



## Methodology-21: what do we do in the afterward?

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## **Methodology-21: what do we do in the afterward?**

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This paper asks “after what” and situates qualitative research in the present moment in the midst of various “deaths” and “returns.” With a focus on fleshing out post-qualitative research, it first sketches efforts to discipline qualitative research via standards and rubrics as a part of neoliberal governmentality and then elaborates what post-qualitative might mean via four exemplars. The first is from Sweden, a focus on relational entangled data analysis in the feminist classroom; the next two exemplars are collaborative studies from Australia at the intersection of Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems; the final exemplar is from Egypt, a feminist post-colonial study of the women’s mosque movement. The paper concludes with a call to “imagine forward” out of troubling a narrow scientificity and enacting an “after” of neoliberalism.

**Keywords:** post; qualitative; research

After what? What posts, post-posts and neo-posts am I using to situate my remarks on qualitative research in the present moment? What deaths of this and that and (re)turns need to be taken into account?

As a sort of shorthand, in *Getting Lost* (Lather, 2007), I listed the various turns in the social sciences, with their attendant citations, as: linguistic, structural, critical, deconstructive, rhetorical, cultural, narrative, historical, ethnographic, postmodern, ethical, visual, pragmatic, policy, and theological. And since that 2007 chart, others have emerged including the material turn (Alaimo, Hekman, & Hames-Garcia, 2008), the affective turn (Clough & Haley, 2007), the cross-disciplinary love affair with the neo-pragmatism of the Danish urban planner, Flyvbjerg (2001), and an increased attention to participatory community-based research, often feminist (Creese & Frisby, 2012; Writers & Nagar, 2006). As well, there have been many announced deaths, perhaps most famously of the subject, of theory and, quite recently, of the university itself (Lincoln, 2011). And the returns include the real, the empirical, and, one of my favorites, objectivity after deconstruction (Melville, 1996).

In terms of qualitative research, all of this (re)framing and emerging and dying generates such terms as “positivist qualitative methods” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2002, p. 457) and “dominant postpositivist” (Mallozzi, 2009, p. 1043) or “conventional interpretive methodology” (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 239) and “plain old ethnography” (Erickson, 2009). In earlier work, I tried to capture such movement with layerings of 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 methodologies. In this schema,<sup>1</sup> *Qual 1.0* is the conventional interpretive inquiry that emerged from the liberal humanism of

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sociology and cultural anthropology with a fairly untroubled focus on standpoint epistemologies, a humanist subject who has an authentic voice, transparent descriptions of lived experiences, and the generally untroubled belief that better methods and richer descriptions can get closer to the truth.

QUAL 2.0 begins to acknowledge multiple realities and voices, messy texts, reflexivity, dialogue, empowerment, and so on, but remains within the humanist enclosure, grounded in humanist concepts of language, reality, knowledge, power, truth, resistance, and the subject. The field becomes centered, disciplined, regulated, and normalized as qualitative handbooks, textbooks, and journals create “moments” and “designs,” and fix the “research process,” so that it becomes possible *to know it in advance*, for example, to offer a sequence of courses on qualitative inquiry, to teach someone how to “do a phenomenology,” and to teach someone how to analyze data.

QUAL 3.0 begins to use postmodern theories to open up concepts associated with qualitative inquiry: validity, voice, data, empathy, authenticity, experience, interviewing, the field, reflexivity, clarity, etc. This work is stalled for years when qualitative researchers turn to the defense not just of the methodology but also of the various epistemologies it carries on its back (feminist theories, race theories, class theories, postmodern theories, etc.). The field continues to be structured, and a kind of “interpretive mixed methods” (Howe, 2004) enters the picture and begins to be normalized.

QUAL 4.0 is *becoming* in the Deleuzian sense as researchers who, weary of a decade of defending qualitative research and eager to get on with their work, again imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. This inquiry cannot be tidily described in textbooks or handbooks. There is no methodological instrumentality to be unproblematically learned. In this methodology-to-come, we begin to do it differently wherever we are in our projects. Here, the term “post-qualitative” begins to make a certain kind of sense (St. Pierre, 2011).

It is the fleshing out of post-qualitative that is my purpose in this paper. To do this, I will first sketch efforts to discipline qualitative research via standards and rubrics. I will then call upon an “escape” that has already occurred. Finally, I will elaborate what post-qualitative might look like in practice as imagined out of what is already happening, embedded in the immanence of doing. What opens up if we position alternative methodology as non-totalizable, sometimes fugitive, also aggregate, innumerable, resisting stasis and capture, hierarchy and totality, what Deleuze might call “a thousand tiny methodologies”?<sup>2</sup>

### Discipline and punish

The transition from Keynesian liberalism to neoliberalism has set in motion radical principles of limited government. The results include the dismantling of the welfare state, expanded market freedom via efforts to curtail unions and regulatory actions, and privatization and taxation reforms that redistribute the burden of state finance away from the wealthy. Pure market logics push ever deeper into “the tissues of everyday life” (Povinelli, 2011, p. 151). We are, in short, witnesses to a fundamental transformation of the liberal democratic state much tied to the global markets, bio-informatics, and population management of the post-9/11 security state.

