Postbook: Working the Ruins of Feminist Ethnography

For a long time, I was engaged in an ethnography of women living with HIV/AIDS. Looking back over our study—where we began, what we encountered, and how we moved—my coresearcher, Chris Smithies, and I were "always already" situated in the ambivalent tensions of Western feminist ethnographic traditions of giving voice to the voiceless. This is no new space for a feminist ethnographer to occupy.[1] The question I offer is how the "fieldwork, textwork and headwork" (Van Maanen 1995, 4) incited by our study can be used to grapple with the ethical and political implications of doing feminist ethnography within the postmodern. I am particularly interested in the concept of doubled practices.[2] These are practices that might be of use in negotiating the tensions between the political imperative of feminism to make visible women's experiences and poststructural critiques of representation (Juhasz 1999; Piontek 2000).

In terms of the "post," as Henri Lefebvre noted about architecture around 1910, "a certain space was shattered" but, nonetheless, "did not disappear . . . without leaving any trace in our consciousness, knowledge

[1] See Behar 1993, 1996; Visweswaran 1994; Behar and Gordon 1995; and Stewart 1996.

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

or educational methods" (1991, 25–26). Traces, fragments, and ruins survive, embedded in common sense, perspective, social practices, and political power. Given such historical sedimentations, how might one look for places where things begin to shift via practices that exceed the warrants of our present sense of the possible? Such doubled practices would be within/against a disciplining space of returns and reversals, knowings and not-knowings, slippages from and dispersals of the Marxist dream of "cure, salvation, and redemption" (Felman and Laub 1992, 177). In such a place, what might feminist knowledge projects look like that work within and against identity categories, visibility politics, and the romance of voice? How, for example, might such projects enact a way to use the ruins of correspondence theories of language as a fruitful site for doing and reporting feminist ethnography in ways that attend to the complexities of our desire for "realist tales" (Van Maanen 1988, 49) of women's experiences?

In what follows, I address such questions via "the thinking that writing produces" (St. Pierre 1997, 178) out of the efforts of Chris and myself to write a book about women living with HIV/AIDS. After a delineation of methodology with/in the postmodern, I raise three issues from Chris and my "postbook" location: the ruins of ethnographic realism, the masks of authorial presence, and the work of a recalcitrant rhetoric. I conclude with some thoughts on a "methodology of getting lost" by looking at the intersection of research, theory, and politics. Working both within and against disciplinary conventions, my sense of task is to explore methodological economies of responsibility and possibility that engage our will to know through concrete efforts both to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently.

Within/against: Methodological responsibility within noninnocent space

Michel Foucault has spoken of "the book experience" as "designed to change what one thinks and perhaps even what one is" (quoted in Ransom 1997, 175). This essay, then, is about research into the lives of others as a troubling, as an ethical move outside mastery, heroism, and the wish for rescue through some "more adequate" research methodology. It is grounded in both the "new" ethnography, that which comes after the crisis of representation (Marcus and Fischer 1986), and the ethnography to come, what Jacques Derrida refers to as the "as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself" (1978, 293). In this, I look for the breaks and jagged edges of methodological practices from which we might draw useful knowledge for shaping present practices of a feminist ethnography in ex-

cess of our codes but, still, always already: forces already active in the present.

The new ethnography grew out of a literary turn in the 1980s with concerns of "textuality, disciplinary history, critical modes of reflexivity, and the critique of realist practices of representation" (Marcus 1997, 410). What George Marcus (1994) has termed "messy texts" announce the new: partial and fluid epistemological and cultural assumptions, fragmented writing styles, and troubled notions of ethnographic legitimacy, including the "ethnographic authority" of fieldwork (Clifford 1983). Feminist work both challenged and built on this move, particularly in terms of a sense of failed promises, charged anxieties, and a "self-abjection" at the limit as a way to live on in the face of the loss of legitimating metanarratives.[3]

Kathleen Stewart characterizes the new ethnography as too much about "a discipline of correctives" (1996, 24), too much within assumptions of "cure," particularly via the "solution" of experimental writing.[4] More interested in what Kamala Visweswaran argues for as ruptured understandings and practices of failure as "pivotal" (1994, 100), Stewart calls on James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* as instructive in its imperfections. "Nothing worked," Stewart notes, and yet his palimpsest of layered evocations still carries force (Quinby 1991; Lofaro 1992; Rabinowitz 1992). Textual solutions, hence, offer both limits and possibilities. This calls for a doubled epistemology where the text becomes a site of the failures of representation, and textual experiments are not so much about solving the crisis of representation as about troubling the very claims to represent. If, as Foucault (1988, 10) states, we are freer than we feel, how can we feel freer in this space?

This might, then, be the contemporary problematic of ethnography: "double, equivocal, unstable . . . exquisitely tormented" (Derrida 1996a, 55), an ethnography of ruins and failures that troubles what Visweswaran

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[3] Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen 1989; Kondo 1990; Behar 1993, 1996; Visweswaran 1994; Gordon 1995; Stewart 1996.

[4] Other critiques of the conventions of ethnographic writing birthed by the new ethnography, with its interest in voice, discontinuity, and situatedness, include Kirsch 1997; Britzman 1998; and Lather 1998. For film studies, see Juhasz 1999, who takes a sort of post-postturn by arguing that the "feminist realist debates" represent only one side by disallowing realism and identification as "viable theoretical strategies toward political ends" (194). Both "molded and frustrated by feminist film theory" (194), Juhasz, grounded in her efforts to make a documentary about women and HIV/AIDS, notes both the deconstructive uses of realist style and "the political efficacy of realism" (196) against a decade of antirealist theory. While tending to conflate political effectiveness and mimetic representation, Juhasz's essay exemplifies a doubled practice of using realism "toward a more noticeably self-aware theoretical/political practice" (197).

calls "the university rescue mission in search of the voiceless" (1994, 69). How might such an ethnography help us find ways of using the constraining order, of drawing unexpected results from one's abject situation (de Certeau 1984, 30), working borders and wrestling with urgent questions of postfoundational practices? Moving across levels of the particular and the abstract, trying to avoid a transcendental purchase on the object of study, we set ourselves up for necessary failure in order to learn how to find our way into postfoundational possibilities. The task becomes to throw ourselves against the stubborn materiality of others, willing to risk loss, relishing the power of others to constrain our interpretive "will to know," saving us from narcissism and its melancholy through the very positivities that cannot be exhausted by us, the otherness that always exceeds us.[5] Given the demise of master narratives of identification, objectivism, and linear truth, such ethnography draws close to its objects in the moment of loss where much is refused, including abandoning the project to such a moment (Haver 1996).

