A Brief and Personal History of Post Qualitative Research
Toward "Post Inquiry"

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I PRESENTED MUCH OF THIS ESSAY THAT REVIEWS MY OWN HISTORY with what I have called "post qualitative research" (St.Pierre, 2011, 2013; Lather & St.Pierre, 2013) as a keynote address at the 2013 34th Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice. Writing that conference paper was helpful not only in thinking about the past but also in thinking about the possibilities of our work going forward in what some in the humanities and social sciences are calling the "ontological turn," as were comments and questions from the audience, several of which I address here.

In this paper, I highlight three key periods in my history as a social science researcher. The first was an early encounter (St.Pierre, 1995), followed by ongoing difficulty, with the incommensurability between postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism and other approaches that I refer to together here as the "posts" and "conventional humanist qualitative methodology" (St.Pierre, 2011, 2013) or "1980's qualitative methodology" (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erickson, 1986). That period included an attempt to use post theories to critique, to deconstruct, to "work the ruins" (St.Pierre & Pillow, 2000) of that methodology in order to make it unintelligible and "produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (St.Pierre, 1997, p.175). I think, however, we were more comfortable with the posts' epistemological critiques than we were with their possibilities for rethinking ontology.

For me, that period ended when I shifted from a critique of that methodology to its defense in response to the neo-positivism in the debates about what counted as rigorous, high-quality, "scientifically based research" (SBR) as described in the 2002 *No Child Left Behind Act* and the 2002 National Research Council report, *Scientific Research in Education*. During that second period, which spanned the first decade of the 21st century, we repeated the critique of positivist social science already accomplished by those who had invented qualitative methodology twenty years earlier. It was like living in a time warp as we responded to those who were "paradigms behind" (Patton, 2008, p. 269), those who had missed all the turns—e.g., the social turn, the cultural turn, the linguistic turn, the postmodern turn, and so on.

In a third, recent period, weary from defending a qualitative methodology I'd never been able to reconcile with postmodernism, I, and others, again took up its critique focusing especially on ontological issues, many of which were described by poststructural scholars half a century earlier. Of course, the linear description I just invented glosses the complexity of several decades of social science research during which everything also happened at once.

Nonetheless, I suspect my history is similar to that of others of my generation who were trained in humanist qualitative methodology even as they *separately* studied postmodern critiques of the humanist epistemology and ontology that makes that methodology unthinkable. Over the years, it has become abundantly clear to me that methodology should never be separated from epistemology and ontology (as if it can be) lest it become mechanized and instrumental and reduced to methods, process, and technique. Looking back now, I know that I read Deleuze so early in my doctoral program that the ontology of humanist qualitative methodology could never make sense. For me and others like me, that methodology was ruined from the start, though we didn't quite know it at the time.

In 2011, I deliberately used the rather large and ambiguous term "post qualitative" to mark what I see as the impossibility of an intersection between conventional humanist qualitative methodology and "the posts." Acknowledging that impossibility can help clear the way for what I hope will be a multitude of different possibilities for post qualitative inquiry—perhaps for *post inquiry*— and I offer two of those here.

First, if social science researchers put aside conventional humanist qualitative methodology, which I think has become monolithic and stifling, they might actually *use* the productive analyses provided by the "posts"—e.g., Foucault's *archaeology, genealogy, and power-knowledge reading*; Deleuze and Guattari's *rhizoanalysis and schizoanalysis;* Derrida's *affirmative deconstruction*; Lyotard's *paralogy* (Spivak, 1993, p. 274)—to think about what puzzles them. But, to repeat, I'm not sure how one can think those analyses *with* conventional humanist qualitative methodology because their epistemological and ontological commitments don't align. For example, it's not clear to me how one would use Foucault's (1971/1972) *archaeology* in a qualitative interview study given that he wrote throughout *The Archaeology Of Knowledge and the Discourse on Knowledge* that he was not interested in the "speaking subject." I would argue that post analyses require a different approach *from the beginning,* and I encourage my students who want to use those analyses to begin with Foucault or Derrida or Deleuze and not with the conventional qualitative research process. So the first possibility of post qualitative inquiry would be to use the post analyses already available.

Putting aside conventional humanist qualitative methodology at the beginning also enables a second possibility, work that some are calling the "new empiricism" (e.g., Clough, 2009) and the "new materialism" (e.g., Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010; Mol, 2002) organized under the "ontological turn." This work is quickly spreading through the humanities and social sciences as scholars insist we engage the ontological, which is too often ignored in the epistemological rage for meaning that centers the Cartesian knowledge projects privileged in the academy, including conventional humanist qualitative methodology. I will discuss this possibility later in this essay.

