Qualitative Inquiry: Where Are the Ruins?

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Abstract

The article interrogates the notion of "the ruins" and its cognates (rupture, loss, failure, etc.) as productively destructive figures for postfoundational methodology and wonders how much damage has actually been done. Hoping for ruins, have scholars merely produced a picturesque gloss on the same old Enlightenment edifice? The author finds some promise in Deleuze's notion of the *stutter*, using this to look at what happens when the body surfaces in language. The author suggests that attention to the bodily entanglements of language, which qualitative method generally prefers to forget, can be put to work to perform a particular form of productive ruin commended by Deleuze—namely, the ruin of representation.

Keywords

qualitative methodology, poststructuralism, Deleuze, affect, language and materiality

Introduction

I want to use the notion of *ruins* as a way of opening up some questions about qualitative research.[1] I am particularly concerned here with postfoundational approaches that go under names such as *poststructuralism*, *postmodernism*, *deconstruction*, and so on. The figure of the ruins has been something of a rallying point for poststructuralist theory and methodology. Patti Lather wrote in the 1990s about "working the ruins" of feminist ethnography and critical pedagogy (Lather, 1997), and that notion of *working the ruins* was taken up as the title of the influential edited book by Bettie St. Pierre and Wanda Pillow (2000).

The ruins are a kind of shorthand for the crumbling edifice of Enlightenment values that have regulated theory and research for two centuries, such as belief in reason and progress, unmediated access to truth, and the agency of the centered, humanist self. The much-quoted "crisis of representation" is part of it too—the disintegration of a secure distinction between language and reality. And the notion of working the ruins is both an acknowledgment that the Enlightenment project is breaking down and a commitment to bringing forth a different kind of research out of those ruins—research that has lost its innocence and its faith in "victory narratives," that recognizes that its truths are always partial and provisional and that it can never fully know or rescue the other.

The figure of the ruins is, of course, not the only one that has animated qualitative inquiry after the postmodern turn, or those other turns that have been identified in the recent history of ideas—the linguistic turn, the literary turn, and so on. *Ruin* is just one term in a wider lexicon of uncertainty and disappointment that has emerged across the humanities and the social sciences, whose entries might include:

ruin	disappointment
failure	entanglement
disconcertion	getting stuck
unintelligibility	getting lost
bafflement	abjection
stuttering	rupture
haunting	trouble
mourning(etc.)[2]	

I am going to return to one of these alternate words, *stuttering,* below.

We have also seen a cast of postmodern characters, lurking, strolling, or dancing in the ruins of research—the trickster, nomad, flâneur, and so on. Not forgetting that figure of mischief par excellence—Woman:

trickster	angel
hybrid	mestiza
nomad	vampire
flâneur	dancer
cyborg	gangsta rapper
Woman (etc.)[3]	

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These dissembling characters have been conjured to problematize the image of the objective social scientist who thinks herself capable of producing disinterested truths and maintaining a safe distance between herself and the research participants. Equally, these postmodern figures of ambivalence are intended as a critique of the ethics of empathy and reciprocity: they mock the idea of the self-effacing researcher who clears a space for the voice of the authentic subject to be heard.

We have tried, then, in Patti Lather's (1996) words, to refuse "textual innocence" and the comforting simplicities of "an untroubled realism" (p. 539). We have looked for alternatives to what Gillian Fuller (2000, p. 84) called "the textual politics of good intentions" in our writing, realizing that the production of the innocent Other shores up our own self-certainty and replays colonial relations. We have tried to avoid boxy theories that lock their objects into the confined space of their explanations. Nigel Thrift (2008) calls them theories that "slide home like a bolt" (p. 2). Instead, we have looked to theory to defamiliarize, complicate, pervert, obstruct, proliferate. But I want to consider the question of how successful we have been at *putting theory to work* in the doing, thinking, and writing of research, in specific research projects and investigations. Are things as ruined as we have hoped? Is the Enlightenment project really as crumbly as we thought?