It is this drawing close, "as close as possible," that has long been the seduction of fieldwork (Dirks, Eley, and Ortner 1994, 16). This closeness to the practical ways people enact their lives has been the promise for understanding how the everyday gets assumed. The reflexive turn has broadened such understanding to include the very space of ethnographic knowing. Hence, to situate ethnography as a ruin/rune is to foreground the limits and necessary misfirings of its project. Problematizing the researcher as "the one who knows," it is not enough, as Judith Butler notes (1993a, 52), to focus on the limits of our knowing. The task is to meet the limit, to open to it as the very vitality and force that propels the change to come. It is this outside that gives us to hear and understand that which is "already coming" (Derrida 1996a, 64). Placed outside of mastery and victory narratives, ethnography becomes a kind of self-wounding laboratory for discovering the rules by which truth is produced. Attempting to be account-

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[5] I use positivities in the Foucauldian sense of the "mode of being of things" (1970, xxii), which is presented to understanding out of both established and emerging configurations, simultaneities, and mutations that constitute the general space of knowledge. Empirical entities inhabit positivities that are thoroughly imbued with finitude out of the endless erosion of time and perspective. For Foucault, the analysis of "actual experience," whether from the perspective of phenomenology, positivism, or eschatology (e.g., Marxism) is a humanism that denies the "promise-threat" of Nietzsche's notion "that man would soon be no more" (322). In contrast, archaeological interest is in studying the modifications of the configurations that produce "the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself" (xxi). This is the "positivity" in which ideas appear, sciences are established, experience is reflected in philosophies, rationalities are formed, all perhaps to be dissolved sooner rather than later.

able to complexity, thinking the limit becomes the task, and much opens up in terms of ways to proceed for those who know both too much and too little.

Feminist methodology has made much note of Audre Lorde's "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." First articulated in her 1984 *Sister Outsider*, Lorde called for tools of knowledge production based on subaltern ways of knowing that had heretofore been excluded from legitimate knowledge. Feminist methodology discussions sought these counterpractices of knowing in personal voices, archival resources such as diaries and journals, dialogic and interactive interview formats, reflexivity regarding interpretive imposition, practices such as cowriting: the list goes on. The point is that such a search was conducted under assumptions of finding a less exploitative, more innocent way of proceeding. Judith Stacey's 1988 essay interrupted this drive to innocent knowing, with its focus on the inescapable power imbalances of inquiry situations, feminist or not. By setting itself up as better intentioned, Stacey argued, feminist ethnography risked even greater violation of the researched than the more distanced "objectivity" of conventional research methods.

Visweswaran (1994) has termed this the loss of innocence of feminist methodology. Given the realization of the limits of representation and the weight of research as surveillance and normalization, Visweswaran advises the workings of necessary failure versus the fiction of restoring lost voices. Here the feminist researcher is no longer the hero of her own story. At a moment when feminist intentions fail, the conventional move of most methodological texts in providing strategies and problem-solving advice, premised on the assumption that "better" methodology will mean better accounts, breaks down. Methodology often diverts attention from more fundamental issues of epistemology. Hence Visweswaran wants to track failure not at the level of method but of epistemic failure (1994, 98). All is not well in feminist research, she argues, and the problems cannot be solved by better "methods." Faced with its own impossibilities, the practice of failure is pivotal for the project of feminist inquiry in negotiating the crisis of representation, the loss of faith in received stories and predictable scripts.

Failure is not just a sign of epistemological crisis but also an epistemological construct that signals the need for new ground versus repetition on the same terms (Butler 1993b). Visweswaran seeks a trickster agency that makes a distinction between success and failure indeterminate. To give voice can only be attempted by a "trickster ethnographer" who knows she cannot "master" the dialogical hope of speaking with (100), let alone the

colonial hope of speaking for. Here, the necessary tension between the desire to know and the limits of representation lets us question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysis, transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility, where a failed account occasions new kinds of positionings. Such a move is about economies of responsibility within noninnocent space, a "within/against" location.

Butler's (1993a) work on iteration or subversive repetition is of use as a way to keep moving within the recognition of the noninnocence of any practice of knowledge production. Within/against, then, is about both "doing it" and "troubling it" simultaneously. In this both/and move, "subversive reiteration reembodies subjectivating norms while at the same time redirecting the normativity of those norms" (Schrift 1995, 55). This is a moment of dispersion, a proliferating moment, within the relations of overdetermination. The argument is that agency exists in the possibility of a variation within a repetition. In order to be intelligible, we need to repeat the familiar and normalized. The task is not whether to repeat but how to repeat in such a way that the repetition displaces that which enables it. While Butler's work was on gender performance, it can be used to rethink practices of feminist methodology in displacing the idea that the work of methodology is to take us to some noncomplicitous place of knowing. Instead, the work of methodology becomes to negotiate the "field of play" of the instructive complications that knowledge projects engender regarding the politics of knowing and being known.[6] Here method is resituated as a way into the messy doings of science via risky practices that both travel across contexts and are remade in each situated inquiry.

After some introductory comments regarding *Troubling the Angels*, I turn, "postbook," to three issues that arose in Chris and my efforts to tell stories that belong to others in a way that attends to the crisis of representation: ethnographic realism and the limits of voice, the masks of authorial presence, and the ambivalence of reception. I conclude by reading Chris and my effort in terms of the responsibilities of interpretation within the "setting to work" of deconstruction (Spivak 1999, 423).

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[6] Derridean "play" is like the play in a machine, to move within limits that are both cause and effect. Set against the "work of the negative" of Hegelian thought, it posits the infinite substitution of signifiers, given the demise of a transcendental signified and the absence of absolute determinism. The place of "'free-play' . . . means that the structure of the machine or the springs, are not so tight, so that you can just try to dislocate: that's what I meant by play" (Derrida, quoted in McGowan 1991, 104–5). Derridean play unsettles the dominant through pointing to suppressed possibilities in order to supplement or exceed the determinations that order has tried to make stable and permanent. For a textual enactment, see Richardson 1997.

