underlines the saliency of the incomprehensible, something we confess we do not understand." This is not a new way of seeing but, rather, "a blindness, a confession that we are up against something . . . to which we can only bear witness" (p. 74).

"Past the post" (Knauff, 1994) of the new ethnography of epistemological wrestling with representation, blurred genres and the ethics of the gaze, such a shift asks how we come to think of things this way and what would be made possible if we were to think ethnography otherwise, as a space surprised by difference into the performance of practices of not-knowing. Meaning, reference, subjectivity, objectivity, truth, tradition, ethics: what would it mean to say "yes" to what might come from unlocking such concepts from regularizing and normalizing? A postsecular, postcritical, post-Enlightenment undecidability becomes not the last word, but the first in making room for something else to come about. Motored by a desire to stop confining the other within the same, this is a sort of preparation that is more about not being so sure, about practices of deferral while entire problematics are recast and resituated away from standard logics and procedures (Caputo, 1997c).

Plateau 3: A Poststructural Science 'After Truth': Ethnography as Index

[P]ost-modernism involves the development of new rhetorics of science, new stories of knowledge 'after truth.'

—Tomlinson, 1989

Poststructuralism understands structures as historically and reciprocally affected by practice within contingent conditions of time, particularly conceptual practices and how they define disciplinary knowledges (Prado, 1995, p. 154). It is about complicating reference, not denying it, through a profound vigilance regarding how language does its work. It is a skepticism not about the “real,” but about “when a language is taken to be what being itself would say were it given a tongue” (Caputo, 1997c, p. 17). What do we speak of when we speak of a poststructural science ‘after truth’?

The theoretical and methodological competitiveness of “successor regimes” (Harding, 1991) that continues to characterize social inquiry often positions the “new” ethnography as some sort of savior. To the contrary, Deborah Britzman (1997) points out that such research is filled with sacred objects to be recovered, restored, centered. There is a tendency to avoid the difficult story, to want to restore the good name of inquiry with these “new” and “better” methods. But research “can’t seem to get it right,” Britzman writes (p. 35), and too often our efforts fall back into the too easy to tell story of salvation via one sort of knowledge practice or another.

Rather than heroism or rescue through some improved methodology, Britzman argues that we may be in a time and place where we are better served by ethnography if it is positioned as a means to see the need to be wounded by thought as an ethical move. “Incited by the demand for voice and situatedness” (1997, p. 31), she writes about the curious history of ethnography’s mistaken identities and asks whether it can be a mode of thought that refuses to secure itself with the consolations of foundationalism and nostalgia for presence, the lost object of correct knowledge, the security of understanding (Britzman, 1998). This is a move out of a “devotional scientism” and toward what Nietzsche (1974) termed a “gay science.”¹² A gay science is based in the very splintering of the mechanisms of control and the resultant incredulity about salvation narratives of scientific progress, reason, and the overadministered world. Such a move uses poststructuralism to distinguish between scientism and a more expanded notion of scientificity.

The received and familiar story of ethnography is that it studies the production of everyday life by often “othered” people analyzed at the level of meaning, social structure, power relations, and history. Its specific disciplinary claim is its ability to situate culture as relative in order to denaturalize via cultural comparison. Because of both its subject and its process, often despite itself, ethnography has escaped, perhaps a bit, the sort of scientism that haunts other disciplinary methodologies. As a double practice, both science and a wanderer outside of the scientific paradigm it unevenly purports to follow, it exists between travelogue and science, narrative and method, story and data in a space Harry Walcott has termed “the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities”

(Mehan, 1995, p. 242). Now, at the cultural moment of the decanonization of science, this marginal scientific status well situates ethnography as a productive site of doubt if one can manage to avoid the “too strong, too erect, too stiff” (Caputo, 1993, p. 161) in working the inside/outside of ethnography. This entails being adept at its practices and moving within its disciplinary habits while disrupting its tendencies to congratulate itself on being the knowledge-producing practice best situated in the contemporary scene to learn from its instructive complications.

In the last decade or so, the “new” ethnography has turned on itself and a sort of “self-abjection” has come to characterize the field (i.e., Behar, 1996). Full of a sense of failed promises, charged anxieties, and mourned history, ethnography is trying to think its self-estrangement as a way out of a mimetic relation to the natural sciences with their mathematized empiricism in the face of the refractory object of its study (Albanese, 1996, p. 9). If, as Foucault (1998) states, we are freer than we feel, how can we feel freer in this space? How might we think ethnography as “an art of being in between,” of finding ways of using the constraining order, of drawing unexpected results from one’s abject situation (de Certeau, 1984, p. 30), of making the dominant function in another register, of diverting it without leaving it? What does ethnography give us to hear and understand about the force needed to arrive at the change to come, that which is, perhaps, underway?