I want to stress that working the ruins is an ethical and a political project as well as a methodological one, and that it is, in my opinion, an honorable one. I am not proposing that it should be abandoned. And it is not my intention to criticize the work of particular researchers: in fact my own work has failed as much, if not more than anyone else's in managing to be ruinous. I am more concerned with *why* it has been so difficult to do research that works the ruins and why the Enlightenment project persists. It is important, I think, for those of us who have advocated, and tried to practice, postfoundational research to keep on questioning how far we have brought about those ruins that we have conjured so many times. If we fail to put that question to ourselves, our ruins risk being merely decorative. A picturesque gloss on the same old edifice.

How, Then, Have We Failed to Be Ruinous?

For a start, it has been hard to escape interpretive mastery and narrative coherence, even though we know that this keeps research subjects in their place and reinforces our own self-certainty. It has been difficult to divest ourselves of what D. A. Miller (1988) calls "the panoptic immunity" of the liberal subject, who is entitled to read and survey the lives of others, while maintaining the privacy of "an integrated, autonomous and 'secret' self" (p. 162).

It has been hard to avoid hierarchies of knowledge and linear thinking, partly because many of us are tethered by the grammar and the propositional logic of the European languages. Working the ruins is problematic when the given language speaks of levels and solid edifices—foundations, grounded theory, higher-order categories, and so on.

We have argued for new forms of relationality and responsibility, yet many of our "field" encounters are still regulated by liberal-humanist ethics and notions of "open" dialogue. This produces only knowledge that everyone can tolerate. And by forcing everyone to speak in the bland dialect of mutual regard, it suppresses idiom, diversity, affect, and conflict.

We have theorized decentered selves, partial knowledge, and layered accounts. But when it comes to analyzing the "data"—interviews, observations, documents, and so on—we often end up, once again, digging up themes or stacking up categories, or finding or enforcing innocence, literal meaning, and uncomplicated goodwill.

In short, poststructural theory has often failed to *make a difference* to the mundane practices of research and the kind of knowledge that it produces. So I want to turn now to some possible openings—if not for ruin, at least for some structural damage—to customary practices in qualitative inquiry.

A Return to the Empirical?

I think qualitative methodology first needs more, and more sustained, engagements with the opaque complexity of lives and things—with what would formerly have been called the empirical. As Patti Lather (2010) put it recently, perhaps we have not *earned* our theory. Often, writing on theory and methodology hangs in a discursive space that is fairly empty of examples, let alone the focus and challenge of a specific investigation or research project. Some of the reasons for this may be sociocultural—related to conditions of employment and research funding that encourage academics to make a choice between theory work and field work. In some places, there is a kind of division of labor in research, where those who engage with theory tend not to do much empirical research, and people who are employed on grants or contracts for specific research projects are not allowed or encouraged to be theoretically engaged.

Theory has not had enough of a chance, then, to proliferate through sustained entanglement and interference with its objects—with their details, their intransigent singularity, and their perplexing Otherness (see MacLure, 2010). It has not folded, deviated, and differed from itself in trying to get to grips with "data" whose complexity always exceed its reach. It has not grappled with the vertigo of sometimes seeming to float above the "feckless particular," as Rosalind Krauss (1993, p. 100) calls it, and at other times being

dragged and dispersed among its mundane detail. It has not pierced or eroded the solid walls of commonsense or received practice. It has not been ruinous.

I see some promise, though, in the recent reappearance of *empiricism* in philosophy and the social sciences and the possibility of a more materially engaged research practice. This is not empiricism as we formerly knew it. Brian Massumi (2002, p. 208) calls it an "expanded" empiricism, Patricia Clough (2009, p. 2) calls it "infra-empiricism," and both are working from Deleuze's (1994a) concept of "transcendental" empiricism (p. 181). It is an *infra*-empiricism because it attends to sensations, forces, and movements beneath the skin, in matter, in cells, and in the gut, as well as between individuals and groups. This kind of empiricism traces intensities of affect that move and connect bodies, subatomically, biologically, physically, and culturally. It does not privilege human interpretation or conscious perception, and the bodies that are animated by affect are by no means restricted to human bodies.