"Troubling the Angels": Women living with HIV/AIDS

Troubling the Angels grew out of interviews conducted from 1992 to 1996 with twenty-five women living with HIV/AIDS, largely in meetings with women and AIDS support groups in four major cities in Ohio. But we also met at holiday and birthday parties, camping trips, retreats, hospital rooms, funerals, baby showers, and picnics. As a feminist qualitative researcher, I was invited into the project by Chris Smithies, a local feminist psychologist, who facilitated a support group whose members wished to publish their stories of living with HIV/AIDS. In the fall of 1995, Chris and I desktop published a version of the book and gave copies to the women we had interviewed; we included their responses in the epilogue of the book that was published in 1997.

The ruins of ethnographic realism and the limits of voice

Troubling the Angels is no seamless ethnographic realism. Working the ruins of an earlier moment of a feminist ethnography assumed "innocent" in its desire to give voice to the voiceless (Visweswaran 1994), Chris and I have attempted a text that both reaches toward a generally accessible public horizon and yet denies the "comfort text" that maps easily onto our usual ways of making sense. The women wanted what they termed a "K-Mart" book. I wanted to create a "messy text" (Marcus 1994) while still honoring Chris and my charge of producing a book that would do the work the women wanted. Using the ruins of feminist ethnography as the very site of possibility for movement from a "realist" to an "interrogative" text, the book reflects back at its readers the problems of inquiry at the same time an inquiry is conducted. Such a practice strikes the epistemological paradox of knowing through not knowing, knowing both too little and too much in its refusal of mimetic models of representation and the nostalgic desire for immediacy and transparency of reference. The effort is, instead, toward a "posthumanist materialism" that shifts from mimesis to something "altered and altering in its approach to language and history" (Cohen 1996, 80). Quoting from the back cover of the book:

> Based on an interview study of twenty-five Ohio women in HIV/AIDS support groups, *Troubling the Angels* traces the patterns and changes of how the women make sense of HIV/AIDS in their lives. Attempting to map the complications of living with the disease, the book is organized as a hypertextual, multilayered weaving of data, method, analysis, and the politics of interpretation.
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> Because of the book's unconventional narration, it invites multiple entries and ways of reading. Interspersed among the interviews, there

are [angel] inter-texts, which serve as "breathers" between the themes and emotions of the women's stories; a running subtext where the authors spin out their tales of doing the research; factoid boxes on various aspects of the disease; and a scattering of the women's writing in the form of poems, letters, speeches, and e-mails.

Enacting a feminist ethnography at the limits of representation, *Troubling the Angels* mixes sociological, political, historical, therapeutic, and policy analysis along with the privileging of ethnographic voice.

In contemporary regimes of disciplinary truth telling, the concept of voice is at the heart of claims to the "real" in ethnography. Indeed, in the new ethnography, the authority of voice is often privileged over other analyses. Confessional tales, authorial self-revelation, multivoicedness, and personal narrative are all contemporary practices of representation designed to move ethnography away from scientificity and the appropriation of others.[7] At risk is a romance of the speaking subject and a metaphysics of presence complicated by the identity and experience claims of insider/outsider tensions. From the perspective of the turn to epistemological indeterminism, voice is a reinscription of some unproblematic real. This is a refusal of the sort of realism that is a reverent literalness based on assumptions of truth as an adequation of thought to its object and language as a transparent medium of reflection. The move is, rather, to endorse complexity, partial truths, and multiple subjectivities.

My attempt here is to defamiliarize common sentiments of voice in order to break the hegemonies of meaning and presence that recuperate and appropriate the lives of others into consumption, a too-easy, too-familiar eating of the other. Such a move is not so much about the real as it is about a horizon *in* insufficiency (Scott 1996, 127). Against homogeneous spaces of collective consensus and communication, such work is emotive, figurative, inexact, dispersed, and deferred in its presentation of truth telling toward responsibility within indeterminacy. But the demand for voice also has much to do with subjugated knowledges and multiple fractured subjectivities, the unheard/unhearable voices of Gayatri Spivak's (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Hence my attempt is not so much "against" voice as it is toward a double economy of the text to move toward destabilizing practices of "telling the other" (McGee 1992). What is displaced is the privileged fixed position from which the researcher interrogates and writes the researched

[7] Van Maanen 1988, 1995; Behar 1993, 1996; Richardson 1994, 1997; and Behar and Gordon 1995.

(Robinson 1994). Arguing that recuperating traditional realism is no answer to the aporias of the Left, I am positioned with those who try to use poststructural theory to think against the various nostalgias of leftist thought and practice. Such issues can be gestured toward via a process of layering complexity and foregrounding problems: thinking data differently, outside easy intelligibility and the seductions of the mimetic in order to work against consumption and voyeurism. By working the limits of intelligibility and foregrounding the inadequacy of thought to its object, a stuttering knowledge is constructed that elicits an experience of the object through its very failures of representation.

To sum up this first point on the disruption of ethnographic realism, in an economy so marked by loss as the place of AIDS, the text undercuts any immediate or total grasp through layers of point-of-view patterns. Refusing much in an effort to signal the size and complexity of the changes involved in the move away from modernist metaphysics of presence, assured interiority, and the valorization of transformative interest, the book is written out of a kind of "rigorous confusion." Such confusion displaces the heroic modernist imaginary in turning toward otherness, being responsible to it, listening in its shadow, confused by its complexities (Hebdige 1996). Here "the participant witness" (Gordon 1995, 383) tells and translates so that something might be seen regarding the registers in which we live out what Michel Serres terms "the weight of hard-borne history" in evoking an ethical force that is directed at the heart of the present (1995, 293).

The masks of authorial presence
There is no absent author in *Troubling the Angels*. In Preface I to the book, Chris and I speak of "both getting out of the way and getting in the way," as we tell stories that belong to others (1997, xiv). In this, we risk both "vanity ethnography" (Van Maanen 1988) and the romance of voice. Chris and I address these problems via such textual practices as a horizontally split text and angel intertexts. In the former, the women's words are on the top of the page in bigger font, and researcher narratives are on the bottom in smaller font. As an intervention in the machinery of mimesis, most pages combine a top two-thirds that appears to be unmediated interview transcript that foregrounds insider stories and a bottom underwriting that both decenters and constructs authorial "presence" through a kind of temporal disturbance. By forcing a reading in two directions, such a textual display is designed to break the realist frame. In a second interruptive textual practice, the angel intertexts serve as a site of deliberate imposition to signal the inevitable weight of researcher interpretation upon the story

told.[8] Wanting to probe these textual moves in order to address issues around both confessional writing and the romance of voice, I set the stage with some excerpts from the epilogue, which recounts the women's reactions to an early version of the text.