Qualitative research is much caught up in such shifts. In education, this means the efforts of the federal government to dictate “gold-standard” research methods via the “scientific based research” movement (Committee on Scientific Principles for

Education Research, 2002) and the consequent push-back. It is helpful to look at other areas of the academy to see how this “disciplining” of qualitative research is about much more than education in terms of meeting such efforts with resistances of various sorts.

In political science, for example, the widely cited efforts of King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) to “help out” qualitative research by offering a “quantitative template” have been countered by Brady and Collier (2004) who call out this “quantitative imperialism” (p. 15) for what it is. As a further example of push-back, the National Science Foundation’s (NSF, 2004) workshop on Qualitative Methods has evoked a letter of protest from the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry regarding the focus on mainstream approaches that marginalizes the proliferation of kinds of qualitative research, in particular, autoethnography, performance ethnography, and critical ethnography.<sup>3</sup>

A sense of how this has played out in the US education research scene can be garnered from a comparison of two sets of standards from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) on research reporting. The set of standards for “empirical social science” (AERA, 2006) works hard to include more qualitative friendly criteria within a commitment to transparency of the logic of inquiry. Announcing itself as “not a checklist,” a set of structuring binaries – a priori/emergent design, causal inference/description and meaning, measurement/classification – allows for shared standards until the iterative nature of qualitative work and the necessary role of interpretive commentary demand separate sections for data analysis. Returning to shared standards, generalization is handled in a way that makes space for qualitative work although conflict of interest and bias are conflated. While undoing some of the constraining effects of SRE (Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research, 2002), the limits of attempting shared standards across the full range of empirical work in education become obvious in comparison with the set of standards for “humanities-oriented research” (AERA, 2009).

In those 2009 standards, there is much talk of dissonance, discomfort and reflexivity, blurred boundaries between the humanities and the social sciences, and room for evocative imagery and narrative. There is space to “depart from the orthodoxies” in demands for transparency and direct refusals of both the movement toward “structured abstracts” and neutrality in favor of research that illuminates, critiques, and evaluates.

This comparison demonstrates that any exploration of a world in process is crowded out in a shared standards approach. Political science is in the midst of figuring this out. The “salutary influence” on qualitative research of “a more complete systematization” of methods, credited to the influence of King et al. (1994), is much troubled (Brady & Collier, 2004). Rather than standardizing qualitative research in the name of providing better evidentiary warrants, such efforts have resulted in a “striking reassertion of qualitative approaches” where shared standards and the fact/value distinction are held in suspicion (Weyland, 2005, p. 392).

In short, the contest over the science that can provide the evidence for practice and policy pits the recharged positivism of neoliberalism against a qualitative “community” at risk of assimilation and the reduction of qualitative to an instrumentalism that meets the demands of audit culture. To refuse this settlement is to push back in the name of an insistence on the importance of both epistemological and ontological wrestling in governmentality and calling out the unthought in how research-based knowledge is conceptualized and produced.

## Escapes

This section makes much of the Spencer Foundation report, issued in September, 2009, on the preparation of education researchers, based on lessons learned from Spencer Research Training Grants.<sup>4</sup> It as well calls on Marcus (2009) and his lessons learned from generations of advising students in ethnography. Both demonstrate, I argue, what it means to think about qualitative research “after” SRE and, in the following section, “after” neoliberalism.

What is noteworthy about the Spencer Report, in both overt and subtle ways, is the influence of the last decade of protest against the 2002 SRE report with its attempt of “a modest dampening of enthusiasm” for randomized field trials (Spencer Report, 2009, p. 25). Key terms are acknowledged as matters of dispute (e.g. rigor, value-neutrality, and objectivity are questions, not assumptions, p. 99). The “comfortable” navigation of “the complex intellectual, social and educational worlds” (p. 10) is interrupted by calls to “soul-searching” as one follows the debates across, for example, the *Educational Researcher* (p. 22). Grasp of “the epistemological underpinnings” (p. 23) of “warring ideas” (p. 24) is endorsed for all. “Hotly-contested terrain” (p. 26) is both acknowledged and used to warrant a call for producing work “of sufficient quality to withstand critical scrutiny from many directions” (p. 26). Contextual knowledge is posited as key across paradigms (p. 28).

Rather than a narrowly defined methodological rigor (e.g. control groups), the report endorses “a depth of understanding educational contexts ... sensitivity to issues of social justice ... and epistemological sophistication” (2009, p. 30). While context is much reduced to classroom culture and less to macro-structures and forces, this document is ripe for an analysis of what lies beneath the surface. I could go on about the specific recommendations that emerge out of the quite interesting vignettes of research training that are offered; however, the point I want to make is not so much about program, pedagogy, and mentoring, but rather the sort of sub-text of this report in regards to its contrast with SRE from almost 10 years ago.