These new empiricisms are linked to the revival of interest in materiality and embodied knowledge, across a range of disciplines, including materialist feminism—for instance in the work of Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Karen Barad (2007), and Vicki Kirby (1997). This work is critical of the so-called linguistic turn in poststructural theorizing, because of its emphasis on the constitutive force of discourse and culture, at the expense of matter and nature. You can see this critique of discourse in the work of Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2008), who have been developing what they call a "postinterpretive empiricism" in their work on indigenous knowledge. They reject the ethical indifference of interpretivism, with its multiple discourses, in favor of a more ethically engaged method that is capable of bringing forth new material realities.

There are also interesting new possibilities around engagements with science. While many of us have spent a lot of time defending qualitative research against the banal and depleted kind of science that has been favored in neoliberal education policy—the discourse of rigor, randomized controlled trials, and so on (see St. Pierre, 2004)—there are interesting rapprochements under way with *other* sciences such as quantum mechanics, neuroscience, and chaos theory. In these sciences, distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research or between the human and the physical sciences are beginning to blur, since both are interested in issues such as: the complications of bodies and minds in thought and action; the significance of nonconscious, embodied activity; the distributed nature of cognition and agency; the role of emotion in decision making; the capacity of objects to interfere with measurement; and the insinuations of affect into language and subjectivity. In these sciences, order, structure, and equilibrium emerge out of movement and flow. Things solidify at thresholds, holding

together under "far from equilibrium conditions," as the terminology goes. In this kind of work, the border between science and the social becomes somewhat tenuous.

The Stutter: Language and Materiality

For the remainder of this article I want to focus in on one particular issue among those that I have floated so far and discuss some actual examples of contemporary research practice. It seems necessary to connect with examples in order to avoid repeating the problematic that I set out from—in other words, merely describing or floating above the ruins, rather than working them. So I want to look at the relationship between language and materiality and particularly at what happens when *the body* surfaces in language. I will suggest that attention to the bodily entanglements of language can be put to work to perform a particular form of productive ruin, namely, the *ruin of representation*. This phrase echoes the title of Dorothea Olkowski's (1999) book, "Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation."

What might it mean, then, to research with, and within, the ruin of representation? For Olkowski and Deleuze, representation refers not only to the mediation of reality by language. Representation is the entire logic of static hierarchy that—in Olkowski's (1999) words—"subsume(s) all difference under the one, the same and the necessary" (p. 185). In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), representation is tree-like or "arborescent" (p. 18). It organizes life in terms of genus and species, categories and instances, and can only cope with difference through relations of identity, similarity, analogy, or opposition, that is, relations based on resemblance or difference among already-formed entities. Within the schema of representation, things are frozen in the places allotted to them by the structure that comprehends them and are not able to deviate and divide from themselves to form anything new. Olkowski wants to bring about the ruin of representation so that she can develop "an ontology of change and becoming" that engages the dynamism and creative force of matter and difference without going through the deadening detour of representation (p. 211).

Nevertheless, language is a key element in the way representation captures difference for sameness. It is hard to escape the "common language of order-words" as Olkowski (1999, p. 124) puts it, citing Bergson. Order words are those words that are always already legitimated by institutions, issuing as if from a readymade self. Lyotard (1992) had something similar in mind when he compared everyday language to Orwell's "newspeak." For Lyotard, newspeak is the mode of the "already said" through which the status quo attempts to control the threat of difference—of that which resists or exceeds meaning (p. 107; see also MacLure,

2006). Deleuze (2004) argued that there is a second, non-representational dimension or tendency that subsists in language, hidden by the tremendous power of representation to cut into the flow of difference to bring forth stable referents, meanings, and speaking subjects. Deleuze calls this other tendency a "wild discourse" or a "becoming-mad" of language that slides over its referents and transcends its own limits, restoring language to the open potential of becoming (pp. 3, 4). This wild discourse does not *mediate* anything. It does not refer outside of itself or build toward some higher fulfillment. And it does not emanate from, or attach itself to, an already formed, phenomenological subject.