Patti: Were there any parts of the book that you didn't like?

Barb: The format. I wanted to read it all from one end to the other, and it was hard to do because I was reading two different things. I would have liked to read one part or the other in sequence.

Patti: So the top/bottom split text was irritating. And it never got easier while you were reading along?

Barb: No.

Lori: I've given the book to four people, and they all said they had a problem with the layout. Some people won't see a movie with subtitles.

Rita: I liked that part where the bottom was a little story, alongside the top part. It made it more interesting, very much more interesting, but I had a hard time with the middle part about angels. It's just a little bit above me, I think.

Lori: I'll be honest, I skipped a lot of the angel stuff. I didn't get why it was in there and I was really into the stories about the women. I was enraptured by the women's stories, and I didn't want to waste my time at that point with the angels. Now that I've seen the play *Angels in America*, I'm going back to read it cover to cover. But at the time, it did not captivate me at all. You're getting into a whole big thing about angels and in a selfish way, I think it takes away from our stories.

Sarah: The angelology part was really interesting. To me it was just interesting to know about angels in our culture and different cultures, and then to tie it in with the struggle with the disease and how we think about it. I learned some things I hadn't heard before. For people who aren't familiar with HIV, they'll be learning from what the women have to say. But if you've got it, what the women say is confirming, but I felt like I learned some things from the intertexts. I hope that if you get it published, they don't massacre it!

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[8] Enacting how language cannot not mean and how it leads to identification, subjectivization, and narrative, I use the angel not to recuperate for a familiar model but to deconstructively stage the angel as a palimpsest, a failure at containing meaning. I wanted to empty out narrative in advance and make it generate itself over its impossibility. For an elaboration of the work of the angels in the book as well as some early audience response, see Lather 2000a.

Heather: It has to have angels in it. That's the whole context. I usually don't buy into such stuff, but as I do this AIDS work, it's a feeling.

Amber: I hope this takes off and they make a little mini-series about it.

Patti: You could be the consultant.

Sarah: I think she wants to be the star!

And from the subtext of the epilogue:

Patti: The earlier self-published version of this book was no first faint draft. While re-orderings, updates and additions have been made, this version is no radical departure from its earlier incarnation. This is not out of some sense of the great sufficiency of what we have done, but rather out of our puzzlement as to how to proceed differently. For example, in the case of our continued commitment to the split text format in the face of participant reservations, we encountered publishers who also wanted us to get rid of it in the name of appealing to a broader range of readers. We tried other options. We knew we didn't want our commentary to come before the women's stories as we wanted to give pride of place to their words. We knew we didn't want our words to come after their stories as that set us up as the "experts," saying what things "really meant." We tried the idea of "asides," where we would put our comments in sidebars. But all of these efforts renewed our commitment to the kind of "under-writing" that we had stumbled onto in our efforts to find a format that didn't smother the women's stories with our commentary and yet gestured toward the complicated layering of constantly changing information that characterizes the AIDS crisis. Trying to find a form that enacts that there is never a single story and that no story stands still, we practiced a kind of dispersal and forced mobility of attention by putting into play simultaneously multiple stories that fold in and back on one another, raising for readers questions about bodies, places and times, disrupting comfort spaces of thinking and knowing.

Our charge was simple: get the story out. The deliberately discontinuous mosaic that we have settled on may be a case of putting style ahead of story and, seemingly, we could have found a publisher more easily without this complicated and complicating format. But we risked this practice in order to bring to hearing matters not easy to make sense of in the usual ways. Forced to deal with two stories at once, the split text format puts the reader through a kind of "reading

workout," a troubling exercise of reading. It stitches together discontinuous bits and multiples of the women's stories through seemingly disconnected narrative worlds, angelology, e-mail and journal entries, letters, poems, interview transcripts, academic talk about theory and method, and autobiography. Multilayered, it risks a choppiness designed to enact the complicated experiences of living with the disease, layers of happy and mournful, love and life and death, finances, legal issues, spirituality, health issues, housing, children, as people fight the disease, accept, reflect, live and die with and in it.

At this point, when I have read the preceding to academic audiences, I have been asked, "But did you cry?" Trying to make sense of this response, further queries of my audience evoke some statement about how distanced and disembodied all of it seems, how caught up in academese. So I continue to read from the subtext of the epilogue:

> I would not let the angels go, even in the face of resistance to their presence in the book.
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> Part of this was my very personal need to negotiate a relationship to loss. Over the course of this project, I broke down badly twice. Once was in transcribing Lisa's story of the death of her son, a late data story that we collected in this project. Recovering, I wrote in my research journal, "I have just broken down, crying. This is the first tape I've transcribed that I didn't know if I could get through it or not. It *is* cumulative; it does get worse with each death and, of course, a child, a child and a mother talking like this about her child's death." A second time was reading Chris' draft of the acknowledgments and seeing Rex's name, my long-time friend cut down by AIDS in the prime of a life well lived, a friend who gave me every encouragement in this project while still holding me to the fire of responsibility. Two bad cries in such a project testifies to the work the angels did for me, their cooling comfort that let me get on with the book.
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> This past July, Chris called to tell me of Lori's impending death. "I need to talk to someone. This is going to be a hard one. I've known her and her family for seven years. Her husband was my first AIDS death." I listen. We talk of the protease inhibitors and how, for some, they are too late. The weight of luck and conjunction and timing and being caught in history's web asserts itself once again. I mention Tracy saying that she had read from the desktop version of the book at Danielle's funeral about Danielle's relationship with her father and we wonder how many more stories like that we'll hear or

whether the new treatments will end this funeral parade. And I think, again, of my stubborn attachment to my "necessary angels."