Here, one might begin to speak of a “new” new ethnography or a (post)ethnography,¹³ deferred and diffused across disciplines and working borders and wrestling with urgent questions in moving into postfoundational practices. In postfoundational thought, as opposed to the more typical sort of mastery project, one epistemologically situates oneself as curious and unknowing. This is a methodology of “getting lost,” where we think against our own continued attachments to the philosophy of presence and consciousness that undergirds humanist theories of agency. Methodologically assuming no privileged signifier, no exclusivity, no priority or predominance, here is where the journey of thinking differently begins: moments in the politics of truth (Foucault, 1970).

Such counternarratives of science help to situate ethnography with/in the postmodern as a science “after truth” (Tomlinson, 1989). Here the discipline of science becomes the rigor of staging and watching oneself engage with the question of knowledge and the production of the object, the referent. The object is bottomlessly resistant to nomination, attached to its specificity and its surfaces of visibility. As noted by art historian Steven Melville (1996), things are present and complete, but the “truth” of them depends on what is visible/knowable via highly troubled knowledge practices, including ethnography itself under conditions of postmodernity. It is to that that I turn next: not ethnography *among* the ruins, but the ruins of ethnography.

Plateau 4: Working the Ruins

The object of philosophical criticism is to show that the function of artistic form is as follows: to make historical content . . . into a philosophical truth. This transformation of material content into truth content makes the decrease in effectiveness, whereby the attraction of earlier charms diminishes decade by decade, into the basis for a rebirth, in which all ephemeral beauty is stripped off, and the work stands as a ruin.

—Walter Benjamin, 1977

What opens up when inquiry is situated as a ruin? In an address to the American Historical Association, Judith Butler (1993a) draws on Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in order to gesture toward the value of taking the failure of teleological history, whether Marxist, messianic, or, in its most contemporary formulation, the triumph of Western democracy (e.g., Fukuyama) as the very ground for a different set of social relations. It is the ruins of progressivist history, naive realism, and transparent language that allow us to see what beliefs have sustained these concepts; only now, at the their end, Butler argues, does their unsustainability become clear. Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Mai Lai, AIDS, for example, make belief in history's linear unfolding forwardness unsustainable.

In such a time and place, terms understood as no longer fulfilling their promise do not become useless. On the contrary, their very failures become provisional grounds, and new uses are derived, "the site of an attempt to trans-value" in Bill Readings words (1996, p. 129). The claim of universality, for example, "will no longer be separable from the antagonism by which it is continually contested" in moving toward a configuration of ethics and sociality that is other to the Hegelian dream of a reconciliation that absorbs difference into the same (Butler, 1993a, p. 6). Butler terms this "the ethical vitalization" (p. 7) of the failure of certain kinds of ideals, a Nietzschean tranvaluation of working the ruins of such ideals as the very ground of what playwright Tony Kushner has termed "non-stupid optimism" in struggles for social justice (de Vries, 1992).

Moving across levels of the particular and the abstract, trying to avoid a transcendent purchase on the object of study, we set ourselves up for necessary failure in order to learn how to find our way into postfoundational possibilities. The task becomes to throw ourselves against the stubborn materiality of others, willing to risk loss, relishing the power of others to constrain our interpretive "will to power," saving us from narcissism and its melancholy through the very otherness that cannot be exhausted by us, the otherness that always exceeds us. To situate inquiry as a ruin/rune is to

foreground the limits and necessary misfirings of a project, problematizing the researcher as “the one who knows.” Placed outside of mastery and victory narratives, inquiry becomes a kind of self-wounding laboratory for discovering the rules by which truth is produced. Attempting to be accountable to complexity, thinking the limit becomes our task, and much opens up in terms of ways to proceed for those who know both too much and too little.

In her debate with Benhabib, Butler writes,

For that sphere [of politics] will be the one in which those very theoretical constructions—those without which we imagine we cannot take a step—are in the very process of being lived as ungrounded, unmoored, in tatters, but also, as recontextualized, reworked, in translation, as the very resources from which a postfoundational politics is wrought (1995, p. 131).

In this move, the concept of ruins is not about an epistemological skepticism taken to defeatist extremes, but rather about a working of repetition and the play of difference as the only ground we have in moving toward new practices (Butler, 1993a).