For Deleuze (1994b), the way to mobilize this paradoxical logic inhering in language is—in his famous formulation—to "make the language system *stutter"* (p. 24). To make language interfere with its own tendency toward homogeneity, categorization, and equilibrium so that it begins to "vibrate," releasing variation and singularity. However, as Deleuze (1989) notes, it is difficult to make language itself stutter, and we may think we have managed it when, in fact, we have only described or impersonated stuttering. Thinking we are bringing forth the new, we may still be caught in the repetitious production of what he calls "everyday banality" (p. 164).

This brings me to the issue of *linguistic experimentation* in qualitative research. For there have been many attempts to make language "stutter" in research within the postmodern or poststructural turn—to unsettle the foundations and structure of academic language in order to release something unrecognizable, and therefore, something that could escape the structures of power, subjectivity, and colonialism that are coded in the writing of qualitative research. We have seen attempts to write qualitative research differently, under the influence of literary theory, deconstruction, and the experimental ethnography of the mid-1980s. Research has been written in the form of play scripts, fairy tales, poems, novellas, and confessions. It has been done in innovative textual formats, with split pages to register dissonant voices, or to unsettle the authority of arguments before they have had time to solidify. We have had footnotes speaking back to the "main" text and different fonts for multiple voices. I have done many of these things myself.

I want to make one important point here*: linguistic experimentation is not enough.* If a play script is just a matter of converting propositions into spoken turns in a not-very-interesting dialogue, it will not make language stutter. If interpretation is merely written up, or dressed up, in the style of a fairy tale, it will not make the language stutter. Multiple voices will not make language stutter, if each voice is that of an intact phenomenological subject and the voices are orchestrated and surveyed by the off-stage writer-researcher. At worst, as Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins (2008) argue, multiple voices keep the fiction of democracy and equity in play, but they displace the material reality of

the researched in favor of multiple interpretations and undermine the prospect of political action by disseminating uncertainty.

So to make language stutter, we need somehow to interrupt its usual workings. One way of doing this is to refuse to forget the *bodily* engagements of language: the way speech comes from the body—from the lungs and the entrails, issuing from the mouth, yet tied to the movements of tongue. Speech affects other bodies, registering not only in the brain and the ears, but in the heartbeat and the skin, in the sensations that we learn, later, to label surprise, boredom, shame, or interest. Indeed the predicament of stuttering encapsulates the entanglement of body and language—it lodges in the body but gets expressed in the language system. The stutter is a point of vibration and impasse where sound is no longer a bodily noise—such as a cough or a yawn—but still cannot quite free itself from the body and deliver itself up to the discipline of syntax and the logic of propositions.

Sounds belong, then, both to language and bodies. But as Dorothea Olkowski (1999) notes, "If sounds remain attached to bodies as qualities, then the sound is that of a body eating or of a body sleeping, yawning, chewing, slobbering, sputtering, choking" (p. 222). Something needs to happen to transform bodily noises into elements of the linguistic system. In Deleuze's (2004) words,

> To render language possible thus signifies assuring that sounds are not confused with the sonorous qualities of things, with the sound effects of bodies, or with their actions and passions. What renders language possible is that which *separates* sounds from bodies and organizes them into propositions, freeing them for the expressive function. It is always a mouth which speaks: but the sound is no longer the noise of a body which eats—a pure orality—in order to become the manifestation of a subject expressing itself. (p. 208; italics added)

Language is only possible, then, when sound enters into a new relationship with bodies, and this happens, Deleuze writes, when something traces a line that becomes a frontier between body and language, things and propositions—something that, nevertheless, does not exist apart from the proposition that expresses it or the body from which it issues. This something that is nothing is sense or the pure event.

I will not dwell on the nature of sense here—though it is everywhere implicated in my arguments. Instead, I want to focus on what happens when that frontier line between proposition and thing, language and body is *not* properly drawn, and the body rises up into language. It happens that traces of bodily stuff—animal noises, moist emissions, and visceral rumblings—do sometimes seep or irrupt into language, with ruinous effect. And with considerable social

and educational implications. One of the most powerful manifestations of class, ethnic and other forms of hostility, for instance, involves the reintrojection of the body into language.