To sum up my personal history, an early disconnect between conventional humanist qualitative methodology and the "posts" led me, first, to deconstruct that methodology. That deconstruction was interrupted by the politics, power, and positivism of scientifically based research so that I spent too many years defending both qualitative methodology and postmodernism. At this time, scholars have renewed that earlier deconstruction by engaging,

especially, the ontological critiques of the posts to see where they might take us. I believe we are at the beginning of this work, especially in educational research, and what might happen to inquiry in *post inquiry* is not at all clear.

Critique in the "Posts"

So what does critique look like in the posts and what does it get us? How would one critique conventional humanist qualitative methodology using poststructural approaches? Foucault (1988), for example, wrote,

> Critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, [on] what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest. (p. 154)

It's important to highlight here that Foucault included in his description of critique both the epistemological (modes of thought) and the ontological (practices enabled by modes of thought). He went on to explain that after identifying and questioning assumptions of the taken-for-granted, "one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, [and] transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible" (p. 155). In this regard, he wrote that his role was

> to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes that have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. (1982/1988, p. 10)

In this way, critique is a practice of freedom for Foucault.

I believe Foucault's description of critique is useful for two reasons. First, it doesn't require the rejection of an existing structure, and I want to be clear that I'm not rejecting conventional humanist qualitative methodology. If one accepts its humanist assumptions, it makes sense. However, if one doesn't accept them, it doesn't. Second, Foucault's critique is useful because it addresses ontology as well as epistemology, and this is very important because the critique of humanist ontology is driving much post qualitative inquiry.

Derrida (1972) offered a similar approach to critique by explaining that deconstruction is not an exposure of error but a very serious, careful reading that identifies contradiction in a structure, contradiction that, he wrote, "overturns and displaces a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated" (p. 329). It's important to note that Derrida, like Foucault, included the material (the nonconceptual) as well as the discursive (the conceptual) in his description of deconstruction. The displacement of a material-discursive structure enables something else to be thought and to happen, and, in that way, deconstruction, too, can be called a practice of freedom. As I noted earlier, I argue that the structure of conventional humanist qualitative methodology is so deeply marked by contradiction that it deconstructs itself and, so, can be displaced.

So, for both Foucault and Derrida, critique does not begin with the assumption that what exists is wrong or in error; rather, critique examines the assumptions that structure the discursive and the nondiscursive, the linguistic and the material, words and things, the epistemological and

the ontological in order to foreground the historicity and, so, the *unnatural* nature of what exists. As Rorty (1986) eloquently explained, "if we once took seriously the notion that we only know the world and ourselves under a description" (p. 48), we might choose to rewrite that description and then perhaps re-describe the world and ourselves. In other words, we could refuse to repeat the same descriptions. Perhaps we could be-do-live something different. This is the agency, the freedom of the posts, to "refuse what we are" (Foucault, 1982, p. 216), what we do, the world we create. And, as Foucault noted, once we understand that, our work becomes very urgent, very difficult, and quite possible.

In my critique of conventional humanist qualitative methodology, I've kept Foucault's and Derrida's understandings of critique in mind. To repeat, I don't claim that the structure of humanist qualitative methodology is wrong or in error. I do argue, however, that its assumptions about the nature of inquiry are grounded in Enlightenment humanism's description of human being, of language, of the material, the empirical, the real, of knowledge, power, freedom, and so on and, therefore, are incommensurable with the descriptions of those concepts in the posts (see St.Pierre, 2000).

Deconstruction: Trouble from the Beginning

As I wrote earlier, I came to qualitative methodology and to poststructural theories at the same time, but separately, when I began my doctoral studies at The Ohio State University in 1991 and took classes with both Patti Lather and Laurel Richardson. Much was happening in the social sciences at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century. At Ohio State, Lather published her first book, *Getting Smart*, in 1991; and, in a writing class, Richardson gave us a draft of her classic chapter, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry," which was published in the 1994 first edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. I remember how hard it was to read *Getting Smart*. I was lost immediately, took copious notes, and realized at some point that I was mostly just copying the book. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* had been published in 1990, the year before I began my doctoral program, and it, too, was too hard to read. In 1990, Linda Nicholson published an edited collection titled, *Feminism/Postmodernism*, so we finally had some books that helped us think feminism with postmodernism, books that, in fact, transformed both feminism and postmodernism.

At that time, translations of the French poststructuralists' work were just being published, and there were still many French texts to be translated and not many secondary sources that provided commentary or critique. Foucault died in 1984, and translations of his interviews and essays were slowly published in various collections. Those who could read French cited the French editions of Foucault's, Derrida's, Deleuze's, Deleuze and Guattari's, Lyotard's, and Baudrillard's work; the rest of us were in the dark. Not many educators or educational researchers in the U.S. used poststructural theories at that time; and some academics, without reading that literature closely, accused the "posts" of being relativistic, nihilistic, deliberately obfuscatory and then just dismissed them. That problem persisted in the next decade's debates about scientifically based research.