*Plateau 5: Loss and Lost, Lost, Lost*¹⁴

In a certain way, there is perhaps no voyage worthy of the name except one that takes place there where, in all senses of the word, one loses oneself, one runs such a risk, without even taking or assuming this risk: not even of losing oneself but of getting lost.

—Derrida, in Malabou and Derrida, 2004

My interest in this book is in a sort of historical/philosophical take on loss that particularly draws on Walter Benjamin’s ideas about mourning. While the work of mourning in the context of science will be addressed in a later chapter, in this section, I introduce what getting lost might mean as both methodology and mode of representation.

At its simplest, getting lost is something other to commanding, controlling, mastery. At its most complex, in a Lacanian register, we spend our lives with language trying to make it register what we have lost, longing for lost wholeness. Lack, lost, missing, absence: in the Lacanian world, the referential function is subject to endless substitutions of multiple self-losses, usually unconscious. In this linguistic sense of constitutive loss, meaning enters with the loss of the real, with lost objects, the mother’s breast being prime (Cohen, 1998, p. 96).

In a more historical sense of loss, a structural loss, Nietzsche spoke of the death of the old god as unspeakable loss. "How many new gods are yet possible?" was Zarathustra's bewildered cry and today we know this includes the loss of an innocent science too. Other losses include: the unitary, potentially fully conscious subject; researcher self-reflexivity as a "way out" of impasses in ethics and responsibility; and transparent theories of language. Lost also is the clear political object. The frame of our present has shifted across the postcommunist era to a state of "endless war" between neoimperialism and a terrorism without borders and, perhaps, even leaders (Hanley, 2005). Basic categories that have defined and animated oppositional discourses have lost their political purchase. Enlightenment categories of rationality, individual autonomy, and historical development are under suspicion, along with such terms as revolution, socialism, and proletarian democracy. Even feminism becomes a "dinosaur" discourse, the enabling fiction of an earlier generation. Duncker (1999), for example, refers to a "Jurassic feminism" meeting up with queer politics.

History, too, has "lost its way." The grand ideals that allowed us to read history in a particular direction, as a story of progress and emancipation, from the Industrial Revolution and the triumph of science over nature, to the emancipation of the working class, the victory of socialism, and the equality of women, no longer persuade. "All bets are off" as the social history of the 1970s "has lost its coherence as an intellectual project . . . and it has lost its prestige as the natural location for the more radical, innovative, and experimental intellectual spirit in the profession" (Eley, 1996, pp. 213, 225).

Across the disciplines, how to deal with such losses in ways other than nostalgia means accepting the disfigurements of language, loving what we do to ourselves with language (Cohen, 1998, p. 189) including the creative quality of loss itself. Derrida (1995) argues that knowledge that interrupts or derails absolute knowledge is knowledge that loses itself, "gets off the track" in order to expose itself to chance. This is Derrida's "as if to the being lost" (p. 289) in order "to learn by heart," knowledge from and of the other, thanks to the other, "where what it promises always leaves something to be desired" (p. 291).

Over the course of the book, the concept of getting lost functions as a paradox. It is a means of critiquing a certain confidence that research must muster in the audit culture. It is a metaphor for a new generation of postcritical work (Hoy, 2004). It is a way to engage a new interdisciplinarity that is able to question not just the nature of knowledge but its grounds of practice in postfoundational times. Here loss bears the very possibility of Foucault's (1970) idea that, finally, we can begin to think again. Given Derridean theories of the interminability of knowing in the face of the ineffability of the known, new losses are incurred by the necessary stabili-

zation of science. Such losses are just beginning to be thought about, in addition to a more Freudian sense of mourning and loss in the context of the social sciences (Britzman, 2003) and a more Benjaminian sensibility where to be lost is “to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery . . . a chosen surrender” in order to find what goes beyond what we know (Solnit, 2005, p. 6).

Getting Lost mines such concepts to track an ontology that circumvents foundations. From power and discourse in Foucault, justice and messianicity in Derrida, to being “lost in the Other” as ground of “future transfiguration” in Judith Butler (2004, p. 240), the book delineates the open-endedness of practical action as a structure of praxis and ethics within the context of postfoundational discourse theory.