The poet Rilke wrote of how "necessary angels" help us negotiate being plunged into death like a stone into the sea. And Benjamin helped me see early on how the angel could function somewhere "between theory and embarrassment" (Ellison 1996) in this study, an index that lets us see how history happens as we attend to the line between the limits of where we are and what is gathering beyond. Grounded in the stories of women living with HIV/AIDS, trying to think about and against our habits of mind in making sense of social crisis, I have put the angels to work in order to continue the dream of doing history's work in a way that is responsible to what is arising out of both becoming and passing away.

My interlocutors have seemed much more satisfied with this, until I raise the question: Why the need to know I cried? Finding an authorial voice that does not lend itself to melodrama has been no easy task in this project. Seeking some undramatized, largely effaced narrator versus the "Oprah-ization" of this era of confessional talk has been complicated by the effort to both deny the tidy text and yet appeal to a broad public horizon. Autobiography seemed requisite in this. Hence in trying to do justice to the women's stories, I sought an authorial presence that was both embodied and yet avoided the "nostalgia-provoking, emotional-yanking" sort of narrative move that is used to sell everything from empathy to hammers.[9] What I have come to call the "validity of tears" brings me great discomfort, a discomfort tied, I think, to what Deborah Britzman writes of as contemporary ethnographers "incited by the demand for voice and situatedness" (1997, 31). As some effort toward "recovering from objectivity," Britzman argues that this incitement is much about the nostalgia for presence and ontological claims of identity.[10]

Friedrich Nietzsche serves well to interrupt such incitements. Nietzsche believed that the way to whatever was "truth" was possible via the unconscious and forgetting. "Every opinion is also a hiding place," he wrote, "every word also a mask" (quoted in Kofman 1993, 91). For Nietzsche,

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[9] Restoration Hardware, an upscale tool-and-home-furnishing chain is about the store-as-autobiography in its folksy pitch for such items as "deeply personal" sandwich spreaders (*Columbus Dispatch,* February 23, 1997). For a critique of empathy, see Caruth and Keenan 1995. Empathy is about sameness: "empathy is what the public is supposed to learn to feel, but it solidifies the structure of discrimination. . . . Its structure is something that somehow elides thinking about death. Something is not confronted there, when you think you're understanding or empathizing in a certain way" (264, 269).

[10] Behar 1996 approaches these issues.

"unmasking is not about removing from the text a cloak that veils the truth, but rather showing the clothing which an apparent 'nakedness' conceals" (92). Nietzsche's big question is what does the will that wants the truth want (Kofman 1993, 24). His counsel was self-estranging breaks, where one could hardly recognize oneself in past productions as anything other than a palimpsest where under each layer is another layer. There is a vertigo produced by such a practice that risks not so much not being understood as one writes outside traditional norms as being understood by those who want the naked truth.

A recalcitrant rhetoric: Against empathy

Troubling the Angels denies the comfort text. Reading perhaps too much Gilles Deleuze these days in order to think my way into postfoundational possibilities, an audience, I posit, reads itself into becoming part of the assemblage that is the text.[11] To take the Deleuzean turn from persuading to producing the unconscious as the work of the text is to put into play the ambivalence of reception. In a book where writing is a place where philosophy is less argued than enacted as a practice of not-knowing, to focus on conventional rhetorical tactics of persuasion would be to assume an a priori audience of address. To the contrary, I am interested in provoking a reading that finds out something about itself via a writing at the limit of taking any particular sort of reader into account.[12]

This is not the place, I think, to get into what art critic Hal Foster (1996) refers to as "the return of the real," but I am, in this project, much more concerned with confrontation with the weight and density of the HIV-positive women who are the object of my knowing than with some audience who reads about them. Here, the meaning of what we study, its objectness, is its effect on our knowing, and writing is an affirmative experimentation that displaces skepticism and irony with respect for that objectness, its capacity to surprise us, to exceed us. The "too easy to tell

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[11] Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their theories of becoming and topology/cartography are interruptive of the more typical ontologically driven Western theories of being and typology (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). As theorists of knowledge, power, and desire, they shift philosophy in ways that use Nietzsche and Baruch Spinoza toward a nonsystematic system of concepts, a sort of "geophilosophy" that provides tools for thinking differently within and against dominant discourses.

[12] The second advance flier for the book delineates the very diffuse sense of multiple audience to which the book is addressed: "*Troubling the Angels* invites multiple ways of reading and grappling with the HIV virus, for personal and professional caregivers, families and friends, students of health, disease, and methodologies, and those living with HIV/AIDS." Issues around writing on multiple levels for multiple audiences are broached in Lather 1996.

tale" (Britzman 1998) that turns everything into rhetoric is not exhaustive of our engagement with objects and how they happen. Art historian Stephen Melville (1996) calls this "objectivity in deconstruction." In short, while knowledge projects are linguistically mediated and rhetorically staged, there is a being in excess of our knowing whether we know it or not. Facing the inadequacy of thought to its object, stuttering of and into language, the book is written within my desire for a "posthumanist materialism" that sees the problematic of language less as formalistic play than as an agent of cultural intervention against the seductions of mimetic views of representation (Cohen 1996).

As Nancy Johnson (1997, 1) points out, "traditional rhetorical theory has privileged persuasion and agreement as the goals of rhetorical practice," in effect erasing difference. In moving "toward the normative" where "authority" is based on "superior knowledge and appealing character," this "anticipatory stance" in regard to audience assumes how a general type of audience will respond. Instead, my work addresses Johnson's question: "How can feminist writers begin to re-imagine the goals of writing and subvert 'persuasion' as an aim for political work?" (1997, 2). Rather than conventional tactics of persuasion, my interest is in what Kate Lenzo terms "more nuanced authorial constructions that call into question the construction of authority itself" (1995, 4). This produces "a disjunctive space that expands rather than reduces interpretive possibilities" (McCoy 1997, 500). Hence, this writing shows what it is to be seen and assembles an audience in a way that resists the ground of traditional persuasion.

Doris Sommer (1994) terms this a "recalcitrant rather than a persuasive rhetoric" (542) in her exploration of texts that resist empathic reading. Disrupting fantasies of mutuality, shared experience, and touristic invitations to intimacy, Sommer delineates "uncooperative texts" (particularly that of Rigoberta Menchú about the struggles of Guatemalan Indians), which refuse mimetic desires and reader entitlement to know. Menchú says, "I'm still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets" (1984, 247). Such practices are double, Sommer argues, both epistemological and ethical. Such empathy-resisting texts are about what we can know but also what we, perhaps, ought not to assume we have the right to know. This questions Enlightenment assumptions about understanding and knowledge. Interrupting our desire to possess, know, and grasp, such defiant rhetorics teach unanticipated lessons about the limits of knowing.