In 1991, qualitative methodology had just been invented and was still considered radical. Even early descriptions of the new methodology drew on conflicting humanist knowledge projects: interpretive, critical, and positivist approaches in the social sciences. Greatly influenced by the interpretive turn and the interpretive anthropology described in Geertz's (1973)

classic book, *The Interpretation of Culture*, early qualitative methodologists were also influenced by the critical turn and the social justice projects of feminists, race scholars, gay and lesbian scholars, and others who demanded action and not just interpretation. Nonetheless, much of that early methodological literature was unable to escape the entrenched positivism brought to the U.S. early in the 20th century when some of the Vienna Circle's logical positivists fled Nazi Germany and immigrated to the U.S. With promises of prediction and, so, the control of society, logical positivism quickly gained prominence and influence, so much so that, as Steinmetz (2005) explained, logical positivism is now the "epistemological unconscious" of the U.S. social sciences, dominating fields like psychology and economics.

When I began my doctoral program in 1991, there were not many qualitative methodology textbooks and few journals that published qualitative work, so qualitative researchers began new journals and become editors of others in order to publish their research. The first volume of the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* had been published in 1988; and the first volume of the journal, *Qualitative Inquiry*, wasn't published until seven years later in 1995.

In an analysis of the l980s qualitative methodology literature, I found that the structure was confused from the beginning as it tried, unsuccessfully, to move away from positivism toward the interpretive and critical social sciences. For example, even texts that claimed to be "interpretive" or "critical" retained positivist structuring concepts like *objectivity, bias, data, coding data, grounded theory, saturation, audit trails, inter-rater reliability, triangulation,* and *systematicity,* even as they introduced phenomenological concepts like *voice, lived experience, narrative* and/or critical concepts like *authenticity, agency, emancipation, transformation, social justice,* and *oppression*. The structure, indeed, deconstructs itself.

I don't know the history of teaching qualitative methodology, and if someone hasn't done that study, it would be a fine project. I do know that by 1991 Patti Lather had developed a three-course sequence in qualitative methodology in education at Ohio State and that Laurel Richardson was teaching qualitative research courses in sociology. So, by 1991, when I began my doctoral studies, qualitative methodology had become a recognizable structure, a discursive and material formation with its own rules and regularities for producing objects of knowledge, including people. Following Foucault (1971/1972), one might conclude that it had reached the threshold of a *positivity* that was "accepted, institutionalized, [and] transmitted" (p. 178). At any rate, it was well on its way to becoming real in the texts we wrote, in the courses we taught, and in the concepts and practices that constituted it and that it, in turn, enabled. We not only used it to produce knowledge, we also made it an object of knowledge. We methodologists studied it, and in that scholarship, we divided, proliferated, and elaborated it so that we now have entire books and handbooks and university courses on, for example, research designs, interviewing, coding data, writing fieldnotes, and so on.

Importantly, we must acknowledge that qualitative methodology participates in and continues the centuries-old history of Cartesian knowledge projects—ferreting out what is known only in not being known —yet. Given the nature of the historical and political period following World War II, it's not surprising that epistemology—knowledge, knowledge, knowledge—was front and center across the humanities and social sciences. We had witnessed world-wide devastation caused by the "knowledge for knowledge's sake" approach of state science. We had invented the atomic bomb because we could and then used it to kill millions. In the concentrations camps of Europe, scientists experimented on, tortured, and killed human subjects for the sake of knowledge. We knew that our universities had been complicit with the

war machine, inventing and feeding knowledge to the military to conquer and subdue. We had unleashed science and technology, and they were our new gods. We were convinced that scientific knowledge was the cure for the world's ills.

But we had also created a desire for other kinds of knowledge. Those who had gone to war knew well that different cultures produce different knowledges and practices. The social movements that were organized several decades after World War II encouraged us to embrace multiculturalism and diversity; and, because we wanted to hear everyone's voices and know what they knew, we invented new methodologies to capture subjugated knowledges. It seemed urgent to resist the rage for quantification of so-called value-free positivist social science; to disrupt disciplinary, exclusionary canons by including the knowledge of the dispossessed; and to make public the knowledge and everyday lived experiences of the oppressed, the silenced, and the lost and forgotten in the service of social justice.