In theorizing distinctions between loss and lost in working toward research practices that take into account the crisis of representation, how can writing the other not be an act of continuing colonization? To risk writing otherwise is not to find an innocent place, but to use the tensions as a way of learning how to live in de-authorized space. Texts that do justice to the complexity of what we try to know and understand include the tales not told, the words not written or transcribed, the words thought but not uttered, the unconscious: all that gets lost in the telling and the representing. My argument is that a stance of “getting lost” might both produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently in working toward more Deleuzean “stumbling” practices that take such losses into account.

What to be “rich in loss” might be made to mean is perhaps best evoked in Pitt and Britzman’s concept of “difficult knowledge” (2003), knowledge that works otherwise than to secure claims through data. Attempting to theorize the qualities of difficult knowledge, they distinguish between “lovely knowledge” and difficult knowledge. The former reinforces what we think we want from what we find, and the latter is knowledge that induces breakdowns in representing experience. Here, accepting loss becomes the very force of learning, and what one loves when lovely knowledge is lost is the promise of thinking and doing otherwise.

Plateau 6: Derridean Rigor as a Double(d) Science

Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition and a general *displacement* of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes.

—Derrida, 1982

The concept of “doubled” is key in deconstructive logic. A doubled reading offers itself without guarantee or “counter” axiology. Authority becomes contingent, “as an expression of a deeper and fundamental dispute *with authority as such*” (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 106, emphasis in original). Hence, a doubled practice must disable itself in some way, unmastering both itself and the pure identity it offers itself against, theorizing the double as a way to move in uneven space. Sometimes referred to as “under erasure,” what Derrida (1982, p. 329) writes of as “a double gesture, a double science, a double writing” intervenes in what it critiques by not only overturning the classical opposition but by a general displacement of the system (Nealon, 1993a, b). My interest in a feminist double(d) science, then, means both/and science and not-science, working within/against the dominant, contesting borders, tracing complicity. Here, the doubled task is to gain new insight into what not knowing means toward the telling of not knowing too much, and rigor becomes something other than asserting critical or interpretive mastery.

Derrida speaks of “deconstruction, if there is such a thing” (Caputo, 1997a). Invested in a nonauthoritarian mode of knowledge production, he stages knowledge that de-authorizes itself, that undermines itself through its own operations. Such knowledge recognizes that it differs from itself and will never arrive at plenitude. What is lost here is the unmediated referent that has historically authorized representation as well as certitude and instrumental transparency. Something other than cure and rectification, such knowledge is both affirmation and negation, critique and postcritical valorization, growing out of counterpractices of nonauthoritarian authority that are precisely what I hope to delineate.

It is here that I encounter the double(d) of the Derridean double session: “the deconstructive and the affirmative in an impure, tactical, and nonsynchronous coalition” that aligns projects of affirmation with destabilization of master discourses (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. 115). Doubled logic cannot abdicate its referential purchase on history and experience. What it abdicates is an axiomatic attitude to representation. Instead, it endorses a problematic attitude, a double reading that is both critique and complicity, a way to move beyond inside and outside. Key to a different logic, it is “the double necessity of working from within the institutional constraints of a tradition even while trying to expose what that tradition has ignored or forgotten” (Nealon, 1993a, p. 101). Rather than essence or origin, the double(d) marks the trial of undecidability as dispersion, dissemination, groundless ground, the always already divided origin, that which can never be mastered, sublated, or dialecticized (Derrida, 1981, p. 221).

One example of this double gesture is Foucault’s support of the resistance of people for their “rights,” where he paradoxically endorses such protest while simultaneously “submitting the same word to the theoretical and

“rhetorical work of decapitation, undoing, and reinscription” (Keenan, 1997, p. 166). This “ethico-political” gesture combines practical intervention in the existing relations of force with a philosophical problematizing of the very terms in which the gesture is made. Such a double move is undertaken “while refusing to allow either gesture to escape unscathed . . . Each moment of the double gesture undoes the other” (p. 170). Here, the risk, the chance of the political, is undertaken without guarantees, without opposition, without resolution, truly temporal, unprogrammable, necessary, and inevitable: an impossible praxis.

Plateau 7: A Praxis of Stuck Places

Morality, politics, responsibility, if there are any, will only ever have begun with the experience of the aporia. When the path is given . . . the decision is already made . . . The condition of possibility of this thing, responsibility, is a certain experience of the possibility of the impossible: the trial of the aporia from which one may invent the only possible invention: the impossible invention.