Such a practice asks how a readership can betray a text that is constructed as a sort of trap that has to be broken with in order to rethink the

relationship of knower/known and reader/writer/written-about as constitutive and productive. Through a different organization of space and visibility, the usual identification and consumption of some other as what Derrida calls "the mourning object" is interrupted (1996b, 187). Gradually building up by partial pictures the idiom of our history, this is a fold versus a depth model. Designed to disrupt the conditioned response of the modernist reader, such a fold elicits an experience of the object through the very failures of its representation. Such a fold sets up a different economy of exchange in order to interrupt voyeurism and the empathy that Walter Benjamin termed an "indolence of the heart" that keeps intact history as triumphalist narrative, the victor's story (1968, 256).

Eschewing sentimentality, empathy, and subjectivism, Benjamin's historical and sociological impulses underwrote the efforts of Chris and myself to construct a book on women living with HIV/AIDS where the reader comes to know through discontinuous bits and multiples of the women's stories. Such textual dispersal works against easy categories of us and them, where "us" is the concerned and voyeuristic and "them" are the objects of our pity, fear, and fascination (Fuss 1996). Refusing to deliver the women to the reader in a linear, tidy narrative, we intended to block and displace easy identifications and sentimentalizing empathy. Thus the text works toward constructing a respectful distance between the reader and the subject of the research, producing a kind of gap between text and reader that is about inaccessible alterity, a lesson in modesty and respect, somewhere outside of the "murderous mutuality" presumed by empathy (Sommer 1994, 547).

Incited by the demand for voice and situatedness, but perverting, inverting, redirecting that demand, the book attempts to complicate the question of ethnographic representation. Irreducible to the terms of the real, its insistent move is from voice to inscription, from notions of the intrinsic to ideas of the frame. Refusing textual innocence and an untroubled realism, representation is practiced as a way to intervene, even while one's confidence is troubled. Here the task becomes to operate from a textual rather than a referential notion of representation in working the ruins of a confident social science. This is deconstruction "after the turn," in what Spivak calls its "'setting-to-work' mode" that carries a greater emphasis on ethics and politics (1999, 429).

Toward a methodology of getting lost: Research theory politics

> At some level, the book is about getting lost across the various layers and
> registers, about not finding one's way into making a sense that maps easily
> onto our usual ways of making sense. Here we all get lost: the women, the
> researchers, the readers, the angels, in order to open up present frames of
> knowing to the possibilities of thinking differently.
> —Lather and Smithies 1997, 52

In this final section, we arrive at where we have, perhaps, been moving all
along: the political and ethical implications of the sort of stammering rela-
tion to what it studies of a book intended to attest to the possibilities of
its time yet, in the very telling, register the limits of itself as a vehicle for
claiming truth. In what follows, I delineate the political point of the in-
terpretive and textual practices of the book, destabilize my own invest-
ment in those practices, and probe the possibilities of a "responsible
deconstruction."

The political point

Troubling the Angels refuses much in an effort to tell the story of others in
a way that takes testimony seriously enough not to tame its interruptive
force into a philosophy of presence and a romance of the speaking subject
(Derrida 1976). Chris and I risked this format in order to bring to hearing
the unspoken and unspeakable that is present when people attempt to tell
the truth about their lives. No longer feeling confident of the "ability/war-
rant to tell such stories in uncomplicated, non-messy ways" (Lather and
Smithies 1997, xvi), the straightforward story has become impossible. "In-
nocent" ethnographic realism is displaced by practices of representation
where authors both get in and out of the way in an effort to honor the
voices of the women while not eliding the inevitable power researchers
yield as interpreters and writers. Deepened in encounter with such com-
plicating of testimony as Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*
(1986), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony* (1992), and the con-
troversy around *I, Rigoberta Menchú,* Chris and I refuse to play the expert
and explain the women's lives.[13] Avoiding the position of the grand theo-
rist and master interpreter, we grant weight to lived experience and practi-
cal consciousness by situating both researcher and researched as bearers of
knowledge while simultaneously attending to the "price" we pay for speak-
ing out of discourses of truth, forms of rationality, effects of knowledge,
and relations of power (Foucault 1998). To mark such complications,

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[13] I pursue these issues in Lather 2000b.

Troubling the Angels uses a variety of devices, from shifting countervoices and subtextual underwriting to dialogic openness and variability of meaning. Intended to rupture the narrative and force reading in two directions, such devices undercut the authors as "the ones who know" by employing partiality, chunkiness, and deferral. Rather than depiction through claims to "wholeness" and presence, representation is presented as irreducible to the terms of the real, and closure is interrupted in order to work against ending on the sort of recuperative note typical of "the religious left" (Gilbert-Rolfe 1995, 56).

Such deauthorizing devices are evident in the book's final two pages where we both challenge the researcher's right to know and interpret and yet "get in the way" of any claim to an innocent ethnographic realism of voices speaking for themselves. Registering discomfort with the religious construction of AIDS as a "journey to God," I listen to one of the women read a poem at her final meeting with the support group. I write of God as, to me, "an available discourse. . . . For Holley, God is the Father she is ready to come home to" (Lather and Smithies 1997, 251–52). And then Holley's poem has its stage, the final page of the book, the final box of a book full of boxed knowledges, unexpected juxtapositions, mimetic ruptures, and changes of register from ethnographic voice to researcher confessionals to the latest demographics of AIDS. Situating our textual moves within and against the historical and normative status of the new ethnography, we try not to position ourselves as knowing more about these women than they know about themselves. Placing their voices above ours on the split pages and their poems in boxes seemingly out of the control of authorial judgment, our aim is not so much verisimilitude as a troubling of authority in the telling of other people's stories. Searching for ways to stage the aporias involved in telling other people's stories, the book works the ruins of feminist ethnography as the very ground from which new practices of ethnographic representation might take shape.[14]

The aporia of exemplarity
To risk applying methodological considerations to an example illustrates "the aporia of exemplarity" (Spivak 1999, 430) where something can be "produced as truth at the moment when the value of truth is shattered" (Derrida 1976, 162). While *Troubling the Angels* draws on and dramatizes