In that work, qualitative methodology became a successful knowledge-production machine. Instead of reading statistical data collected in surveys and experiments in which people and what they thought and felt and did were disappeared in numbers in charts and graphs, we retrieved the lived body—we wanted people *live*, in person, present. We wanted to talk with them face-to-face; to see, first-hand, what their faces and bodies looked like when they described their everyday lived experiences. We wanted to see their pain. We wanted to witness their oppression first hand. We wanted to laugh and weep with them when they told us their stories. We wanted to hear their voices which came from the depths, the core of their inner beings. We wanted to watch them in their natural settings as they *really* were. We wanted to get to the ground of truth, to the reality of their everyday lives. We longed for our *own* experiences of "being there" with them in the field, being present, being witnesses in the moment with them. Then, if we'd carefully and systematically captured and recorded that authentic reality, we could reproduce it, represent it in words, in thick description, so that others could read our texts and be there too. Even after the crisis of representation, we continued to present our participants to our readers on a silver platter for the sake of knowledge.

I used that description of humanist qualitative methodology that I began to learn in 1991 to design my dissertation research, which was a combination of an interview study with 36 older, white, southern women who lived in my hometown and an ethnography of the small, rural community in which they lived to investigate what Foucault (1976/1978; 1982/1988; 1983/1984) called the *arts of existence* or *practices of the self* they used during their long lives to construct subjectivity. In both the doing and the writing of the study, humanist qualitative methodology deconstructed itself as I lived, wrote, and thought with the "posts," I learned that I could not, after writing a literature review describing the post theories that informed my study (Chapter 2), describe the doing of the study using conventional humanist qualitative methodology (Chapter 3). Instead, I used *the fold* (Deleuze, 1988/1993) to deconstruct several key concepts in that methodology that were especially troublesome in my study— *data,* the *field,* the *interview*—and I named that work "methodology in the fold."

Here I used a *concept as method.* But this "method" was not a prescriptive step-by-step procedure (e.g., interview, participant observation) described in advance of my study in some textbook that I could easily implement during "fieldwork." Instead, the concept slowed down and reoriented my thinking about everything. That work was my first post qualitative inquiry, and there was no going back. As Deleuze and Parnet (1977/1987) put it, "It might be thought that nothing has changed and nevertheless everything has changed" (p. 127).

But I was certainly not the only one deconstructing concepts that structure and organize conventional humanist qualitative methodology in the early 1990s. Lather (1993) and Scheurich (1993) deconstructed *validity*. Scheurich (1995) deconstructed the *interview*. In history, Scott (1991) deconstructed *experience*. Nespor and Barylske (1991) deconstructed *narrative;* and Visweswaran (1994) and Britzman (1995) deconstructed *ethnography*. Later, Lather (2000) deconstructed *empathy, voice*, and *authenticity*; Jackson (2003) deconstructed *voice*; and Pillow (2003) deconstructed *reflexivity*. By then, humanist qualitative methodology was, indeed, ruined.

An Interruption: Neo-Positivism and Scientifically Based Research

Poised, I think, to overturn the structure of conventional humanist qualitative methodology and do different work, qualitative researchers as well as scholars who used postmodern theories were attacked in 2000 by the positivist description of scientifically based research in the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Two years later, a National Research Council (2002) committee, claiming to intervene in the neo-positivism overtaking educational research and practice, published a report, *Scientific Research in Education* (2002), that not only upheld that positivism but also rejected postmodernism (p. 25). It was evident that postmodernism was being used as a codeword for any social science approach—interpretive, critical—that was not positivist. Those who rejected postmodernism seemed not to have studied it, but neither had they studied social constructionism or phenomenology or feminism or queer theory. We wondered what kind of social theory those social scientists had been reading for fifty years. Grover Whitehurst, the first director of the U.S. Institute of Education Sciences (IES), wrote in his final report to Congress that his charge had been to distinguish the rigorous, scientific (positivist) work of the IES "from what had become the dominant forms of education research in the latter half of the 20th century: qualitative research grounded in postmodern philosophy" (Institute of Education Sciences, 2008, p. 5). Who knew that such a thing was even possible much less *dominant*? I have described scientifically based research (St.Pierre, 2006) and its positivist knowledge (St.Pierre, 2012) elsewhere and so will not repeat those discussions here.

In education, the positivist attacks on qualitative research and postmodernism went on for years—they lasted so long that damage was done that can't be unwound. During the first decade of the 21st century when some of us were defending both qualitative methodology and postmodernism from the positivist police, much mainstream qualitative research tightened up, emphasizing its latent positivism (e.g., focusing on methods-driven research and concepts like bias and coding data) in a bid for legitimacy. In his 2001 inaugural presidential address to the National Academies of Science, Bruce Alberts explained that one of his goals was to make education a science, and some would say he, along with others, succeeded. Education had, indeed, become a science, and the insistence that educational research be "scientific" so we could determine "what works" in schools had reduced too much qualitative research to method and low-level technique and process that produced too much pedestrian, insignificant work. For example, data analysis, which Kvale and Brinkman (2009) described as a "theoretically informed reading" (p. 236), had been reduced to the mindless, line-by-line coding of data. But, then, that's not surprising since it's much easier to write a chapter in a textbook or teach a class about coding data than about thinking with theory as Jackson and Mazzei (2012) described in their book, *Thinking with Theory*. To think with theory, one must first read theory; but I've learned that

people do qualitative studies without reading much theory at all. As Lather (1996) noted some time ago, "methodology often diverts attention from more fundamental issues of epistemology" (p. 2).