—Derrida, 1992b

Classically, praxis is the self-creative activity through which we make the world, *the* central concept of a Marxist philosophy that did not want to remain a philosophy, philosophy becoming practical (Bottomore, 1983, p. 386, emphasis in the original). For the Greeks, *praxis* was the realm of free action of citizens (free men), as distinct from *poiesis*, the servile action of necessity. Marx put together a practice of material transformation that brought these together in a relationship of reciprocity with a theorizing quite other to contemplation, “proposing to philosophy that it view itself in the mirror of practice” (Balibar, 1995, p. 41).

The idea of praxis has long given me much to think about and to do. My earlier articulation of “research as praxis” (Lather, 1986a) sought that intersection of material transformation through theory’s practice and practice’s theory. Reprinted in *Getting Smart* (1991), the chapter on research as praxis is the most cited part of the book, even though I now see it as full of unproblematized assumptions about the role of “transformative intellectuals,” ideology critique, a voluntarist philosophy of consciousness, and pretensions toward “emancipating” or “empowering” some others.¹⁵ The failure of most readers to trouble the foundationalism of my concept of “research as praxis” speaks, I think, to the yearning and unsettlement of the academic left, given the demise of humanism and regimes of transcendent generality on the one hand and the “conservative restoration” (Apple, 2001) on the other.

Refusing the much that must be refused in the Hegelian enclosure of dialectics, negative or not, is a tempting move in the face of the much that must be rethought: the concepts of certainty, morality, meaning, and praxis;¹⁶ resistance and agency (Pitt, 1998); the unconscious (Britzman, 1998); empowerment (Orner, 1992); rationalism and dialogue (Ellsworth, 1989, 1997; Leach, 1992); the list goes on. But I am entirely persuaded by poststructural theory that it is what seems impossible from the vantage point of our present regimes of meaning that is the between space of any knowing that will make a difference in the expansion in social justice and the canons of value toward which we aspire. That is precisely the task: to situate the experience of impossibility as an enabling site for working through aporias. Ellsworth calls this “coming up against stuck place after stuck place” as a way to keep moving in order to produce and learn from ruptures, failures, breaks, refusals (1997, pp. xi, 9).

Hence, my interest is a praxis that attends to poststructural suspicions of rationality, philosophies of presence, and universalizing projects, a praxis that moves away from the Marxist dream of “cure, salvation and redemption” (Felman and Laub, 1992, p. 177). Learning to see the imperialism of our continued investments in teleology, “persuasion,” consensus, and ideology critique premised on some “real” outside of discursive renderings, the task becomes not so much to invent or incite as to use praxis as a material force to identify and amplify what is already begun toward a practice of living on.

Plateau 8: Naked Methodology

We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or be present at everything and “know” everything.

—Nietzsche, quoted in Kofman, 1988

My interest in nakedness comes from the very material practice of time in hot tubs that has characterized Chris and my methodological wrestling in our study of women living with HIV/AIDS.¹⁷ Grounded in the hours spent in my co-researcher’s hot tub where we discussed the project, my interest in nakedness also comes out of a small research retreat in Wisconsin when this project was at its beginning. There, structured around each of seven women having two hours of “exquisite attention” for her work in any way she wanted, I stripped and sat in a jacuzzi in a bathroom surrounded by six dressed women who fired questions at me about the ethics and politics of what I was undertaking.¹⁸

As was evident at that session, such work pushes a lot of buttons for those invested in the politics of knowing and being known. This is as it should be. While naked methodology became a situated practice toward an ethical encounter with the women in our study, it is not about presenting myself as transparent, vulnerable, and absolutely frank. Based on Nietzsche's strong thesis that every word is also a hiding place, an apparent nakedness is but a mask that conceals a will to power. Any illusion of presence unmasked is interrupted by the difficult task Nietzsche invites us to: not to unmask and demystify but, rather, to multiply perspectives toward an affirmation of life as a means to knowledge without guarantee (Kofman, 1993). This is a rigor of staging and watching oneself subvert and revalue the naked truth in order to learn to live without absolute knowledge, within indeterminacy. Based on Derrida's thesis of necessary complicity and what Foucault cautions as the invasive stretch of surveillance in the name of the human sciences, such a project is situated in the loss of innocence of qualitative research, particularly feminist ethnography (Stacey, 1988; Van Maanen, 1995).