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[14] My thinking in this section is inspired by Malini Johar Schueller's (1992) critique of James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* where she situates Agee as paternalistic and liberal in his idealization of those whose stories he tells but, nevertheless, as opening up a space for subverting narrow and consensual definitions of the tenant farmers who people his book.

reoccurring tensions and traditions in feminist ethnography, any reading of such a text is "ordered around its own blind spot," and this is surely doubly so when the text is one's own (Derrida 1976, 164). To privilege a certain text is, in Derrida's words, exorbitant, by which he means "a wandering thought . . . affected by nonknowledge" that reaches a point beyond "the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship" of a writer to her time and use of language (1979, 161, 158). But "we must begin *wherever we are*," he says, "[having learned] that it was impossible to justify the point of departure absolutely. *Wherever we are:* in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (Derrida 1976, 162; emphasis in original). Troubling both habitual frames of representation and deconstructive counterpractices, the book is offered as "modest witness" of a "good enough" ethnography in the making, ethnography as a cultural practice and practice of culture, something to think with rather than a mastery project (Haraway 1997).

Ironically, such an example courts a situation of being too convinced of its success as an ambivalent failure in a way that recuperates a sense of mastery through the very defense of risky failures.[15] As methodological stances, reflexive gestures, partial understanding, bewilderment, and getting lost are rhetorical positions that tend to "confound refutation," and fragmentation of texts hardly avoids imposing one's interpretation of a fragmented worldview (Hegeman 1989). Against such self-consolidations/ consolations, my interest is in the limits of reflexivity and the possibilities of nonmastery as an ethical move. In this, reflexivity is positioned as about modernist assumptions of consciousness, intentionality, and cure and displaced by what Derrida has termed a "double effacement" (1979, 100).[16] Effacement, as some other to the plenitude of presence, displaces mastery with a recognition that we often do not know what we are seeing, how much we are missing, what we are not understanding, or even how to locate those lacks. What is doubly effaced, then, is both the transparency of

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[15] As noted by a reviewer of an earlier draft of this essay.

[16] As June Nash notes, the first calls for reflexivity in anthropology came in the mid-1960s (1997, 18), well before postmodernism appeared on the disciplinary scene. Visweswaran distinguishes between interpretive/reflexive and deconstructive ethnography. Reflexive ethnography authorizes itself by confronting its own processes of interpretation as some sort of cure toward better knowing, while deconstruction approaches "knowing through not knowing" (1994, 80). In delineating reflexivity as a modernist practice, Felman's distinctions between Hegelian, Nietzschean, and Freudian philosophies of knowledge are useful. The former *"believes it knows all there is to know"*; a post-Nietzschean philosophy of knowledge is that "which *believes it knows it does not know*"; and a Freudian philosophy of knowledge is that where authority is given "to the instruction of a knowledge that does not know its own meaning, to a knowledge . . . that is not a mastery of itself" (1987, 92; emphasis in original).

language in constructing the referent and "the narrative of the impossibility of narrative" that is "of the same nature as what it works against," doing again as it undoes (Miller 1979, 250, 251). In order not to be "a bit too masterful and muscular," it undoes itself via "a ceaseless dissatisfied movement" (Miller 1979, 251, 252). Eroding privilege and undercutting certainty, both the knower's mastering point of view and the authority of the metastory "of deconstruction in deconstruction" (Derrida 1979, 100) are effaced. Here the obligation becomes to read the unreadability of the impossible event, an aporia that sets things in motion: "What must remain beyond its reach is precisely what revives it at every moment" (Derrida 1979, 134).

Staging a set of anxieties that haunts feminist ethnography, the book is a viewing space punctuated with paradoxes. Working at various levels of representation, it both uses and troubles the ethnographic genre in order to give testimony and mark reflexivity as a modernist trap while troubling both testimony and the angst around reflexivity. Conscious of itself as a system of conventions and representations, it performs the arbitrariness implicit in the act of representation. Its aspiration is to consolidate a critical public, both on the political level of HIV/AIDS support and activism and in the reception of feminist ethnography as a critical tool, particularly in terms of its "duty to betray" the seductions of mimetic views of representation: "the mirage of [the] immediacy of speech" (Derrida 1976, 141).[17]

Perhaps too clever by far in its dizzying involutions and intellectual somersaults, such a messy text says "yes" to that which interrupts and exceeds and renounces its own force toward a stuttering knowledge. The danger is that it risks "ethically violating the testimony of the other by subsuming her body or her sentiment to the reductive frames" of our interpretive and textual moves (Mehuron 1997, 176). Given such complicities, as Derrida (1996a) notes, the "authentic" witness is necessarily a "false" witness, caught in aporia, where to succeed is to fail in making the other part of us.

Deconstructive responsibility
While often assumed to be a nihilistic undercutting of ethical practice, the primary interest of deconstruction is "in awakening us to the demands made by the other" (Caputo 1997, 15). Given contemporary demands for practices of knowing with more to answer to in terms of the complexities of language and the world, what would be made possible if we were to

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[17] My thinking here is inspired by a review of the art of David Reeb, whose work addresses historical painting and the problem of testimony, particularly around the Intifada. See Levy 1994.

think ethnography as a space surprised by difference into the performance of practices of not-knowing? Meaning, reference, subjectivity, objectivity, truth, tradition, ethics: What would it mean to say "yes" to what might come from unlocking such concepts from regularizing and normalizing? In making room for something else to come about, how do we stop confining the other within the same? This is about the ethics of not being so sure, about deferral while entire problematics are recast and resituated away from standard logics and procedures (Caputo 1997).

In terms of a responsible deconstruction, how is it possible that *Troubling the Angels* might "be of use" to the women whose stories we tell? Is the violence done by raising issues around the romance of testimonial voice in the crisis of representation enabling or disabling? Can working through familiar narrative forms and everyday language via reflexive experimentation enhance rather than dilute the practical, political intent of feminist ethnography? "What would it be," as Spivak asks, "to learn otherwise, here?" (1994, 62).