Ignoring epistemology, and ontology, in favor of a brute methodology was common in a new phenomenon called "mixed methods" that was popular in the decade of scientifically based research. Mixed methods allowed educational researchers to sneak a small qualitative component—maybe a few interviews—into a big quantitative study to get federal funding from Whitehurst's Institute of Education Sciences. Confusion and contradiction are not uncommon in mixed methods when a researcher claims to enact positivist and interpretive social science at the same time in the same "mixed" methods study. For example, the researcher uses positivism to claim there is a brute reality out there to be found *and* interpretivism to claim that reality is socially constructed.

What struck me most on my return to qualitative methodology after years of defending it was the theoretical confusion of much of that stripped-down, scientized post-SBR work. In fact, I found that *positivist qualitative methodology* was not uncommon. Overall, the methodology no longer made any sense to me at all. During that period, there were, of course, qualitative studies whose epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies were aligned. Nonetheless, I found myself frustrated and cranky about having spent so much time defending a methodology that seemed to have lost much of its early radical possibility, and I began to signal my concerns and my desire for something different using the phrases, "post qualitative research" and "post inquiry" (St.Pierre, 2011) in my writing and teaching.

Post Inquiry

So what did I want to do next at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century? Someone suggested I begin a new qualitative study, and I entertained that possibility for about thirty seconds. I hadn't done a "qualitative" study since 1997, two years after I graduated with my doctorate, and that study had been an impossibility for many reasons. Whenever I thought about doing qualitative research in the ensuing years, I froze up and went to the movies instead. It's not that I hadn't been reading, writing, thinking, and inquiring relentlessly. I just couldn't do qualitative research. It was unthinkable, so undoable.

But teaching always helps me think, and, over the years, I had developed a set of what I call "theory" courses, courses *I* would have liked as a doctoral student. I taught a survey course called "Theoretical Frameworks for Doctoral Studies," courses on postmodern theory, on Foucault, on Derrida. I also taught our introductory course in qualitative methodology for 18 years, and, during that time, postmodernism increasingly intruded on its humanist structure. Students who took courses in postmodern theory as well as courses in humanist qualitative methodology encountered the same disconnect I had as a doctoral student, but earlier in their studies. Their distress became acute as they tried to write their dissertation proposals, so, in 2003, I developed a course in post qualitative research to support their work.

In that course, my students and I, over the years, searched for qualitative studies to which we might apply the label—postmodern qualitative research—but, not surprisingly, we found few, if any. We might find, for example, humanist qualitative studies that plucked one concept, like the *rhizome,* from Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) dense assemblage of concepts and tried to use it in their projects without realizing that the rhizome brings along with it Deleuze and

Guattari's entire ontology, their transcendental empiricism, which is not the empiricism of humanist qualitative methodology. In other cases, we found qualitative studies that claimed to use poststructural theories of the subject but then in the methodology section included descriptions and treatments of people as humanist individuals with unique "voices" waiting to be set free by emancipatory researchers. We also found research reports that described poststructural theories of language in the literature review but, in the methodology section, switched almost seamlessly to a description of data analysis as a positivist coding of data, assuming words can be brute data, like numbers.

But the disconnect between theory and methodology is common, I think, because we seldom teach courses in which epistemology, ontology, and methodology are aligned—for example, courses in phenomenological research, queer research, or even positivist research. We continue to separate Philosophy from Science as positivism insists. The upshot of our review of studies that might be labeled *postmodern qualitative research* is that such a construction is highly unlikely.

MacLure (2011) noted that "poststructural theory has often failed *to make a difference* to the mundane practices of research and the kind of knowledge that it produces" (p. 998), and I think that's because, like the students I refer to above, we abandon the assumptions that organize "post" theory in order to insert our work into the recognizable, comfortable structure of humanist qualitative methodology. After all, what's one to *do* with poststructural theory in empirical research? Where's that textbook? Where's that "research design"?

At some point, I began to advise students who were trying so hard to reconcile poststructural theory and humanist qualitative methodology to just refuse that methodology, to give it up, to try to unlearn it, forget it, get it out of their minds. It had become totalizing, even oppressive, and was shutting them down. But what could they do instead?

Using Post Analyses.