Consider these three examples from newspaper articles, in which journalists express disgust at "nonstandard" English speech, and therefore also, disgust toward the speakers themselves (all quoted in MacLure, 2003).

The grunters . . . swarm noisily past my windows between 11 and half past on Fridays and Saturdays after an evening in the nearby pub. They shout, gurgle and gobble in a largely consonant-free stream of noisy and incomprehensible dipthongs, among which the only recognizable—and oft-repeated—word invariably begins with the letter "f." (Susan Elkins, newspaper columnist).

Then she was interviewed. Out of the mouth of this serious, pretty girl came an impenetrable, sublit- erate dialect. (Janet Daley, newspaper columnist, reviewing a television documentary on young home- less people).

I once found myself alone in a no-smoking com- partment of a corridor train to Glasgow. An ambas- sador for that city lurched into the compartment and crashed down opposite me. He took out a bottle of cider, rolled himself a cigarette, leant across to me and belched, "Ye git a light, Jimmy"? For almost an hour I humored him, chided him, remonstrated with him, fearful for the safety of the Indian conductor who I knew was coming down the train (and who wisely passed us by). My reeking companion demanded attention like a 2-year-old. He told me his so-called life story, requested money with menaces, swore, and eventually relieved himself into the seat.

Reading Mr. Kelman's book was a similar experi- ence. (Simon Jenkins, reviewing a novel by James Kelman, written in the Scottish dialect of Glasgow).

These expressions of disgust at "nonstandard speech" issued in the context of an English national curriculum pol- icy document in 2002, which had demanded that all chil- dren should be taught to speak "Standard English," the prestige dialect of the educated middle and upper classes in England. This has been a recurring demand in the United Kingdom for at least 200 years, and it is indissolubly linked to class and racial antagonism, even when it is also part of neoliberal arguments around "entitlement" to social or eco- nomic goods. What interests me here is the visceral nature of the journalists' class antipathy. Their disgust at nonstan- dard speech seeps and spurts out in the language of bodily emissions and animal noises. In this language of intestinal revulsion, dialect speech issues "out of the mouth" of a pretty girl; incomprehensible dipthongs discharge in a

"stream," and speech is figured as the sound of the internal organs processing their waste—as grunt, gobble, gurgle, or belch. Or associated with waste itself—as piss and reek.

The columnists' revulsion registers, and deploys, the affects that move in the depths of bodies. Their disgust undoes the line that sense draws between body and mean- ing, making the body surge up to the surface of language. The columnists also register the *synesthetic* nature of affect—the way in which sound, smell, touch, and vision are mutually implicated. Brian Massumi (2002) defines affect as the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected and writes, "Affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other" (p. 35). The columnists orient also to the implication of *movement* in the affectual agitation of speech, which here issues from bodies that "swarm," "lurch," and "crash" in threatening motion.

I want to suggest that these commentators are registering— malignantly—something that linguists, liberal educators, and qualitative researchers often overlook; that is, the mate- riality inherent in language, and the affects that move in, and connect bodies. What the columnists do not of course register is the fact that, as speakers, we *all* gobble, gurgle, and spill our guts. In the case of qualitative research, the suppression of materiality happens even though the *spoken* voice is central to the research endeavor. In interviews, case studies, "participant observation," and so on, people are speaking to one another. Yet much of what constitutes voice evades capture or prompts its own erasure from the official texts of research, which prefer to forget that speech issues from our insides (see MacLure, 2009). As Zali Gurevitch (1999, p. 527) notes, this is coded in the double meaning of *tongue*, as both a part of the body, and a word for language itself. The tongue is the place where the exertions of "dumb matter" and the logic of the symbolic order (i.e., language) are played out. Stuttering.