In June of 1999, I spoke about our book at a conference on women and AIDS in Oklahoma, handed out copies at the women's prison, and engaged with AIDS service care providers and HIV-positive women.[18] Continually bought up short by the very tensions I am addressing between feminist imperatives to render women visible and poststructural critiques of representation, I thought much of Foucault's challenge that because nothing is innocent and "everything is dangerous . . . we always have something to do" (1997, 256). I wondered what we are to do with what we are told in terms of listening for the sense people make of their lives without reverting to "too easy" ideas about voice. How do we avoid practices of usurpative relation to people's stories of lived experience while still troubling experience as a "grand narrative" (Scott 1992)? How weighty are such academic questions about the limits of representation in the face of the urgency of AIDS in the world?

While the "member check" data included in the epilogue of the book give some credence to the usefulness of the book in the lives of many of the women we worked with, a different sort of book might have pleased them as much, or more.[19] In refusing to deliver the women to the reader

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[18] Women and AIDS Second Regional Conference, June 14, 1999, Tulsa. Representatives from nine states attended; fifty-nine sponsors and supporters were listed in the conference program; fifty scholarships were given out to maximize attendance by HIV-positive women.

[19] One example would be *Breaking the Walls of Silence* (ACE Program Members 1998), which grew out of an HIV/AIDS peer-counseling program at the maximum security women's prison at Bedford Hills, New York. Eight years in the making and another three years to press, the book combines the Freirian emphasis on empowerment and the knowledge sharing

in a linear, tidy tale, in excess of the referent, both more and less than any proper name, Chris and I evoked the "real" through the women's stories while problematizing referentiality. Staging the women "as a slice of the authentic, a piece of the real" (Spivak 1994, 60) while, simultaneously, questioning its own interpretive and textual practices, the book troubles the ruse of presenting the women's stories as transparent language. In addressing issues of responsible engagement, was the member check a "structured alibi for consultation" (Spivak 1994, 63)? What is at stake in replacing invisibility with visibility in a way that refuses seemingly self-evident, transparent stories presented as if voices "speak for themselves" (Piontek 2000)? In coming to terms with the dangers of such a tack, mimetic realism is not innocent in the way it treats the sign as transparent in privileging representation over signification, reinforces the passivity of the reader, and fails to portray the real as a contradictory linguistic construction. What is our obligation to the people we study? Do we act in their name in the last instance, or to "a greater responsibility than allegiance to a proper name . . . something coming about through the telling" (Spivak 1994, 41, 46)?

As Derrida teaches us, deconstruction is both remedy and poison (1981). My effort is toward a responsible deconstruction that learns critique from within in order to set to work anew. Assuming that consciousness is not the authority in the last instance (Derrida 1981, 316), my goal is "an analysis that is patient, open, aporetic, in constant transformation, often more fruitful in the recognition of its impasses than in its positions" (322). Drawing on Spivak (1994), who draws on Derrida to address questions of responsibility, my deconstructive methodology is a "setting-to-work . . . bound to good or bad uses, doubled in its acknowledgement" of necessary complicity (28). In formalizing the problematic of responsibility in terms of the relevance of deconstruction to politics, Spivak reminds us that "all complicities are not equivalent" and that "such demonstration can only happen within the intermediary stage" (1994, 63, 23). In other words, one sets to work out of what one knows, but "decisive testing" is in action in "the risks of non-knowledge" (25).

I think what this means is that as much as I would like to return to Oklahoma and see what sense the women I talked to have made of our book, perhaps it is the very questioning engagement of our intervention

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of its "behind-the-scenes" editor, Kathy Boudin, a former member of the Weather Underground, with personal testimony from women in prison and curriculum guidelines for nine education and counseling workshops. For a review, see Kaplan 1999. Another example would be *A Positive Life: Portraits of Women Living with HIV/AIDS* (1997), a book of photographs and interviews by Mary Berridge and River Huston, which Piontek 2000 contrasts with the narrative strategies of *Troubling the Angels*.

that is the politics of what we have done. Seeking something not over-coded in terms of received understandings of ethical exchange, including feminist protocols, we have set to work in the mode of deconstruction where accountability and responsibility are about "a persistent effortfulness that makes a 'present'" (Spivak 1993, 156). Attempting "to turn into something doable" the difficult recognition of the stakes of language in telling stories of lived experience, we have tried to write a book that is something other to "precious posturing" (Spivak 1993, 155). This has en-tailed risking that the testimonial subject can give us what we need instead of what we think we want: not her truth delivered to us in a familiar frame-work but the truth of the play of frames and the dynamics of presences, absences, and traces as all we have in the undecidability of history.

In working from, with, and for women living with HIV/AIDS, Chris and my book is as much symptom and index as intervention. It is a risky business, this mining of discursive resources toward a kind of knowledge that jolts us out of our familiar habits of mimesis, referentiality, and action (Cohen 1996). The danger is to steal knowledge from others, particularly those who have little else and use it for the interests of power. This is so even when the intended goal is to extend the reach of the very counter-knowledge upon which the book is based, the stories entrusted to those "who enter [such alliances] from the side of privilege" (Fiske 1996, 211) in order to transform the ubiquitous injustices of history into a readable place.

Conclusion

Even with all these words, I know that I am making a career out of them.
— Rhee 1999, 21

And so I leave you with my indeterminacies. In this account of strategies risked, I have sought the possibilities of research that makes a difference in struggles for social justice while working against the humanist romance of knowledge as cure within a philosophy of consciousness. My sense of responsibility is to move toward innovations leading to new forms, toward negotiation with enabling violence attentive to frame narratives that works against the terrain of controllable knowledge (Spivak 1993). My interest is in a less comfortable social science, one appropriate to a postfounda-tional era characterized by the loss of certainties and absolute frames of reference. Using a book full of stuck places and difficult issues of truth, interpretation, and responsibility, I have searched for the sort of doubled practices that "let the story continue," as Britzman (2000) refers to the

work of representation. Caught within the incomplete rupture with philosophies of the subject and consciousness, I have appropriated contradictory available scripts to create alternative practices of feminist research as a site of being and becoming in excess of intention.

As an index of the limits of the saturated humanist logics that determine the protocols through which we know (Melville 1986), feminist ethnography is a much-written on and about movement. From the consolations of empowerment to a sort of self-abjection at the limit, it is generating itself out of its own impossibilities as it evokes the anxieties that follow the collapse of foundations. Always already swept up in language games that constantly undo themselves, we are all a little lost in finding our way into ethnographic practices that open to the irreducible heterogeneity of the other as we face the problems of doing feminist research in this historical time.

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