First, as I wrote at the beginning of this paper, I advise my students to actually *use* the "post" analyses that have been available for over sixty years. I encourage them to try to forget humanist qualitative methodology and *begin with the epistemological and ontological commitments of the analysis*—e.g., Derrida's deconstruction, Foucault's power-knowledge reading—and use it to think about whatever they're interested in thinking about—dropouts, the Common Core Curriculum, reading. I assure them that if they've studied the theory carefully their "methodology" will follow. I advise them *not* to think about their studies using qualitative methodology and its grid of normalizing humanist concepts, many of which are positivist: "problem statement," "research questions," "research design," "research process," "interview," "observation," "data," "data collection," "data analysis," "grounded theory," "representation," "systematicity." Instead, they might ask themselves, for example, how would Foucault study power relations in an educational apparatus in which the concept *dropout* is possible? What would he do to investigate that problem?

Of course, there's no recipe, no textbook that explains, step-by-step, how to "do" a Foucaultian power-knowledge reading or genealogy; there's no "research design" or "research process" for how to "do" Derridean deconstruction. To use those analyses, one must read and wrestle with texts written by Foucault and Derrida that may, at first, seem too hard to read and with ideas that may upend one's world so that "thinking is living at a higher degree, at a faster

pace, in a multidirectionary manner" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 167) that certainly can't be captured in advance of the study in a research proposal or a timeline. If one tries to reduce those analyses to recipe, process, and systematicity, the magic of inquiry can become what MacLure (2013) called "lumpen empiricism." Further, using those analyses is, I believe, much more difficult than interviewing six to eight people and then, attending neither to epistemology nor ontology, coding the interview transcripts and watching "themes" somehow miraculously "emerge." But my own doctoral students (e.g., Amatucci, 2010; Augustine, 2010; Collins, 2013; Sanford, 2012; Van Cleave, 2012) have produced smart studies using poststructural analyses, and two, to date, have won dissertation awards. And as a committee member, I've worked with other doctoral students who've productively used these analyses.

A critique of using post analyses at the 2013 Bergamo conference was that research using a post analysis like genealogy is "just textual analysis." But I would argue that that comment functions in the material/textual binary enabled by the ontology and empiricism of conventional humanist qualitative methodology that identifies the material or "empirical"—the bedrock real, the foundation, the *origin*— as first order and primary, and language and/or discourse—*just text*— as second-order, unreliable, and representational. What matters and counts as the empirical in that methodology is the face-to-face collection of data in the present—think of Geertz's (1988) phrase "being there" (p. 1). The language that matters is spoken, heard language. Written language, the text, is supposedly too far removed from the present, the really real, to matter much. This is phonocentrism.

But the hierarchy of the material/textual (Science/Philosophy) binary is not thinkable in the ontology of the "posts." Woolgar and Lezaum (2013) recently responded to the "only textual analysis" critique in their ontological analysis of a newspaper article (a text) by explaining that

> It is important to emphasize that the "textual" in "textual analysis" does not entail any lesser capacity for ontological enactment…some authors have been tempted to depict certain kinds of artifact as "merely" textual, or "purely" discursive, with the implication that some kinds of element could possibly be non-textual (i.e., non-interpretable). (p. 333)

But Derrida (1967/1974) explained this half a century ago, and his post analysis, deconstruction, is a critique of Plato's ontology, its phonocentrism, and its privileging of *presence*, which grounds the "face-to-face" demands of qualitative methodology's ontology and empiricism and thus relegates the text to secondary status. Derrida deconstructed the material/textual binary early on when he wrote, "*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]" (p. 158). He explained as follows:

> The concept of text or of context which guides me embraces and does not exclude the world, reality, history. Once again (and this probably makes a thousand times I have had to repeat this, but when will it finally be heard, and why this resistance?): as I understand it (and I have explained why), the text is not the book, it is not confined in a volume itself confined to the library. It does not suspend reference—to history, to the world, to reality, to being, and especially to the other. (Derrida, 1972/1981, p. 137)

Derrida's ontological comment explains that the text is always already of, with the world; it is never "just text." Everything (including language, the text) exists at the surface, at the level

of human activity, and there is no primary empirical depth we must defer to in post analyses as there is in the ontology and empiricism of conventional humanist qualitative methodology. That is, in post ontologies it makes no sense to privilege language spoken and heard "face-to-face" as if it has some primary empirical purity or value, as if it's the origin of science. Again, this is Scott's (1991) critique of grounding knowledge claims in lived experience.