Here is another example, where the body surfaces—this time into a research text. This is an analytic note from an ethnographic study of how young children in their first year at school, at age 5, come to be seen as a problem in terms of their behavior (MacLure, Jones, Holmes, & MacRae, in press).[4] The note refers to a meeting of the project team, Liz Jones, Christina MacRae, Rachel Holmes, and myself.

Today's discussion was touched off by Christina's account of a nervous child (not in our "sample") who is causing a lot of consternation among staff because she keeps being sick—primarily in the dinner hall. Vomiting on the other children's food and so on. Now starting to be sick even at the mere mention of food. Teacher seems to think she's doing it on pur- pose or being manipulative or at least not trying hard enough *not* to do it. Also a bit of criticism of the parents for (somehow) not nipping this sort of thing in the bud. . . . Children seem to get "locked in" to a

particular behavior (though, again, what does this mean?). . . . The vomiting child—like the ones who poo and pee in the "wrong" place, and perhaps the ones who bite, seem to cause particularly visceral feelings of revulsion in adults.

In this note, the body comes to the surface rather literally, in the child's repeated vomiting. One of the things that is interesting about it is how the school staff attempt to bring the vomiting into the scheme of representation—that is, they assume that the child's vomiting *means* something, that it emanates from a subject (the child) who is intentionally communicating something, that it signifies something. The vomiting is not, therefore, seen just as a bodily process, but as representational, that is, as a sign of something else.

But notice also that we, as researchers, were trying to do the same thing, that is, asking what the vomiting means. We too wanted to "capture" the irruption of the body for signification—to draw it up into the representational regime of research, with its priorities on analysis and interpretation. The questions posed by the irruption of the body into the abstraction of meaning are unanswerable. Yet they cannot be dismissed. They produce, I think we could say, a kind of *stuttering* of interpretation itself. A small ruin of representation, which allowed us to think that a child might be affected by other bodies, that the external world of the classroom might impinge on her in ways that do not necessarily pass through language and that are not, therefore, susceptible to conventional practices of interpretation.

We noticed this dynamic many times in the course of our early childhood research (though we did not formulate it in this way at the time): the point at which interpretation stutters and the rage for explanation (by teachers and ourselves) turns back on itself in a kind of vibrating immobility. Or an *impassibility*, to use another of Deleuze's (2004, p. 109) words. One such example concerned Hannah, who would not, or could not, say her name during the morning ritual of taking the register (MacLure, Holmes, Jones, & MacRae, 2010). Hannah's silence—something that is, and is not, part of the linguistic system—caused interpretation to stutter, exposing the rage for explanation—almost a literal rage at times—on the part of school staff, parents, and researchers.

Instances such as these, where bodily matters resist incorporation into representational schemata, but at the same time seem to demand this, reveal the routine machinations of representation in education and research. Children's actions and affects are read as instances of something more abstract—such as "behavior." They are treated as signs that point to something else. When Brent turns up several times in wet clothes, from jumping in puddles on his way to school, this is seen by his teacher as a *sign* of his mother's failure to teach him how to behave properly. A child's expressionless face when being reprimanded by an adult is read as a *sign* of insolence or not being sorry enough.

We would argue, though we could be misleading ourselves, that those moments when our capacity for interpretation faltered or stuttered—when our representational schemata were ruined, if only fleetingly— allowed something *new* to emerge in our thought about children, education, and research. We began to wonder about the limits of rationality as a basis for understanding and interventions around behaviour. We became more attuned to the continuous emotional work that goes on in early childhood education, as children are taught to value and exhibit a very small repertoire of emotions and dispositions, such as being kind, sharing, liking one another, and so on. We called this the "orthopedics of affect"—the formation of a small number of officially sanctioned emotions out of the flux of affects (MacLure et al., in press). We started to ask what happens to all the other affects that move in and through children and adults and how children handle the disjunctions between these and the official emotional repertoire.

We also began to look to art as a provocation to the "everyday banality" of our own ways of seeing children. We made a short, fragmentary film that aimed to release more of the affects that haunt our views of children, and less of the developmental and psychological categorising that pre-explains and pre-judges so much of what children do and say (see MacLure, Holmes, MacRae, & Jones, 2010).