To situate inquiry as a laboratory for discovering the rules for the production of truth, I trouble the possibilities for "coming clean" in practices of researcher reflexivity. As June Nash (1997) notes, the first calls for reflexivity in anthropology came in the mid-1960s (p. 18), well before postmodernism appeared on the disciplinary scene. Visweswaran (1994) distinguishes between interpretive/reflexive and deconstructive ethnography. Reflexive ethnography authorizes itself by confronting its own processes of interpretation as some sort of cure toward better knowing, while deconstruction approaches "knowing through not knowing" (p. 80). In delineating reflexivity as a modernist practice, Felman's (1987) distinctions between Hegelian, Nietzschean, and Freudian philosophies of knowledge are useful. The former "*believes it knows all there is to know*;" a post-Nietzschean philosophy of knowledge is that "*which believes it knows it does not know*;" and a Freudian philosophy of knowledge is that where authority is given "to the instruction of a knowledge that does not know its own meaning, to a knowledge . . . that is not a mastery of itself" (p. 92, emphasis in original). Mindful of the dangers of reinscribing the potentially fully conscious, individualized, humanist subject, the possibilities of nakedness are theorized as a way to sketch the theory of representation that structures my methodological imperatives.

In this effort, Nietzsche invites us to learn to read well, to decipher the text in order to discover the drives toward mastery in a time when all concepts have lost their meaning, become dislocated, fragments of ruins, no more foundation. How does one manage to live in such a place where desires for the "naked truth" will not do? Nietzsche's best answer was an affirmation of the will that wills itself to illusion, knowing it will not perish without absolute knowledge (Kofman, 1993). The necessary multiplication of perspectives can

work toward the solution of the problem of value, “a pragmatism directed toward a use which is yet to come” (p. 127) that turns life into a means to knowledge, fuller of future by risking not being understood as one writes outside traditional norms.

No cure.
Immanent value.
Necessary perspectivalism.
It’s a good thing too (Fish, 1994).

Conclusion

This chapter has delineated what McWilliam (1993) terms “galloping theory” as we try to stay abreast of perpetually reforming knowledge problematics. About more than critical fashion, the motivation for such an effort is to engage in a transvaluative moment regarding the purposes of the social sciences: to further change the terms of the legitimation of knowledge beyond discrete methods and toward the social uses of the knowledge we construct. Caught between a rock of responsibility and a soft place of the received claims of scientism to one-best-way production and legitimation of knowledge, we live out these tensions.¹⁹ Now, in our time of the “rage for accountability” (Lather, 2004a, b) the “methodological fundamentalists” are having their moment; critical researchers are being written off as “ideologues” (Howe, 2004). What is at question is the adequacy of standard methods, the desirability of research and policy goals, and the philosophies of science that prescribe narrow views of these issues.

The crisis of legitimation occurring across knowledge systems is registered in a cacophony of postpositivism, nonfoundationalism, kinds of realism and postrealisms, warranted assertability, logic of inquiry, construct validity, carefully controlled inference, objectivism, situational validity, and Cronbachian insights regarding the decay of generalizations (Garrison, 1994). As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, feminist knowledges, too, are experiencing a crisis of legitimation as they face not just external critiques, but internal debates, critiques, and reflections on the meaning and scope of feminist methodology (Fonow and Cook, 2005).

Suffering from our categories of science and research and the failure of their promise to deliver, our practices are overcoded by the normative, our procedures and operations too much configured into repetitions of banality. To ask what makes certain possibilities impossible for us is to press our uncertainties and to calculate the apparatuses of our capture. What would it mean to create a different space in which to undertake other thinking, an aesthetic space, a political space? What would it mean to create new solidari-

ties, fragments of other possibilities, to experiment differently with meanings, practices, and our own confoundings?

The geography of such questions is very different from opposing a dominant culture considered radically other. It is, as well, to face “a loss that [is] no longer to be undone by willful reflection” (Hanssen, 2001, p. 78). This is about working within/against the dominant, contesting its borders, tracing our complicity, moving toward a double(d) science in order to capture the vitality of the deviations that elude taxonomies in addressing the question of practices of science within a postfoundational context.²⁰

Asking what becomes possible when *all* research is positioned as distressed and exceeded, I raise questions about the difficulties and limitations of the categories we use to do our work. Much thinking has been going on in such a place, particularly in the tensions across our paradigmatic divides. For those who have moved out from under a narrow scientificity, other practices are being rehearsed toward changing the social imaginary about research. Moving beyond the normalized apparatuses of our own training, a social science more answerable to the complications of our knowing is beginning to take shape. Feminist methodology has been no small contributor to “the changing shape of the thinkable” (Gordon, 1991, p. 3) and it is my fondest hope that this book can contribute to this continuing invention of ourselves into “the surprise of what is not yet possible in the histories of the spaces in which we find ourselves” (Rajchman, 1991, p. 163).