In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) explained that the material/linguistic distinction does not work in their ontology, "There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)" (p. 23). The hierarchy that enables the privileging of the material in the material/textual dualism is not thinkable in their ontology, and the "just textual analysis" distinction doesn't make sense. However, I believe it is very difficult for those of us well-trained in the empiricism that grounds conventional humanist qualitative inquiry *not* to think that material/textual binary, not to privilege language collected "in the field" and "face-to-face" over already written language—in other words, it's difficult not to privilege *presence.*

Ironically, what counts as data in conventional humanist qualitative—what we analyze—is *text*, because we are taught to textualize the face-to-face interview (what was spoken and what we heard) into written words in an interview transcript and the face-to-face observation (what we saw and heard) into written words in fieldnotes, thereby acknowledging that the present can never be present, stable, bedrock long enough to be analyzed "systematically" or "scientifically." We must turn everything into words, language, text (something on paper, something real) for science's sake, so analysis in conventional humanist qualitative methodology is, after all, "just textual analysis" (see, e.g., St.Pierre, 1997).

The question, I think, is why we privilege words in some texts (e.g., interview transcripts and fieldnotes) over words in others (e.g., a policy document, a federal law, a history book, a movie script). This is, of course, an empirical question, an ontological question. If one thinks with post ontologies, it makes no sense to separate our analysis of words "collected" in existing documents into a section of the research report called the "literature review" from our analysis of words "collected" in interview transcripts and fieldnotes in a section called "findings." But we do. And I would argue that that separation makes it easy for epistemology, ontology, and methodology to be mis-aligned in conventional humanist qualitative methodology.

In sum, the first possibility I offer for post-qualitative inquiry is to use the post analyses we've had for decades, to put them to work to think about what puzzles us.

The New Empiricisms/New Materialisms.

The second possibility for post qualitative inquiry that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper is to use the scholarship organized under the "ontological turn" (if, indeed, there is one) called the "new materialism" and the "new empiricism" at work in disciplines as diverse as literature, physics, political science, education, philosophy, and sociology. One question about this work is whether it is, indeed, "new," and I address that question in the following discussion. First, I point out that some have claimed that all these "new" turns—the ontological turn, the material turn, the empirical turn, the affective turn, the posthuman turn—are reactions to a supposed linguisticism or textual narcissism of the French Theory of the "posts," as if post analyses neglected ontology and the material. I disagree with that assessment and find critiques of the ontologies of Enlightenment humanism throughout that literature. I have already

described Derrida's response to the material/textual, material/linguistic binary in which it is clear that the lexicon of Enlightenment ontology is simply insufficient. "Everything begins before it begins," Derrida (1993/1994, p. 161) wrote, overturning our conception of being. To help think this, he invented the ontological concept *hauntology*:

> To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration. (p. 161)

I believe even the few quotations from Derrida's work provided in this paper illustrate his critique of the ontological.

And it's difficult to understand how one could think Foucault privileged the discursive at the expense of the material and the ontological. In the following, for example, he identified the ontological shift that Descartes's powerful concept, the *cogito* enabled, what de Castro (2004) called the "massive conversion of ontological into epistemological questions" (p. 483).
Reading Descartes, it is remarkable to find in the *Meditations* this same spiritual concern with the attainment of being where doubt was no longer possible, and where one could finally know [*connait*]. But by thus defining the mode of being to which philosophy gives access, one realizes that this mode of being is defined entirely in terms of knowledge [*connaisant*], and that philosophy in turn is defined in terms of the development of the knowing subject. (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 294)
But Foucault (1984) pointed out that the mode of being we inherited from Descartes and believe is "natural" is, instead, historical and so contingent and not necessary; and he encouraged us to critique it as follows:

> The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (Foucault, 1984, p. 50)

In other words, Foucault asked us to consider other possible modes of being, different ontologies.
In the following long quotation from Foucault's (1971/1972) work, he described the relation of objects and discourses in his archaeological analysis:

> We shall remain, or try to remain, at the level of discourse itself . . . [discourses] are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words; I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience; I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the

canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. "Words and things" is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than just use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* than that renders them irreducible to the language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this *more* that we must reveal and describe. (pp. 48-49)

The rules of discourse and discursive practices create an order of things that is, indeed, ontological.

Perhaps what some are calling the "ontological turn" is not so much a new turn as a *re*turn, a reorientation to ontological concerns like those engaged in the "posts." Perhaps it is a commitment to consider different orders of things, different *distributions*, that have been and might be. In any case, returning to a prior discussion, privileging the material and empirical (as if we know what those words mean) over the textual and linguistic (as if we know what those words mean) does us no good because doing so keeps us trapped in the material/textual binary enabled by a particular ontological order the turns are working against.

My assessment of the "newness" of this work is that it draws heavily on the ontological critiques available in the "posts," critiques we may only just be attending to. After all, thinking ontology differently, after that massive shift in the 17th century to epistemology and the knowing subject, is difficult indeed. Given our obsession with humanist knowledge projects, we're just not trained to think much about ontology or to critique the human subject of humanism. As Foucault noted above, to do that difficult work, we have to develop an attitude, an ethos of critique of the existing ontological order, especially the nature of human being.

Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari together are especially helpful in thinking ontology differently because their critique was deliberately ontological. If one reads the literature of the new empiricisms and new materialisms through their work, it seems quite DeleuzoGuattarian, even if their work is not cited. Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari provided new concepts— intensive, *futural concepts* with their own speeds and rhythms that slow us down because they don't fit existing ontologies and so open things up, helping us think new modes of being. Indeed, as I mentioned earlier in regard to my own use of the *fold*, their concepts (e.g., assemblage, rhizome, bodies-without-organs) can be *methods* that enable new research practices that can neither be described in advance of a study nor easily described at the end.

For me, trying to think conventional humanist qualitative methodology with those futural concepts is nigh impossible given that it is grounded in the limited capacities of the epistemological desires of the *cogito*, that Cartesian concept that slowed us down centuries ago and sent us toward a new order of things whose distribution favors hierarchies and binaries like mind/body, man/nature, and knower/known in which, as Foucault (1966/1970) noted, the figure of man is empirically constituted by life itself and then designated the author of meaning in that empirical order, the interpreter of life with all its limits—the *knowing subject*. Conventional humanist qualitative methodology is grounded in that empiricism and the lived experience of its human being.

To think and live new modes of being we might follow Foucault and practice a critical ontology of ourselves and refuse that mode of being, even, perhaps, the "new knowing subject"

(Braidotti, 2013, p. 159) of posthumanism. But who wants to do that? Who *can* do it? And here it becomes very difficult to think inquiry once one tries to shift to the ontological. Do we continue to inquire as we have and simply ask ontological in addition to epistemological questions—add ontology and stir—as if ontology is not always already there? Do we simply substitute ontological for epistemological questions in the same old enclosure, as if ontology and epistemology can be separated? Can we use futural concepts as methods to break open that structure? Can we develop a new ethos? If we did, how would we get on, live, "be" in a world so overcoded with the being of humanism? What might we *do,* we researchers? How might we inquire? What kinds of inquiry might be thinkable in different modes of being, different ontologies?

Would we inquire? Is inquiry thinkable without the knowing subject?

All this may be too hard to think, and I'm not sure I can sufficiently escape the Cartesian *cogito* I have been trained to be—the academic researcher producing knowledge— to think differently. Indeed, I seem only to leap from question to question.

But I also latch onto certain phrases from the texts of others who think differently. Their words are provocative, and I wonder what might be possible if, to escape the human being of humanism, I thought of myself as a "transitory hardening" (De Landa, 1997, p. 259) in the flow of things, as—"impersonal" (Deleuze, 2001, p. 28) rather than "a person"; if I understood that all permutations of the verb *to be* (I am…) are no longer thinkable because they imply stasis, permanence, *presence*, and, likewise, if I understood that any "I" I call forth "designates only a past world ('I was peaceful')" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 18). I wonder what might be possible if I accepted that "I is a habit" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 105); if I were able "to reach not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 3)? I wonder what might be possible if I were seriously and affirmatively to experiment with what is yet to come, "people to come," to summon those "still-missing people" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 176) we have not yet been able to think and so live? If all this were possible, what else might there be, what *more*, what excess, what *supplement*, might be set loose? "We lack resistance to the present. The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 109).

I confess I cannot see how conventional humanist qualitative methodology invented by the Cartesian *cogito* can help me with this future form—a new mode of being—a massive shift in the order of things. If we continue to secure and perpetuate this methodology in the books and papers we write and the courses we teach, I fear most of our students will follow in our footsteps and, like us, find it difficult to escape their training. Might we, instead, encourage them to practice a critical ontology of themselves, to experiment with what is yet to come, to summon those still-missing people? Might that exquisitely empirical work be "post inquiry"?

Here at the end I am left with and repeat the limit questions I have gestured toward throughout this paper. Given that humanist descriptions of human being organize and structure the concepts and practices of conventional humanist qualitative methodology, why do even those of us who say we do "post" work nonetheless cling to that mode of being and its ontological commitments? Why do we continue to rescue humanist concepts and practices from the ruins of that methodology and think they will work in post qualitative inquiry?

In other words, in our encounters with the ontologies of the "posts," why and when do we push the posts away? Why and when do we draw the line? What concept(s) and practice(s) are we afraid of losing? Dare we risk losing our very *being,* our "selves"? Would that be such a

loss? Was it ever even real? I close with Spivak's (1993) caution that "what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live" (p. 22). That warning has stayed with me for over twenty years, haunting my brief and personal history in post inquiry.

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