I am not suggesting that we could, or should, abandon representation or stop researching culture and discourse. But one productive question for research, and for education, might be how to work the ruins of representation at least long enough to engage the bodily intensities of affect that swarm in language—and mobilize these creatively. We might glimpse more of the sociocultural and symbolic *capture* of affect and how this is often mobilized for the ideological work of race, class, or other forms of oppression.

One further example: Hosu Kim, a Korean American researcher, makes language stutter in a piece called "The Parched Tongue," published in the book edited by Patricia Clough and Jean Halley (2007), *The Affective Turn*. "The Parched Tongue' stutters in an English broken by Korean broken by English, registering the contortions of the tongue and the longings of the language learner, mixed with the rhythmic strokes of a loving Korean mother disciplining her child into reading, and the forgotten loss of Korean babies given up for adoption, and the desirous envy of the smooth tongue of a fellow student. Hosu Kim (2007) calls her piece a "mouth-work" (p. 35), where eating and speaking take place, and change place, on the surface of the tongue that seeks comfort in American chocolate bars and struggles to utter the alien words on which a better life depends.

The following excerpt, conjuring an English lesson at school, registers that synesthetic quality of speech mentioned above—a mingling of smell, touch, and taste, as well as sight and sound, and its connection with sensations such as shame and desire:

A classmate sitting by laugh at me trying English
Got blushed and stopped
A word of English couldn't get out of my mouth quite
   awhile
afterwards
Although I couldn't figure out what I did wrong
I felt ashamed of my tongue
I felt ashamed of my shame

And yet, I heard her speaking english sounds much
   smoother,
and tender
Like her smell with floral soap breeze
Like the precious banana taste we occasionally had
   in our
childhood

Her English never felt with my breathed-like kimchee-
   smell english.
We all adore her . . . (Kim, 2007, pp. 36-37)

And this next extract expresses the embodied experience of linguistic prejudice and the shame of linguistic imperialism, in mouths that seek status in Japanese words and comfort in American chocolate bars:

Hey, gooks; ching chang chong
I often felt
puzzled and pondered.
Then maybe not a matter of fluency and mastery in
   English.
My tongue already and always surfaces the Other
Re-membering our tongue has been embodiment of
   shame, pain,
violence
Our grandmothers speaking with Japanese words
   here and there
In boasted speech implying, "I am civilized and mod-
   ernized"
Our mothers' memory of tongue indulged by and suc-
   cumbing to
M&M's, candy bars, Skippy peanut butter, powdered
   milk,
caramels,
All sweets from C-ration box of *mi-goon-boo-dae**
   (Kim, 2007, p. 39)

*US military base

The "parched tongue" that works imperfectly in the mouth of the Korean immigrant stutters in faulty translations across time, geography, and language to register, in Patricia Clough's (2007) words, the effects of "the American Dream gone nightmarish" in "a broken English gone poetic" (p. 5).

One way of working the ruins of representation might therefore be to focus on those phenomena that lie at the limits of language and the body, that qualitative research generally prefers, or needs to forget: stuff of the body, of affects, and the inchoate feelings that swarm in among our supposedly rationalist arguments, undoing our certainty and our self-certainty. The tendency for affect to seep into rational argument is particularly noticeable, I think, in critiques of postmodernism, which often have a hyperbolic, if not slightly hysterical flavor. For instance, here is the sociologist of education, Michael Young, warning of the "*extremes* of voice discourse," which he associates with postmodernist theory:

> The intellectual dishonesty and potential harm that can be caused by voice discourse theorists needs to be pointed out loudly and clearly. . . . "Voice discourse" theorists are often clever and, in appearing to be democratic both in their deference to the experience of so-called "real people" and in their critique of expertise, they are also seductive. In rejecting the claims for any kind of objective knowledge, the logic of their position is nihilist and leads to the cynicism of social scientists who reject the grounds of their own practice or, as in the case of Baudrillard, give up social science altogether. If taken seriously, as some in Germany and elsewhere took Nietszche, the rejection of any grounds for knowledge can lead to the view that the only question is who has the power to impose their view of the world. (Young, 2000, p. 534) [5]

The anxiety and repulsion that often infuses critiques of postmodernism, and the distinctly personal flavour of the antagonism, are responses, I think, precisely to the threat that postmodernism seems to pose to the order of representation and the apparent debasement of the purity of truth or the power of ideas (see MacLure, 2010). But the offence of postmodernism—its tendency to affect critics like a bad smell as much as a bad idea—testifies to the submerged circulation of affect in *all* acts of thought and decision making.

We could also pay more attention, in qualitative research, to the irruption into data of those emissions that lie on the boundaries of language itself—such as laughter, gasps, tears, sneers, snorts, and silences. And to those speech acts that obstruct the work of analysis, making it hard to break things up into categories or boil them down into themes.

I have in mind problematic speech acts such as mimicry, mockery, jokes, lies, irrelevance, and contradiction. These sorts of phenomena are often disconcerting—both in the field, where they often make us feel uncomfortable, and at the point of data analysis, if we cannot find rational ways of accounting for them, other than counting them out as superficial or as accidents.

It might be more useful, though, to treat all these problematic phenomena as hot spots—moments of productive *disconcertion*, to use Michael Taussig's (1993) term, which manifest themselves affectively. Instead of the cerebral comforts of ideas and findings, or as well as these,

we could focus on moments of nausea, vertigo, disgust, embarrassment, guilt, fear, or fascination in the research process. These gut feelings point to the existence of embodied connections with others that are far more complex, and potentially more wondrous, than the static connections that we often assume between self and other, researcher and researched.

Perhaps we could try not to flee from these disconcerting sensations—those moments when we feel the body surging into the serious work of cognition, threatening to bring about the ruin of representation—and instead treat them as possible openings onto *wonder.* This might seem like a strange opening to look for. Yet Brian Massumi (2002, p. 239) considers wonder to be the proper business of philosophy, which he describes as "the activity dedicated to keeping wonder in the world." Like those other disconcerting affects, wonder is felt in the body as well as the mind, and it baffles the order-building structures of representation. "The experience of wonder," writes Stephen Greenblatt (1991, p. 20), "seems to resist recuperation, containment, ideological incorporation," while for Mauriès (2002, p. 249) it is "the contemplation of *otherness.*" Resistant to capture by ideology or language, wonder could be the proper business, not only of philosophy but also of qualitative inquiry.

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Notes

1. This article is based on a keynote presentation of the same name to the New Zealand Association for Research in Education Conference, University of Auckland, December 6-9, 2010.
2. *ruin*—St. Pierre & Willow (2000); *failure*—Visweswaran (1994); *disconcertion*—Taussig (1993); *unintelligibility*— Britzman (1995) and St. Pierre (2000); *bafflement*—Krauss (1993); *stuttering*—Deleuze (2004); *haunting, mourning*— Derrida (1994); *disappointment*—Stronach & MacLure (1997); *entanglement*—Bal (1999); *getting lost, getting stuck*—Lather (1998); *abjection*—Kristeva (1982), Butler (1993); *rupture*—Derrida (1978); *trouble*—Butler (1990).
3. *trickster*—Gates (1988), Haraway (1992); *hybrid*—Bhabha (1994); *nomad*—Braidotti (1994); *flâneur*—Jenks (1995); *cyborg*—Haraway (1991); *angel*—Lather (1997); *mestiza*— Anzaldúa (1999); *vampire*—Case (1991); *dancer*—Rambo

Ronai (1998); *gansta rapper*—McLaren (1995); *Woman*— Derrida (1981).
4. The research was funded by the U.K. Economic and Social Research Council. Project title: "Becoming a Problem: How and Why Children Acquire a Reputation as "Naughty" in the Earliest years at School" (Reference: RES—062-23-0105).
5. This example is discussed at more length in MacLure (2009).

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Bio

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