As someone who frequently whines about the focus on SRE and how it has detracted me from my real interest in feminist research methodology, I was quite heartened by the obvious effect this last 10 years of protest has had. Frequent references are made to how the tensions between qualitative and quantitative research help one “think deeply” about underlying assumptions (2009, p. 77). Mindful attendance of “some of the more lively and well-attended” (p. 97) AERA sessions that feature these tensions is endorsed. Even the old chestnut that question determines method is something to be discussed, not assumed (p. 95) and research questions are, finally, seen as evolving (p. 109).

The SRE report is “a lightening rod” (Spencer Report, 2009, p. 102), and critiques about it are registered in a way that attends to the incommensurability at work in the struggle over science that has to be taken for what it is: power struggles over who gets to set the terms of debate. This is about difference, not sameness, a difference that begins to be acknowledged in this report. Perhaps most exemplary of this is that the much debated six “guiding principles” of the SRE report are elaborated upon in a critical, inclusive manner. Replication and generalizability are, newly, “questionable” (p. 104) and even the priority of causal knowledge is made a question rather than an assumption (p. 107).

All is not perfect; new positivisms sneak in, for example, the reworking of objectivity as refutability, a rather untroubled idea of triangulation, and the demarcation criteria for science continue to be normative rather than descriptive, more a “who gets

to be in the gentleman's club" as opposed to a more science studies approach of "how does it work." The "non-epistemic" of socio-political values is held in place in an unacknowledged "context of discovery" vs. a "context of verification" distinction.

But ground has been moved. The "objectivity debates" are now acknowledged and good educational researchers are to be trained to be "reflective" and to have well thought-out positions in the face of such debates (2009, p. 108). Qualitative research now has "families" with different approaches and debates around "skills based" vs. "theory-based" training (p. 112). The sort of quantitative imperialism that so characterized SRE has been shaken and, most encouragingly, seemingly from within the Task Force itself. The "disciplining" of qualitative research appears to be abated; rather than more "standards," the tables are turned toward the importance of epistemological grounding across paradigms.

Dare I say: the address actually seems more to positivism than were previous efforts to foster a "positivist qualitative research" (e.g. 2004 NSF standards for qualitative research documents). While the "disappearance" of less mainstream qualitative research continues – there is no mention of autoethnography, performance ethnography, and critical ethnography – it appears there is room at the table for qualitative research as long as it behaves itself.

To the extent the Spencer Report registers stresses and controversies, I announce no great remaking of old divides. Much work remains to be done, particularly, I would say, on the front of new methodology for new times in terms of concretizing emerging trends, particularly those that "exceed the discourse of fieldwork that exists" (Marcus, 2009, p. 4).

To think differently means to work within and beyond the reflexive turn, to problematize inquiry, to redefine objects as more in networks than in single sites (Barad, 2007), to trouble identity and experience, and what it means to know and to tell. Most importantly, it means "no methodological a priori" (Marcus, 2009, p. 5). The actual design and practice of the fieldwork of the future are up for grabs. "What is usually thought of as method" (p. 6) shifts to a sort of "running away" from traditional models, especially the holdover of research as a mirroring/objectivism where "despite fierce resistance," destabilization has happened.

As evidenced by the Spencer Report (2009), perhaps we are caught between two regimes of truth. What does it mean to move beyond the limits of the kinds of change that can be produced within current paradigms in an era crushed by demands for more "evidence-based" research under some "gold standard"? Of course, as many have argued for quite some time, the key is to contest what counts as science if we are to move toward "methodology-21," something less Cartesian and, perhaps, more Deleuzian.

### **Post-qualitative**

After 10 years, somewhat lost to fighting governmental incursions into science, the repositivization of the field and consequent remarginalization of qualitative work, the development of the contemporary scene of educational research is taking advantage of the ruins of SRE to develop new practices. Such practices move us into what Marcus (2009) terms "metamethod" that reconceptualizes and experiments with standard practices, moving beyond current scripts and their conventional codifying and disciplining of inquiry. Here is the space of "post-qualitative."

To explore this space, I call upon four exemplars: from Sweden, a focus on relational, entangled data analysis in the feminist classroom; from Australia, two col-

laborative studies of the intersection of Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems; and from Egypt, a feminist post-colonial study of the women's mosque movement.

In an essay on thinking as sexed and collaborative analysis as feminist, Swedish post-structuralist, Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi (in press), theorizes Deleuze and Guattari's "molecular girl" as an embodied becoming against a metaphysics of an individual subject. Looking at 10 doctoral students engaged in collaborative deconstructive analysis of qualitative data, displacing and unhinging their own thinking was where they started. Trying to resist habitual ways of reading data, what Deleuze termed the "violence of thinking" was embraced as "lines of flight" that were actualized in computer designs for analysis and writing. Page work, colors, lines, graphemes, and commentary boxes, all marked the various deconstructive moves in ways that went well beyond "coding and categorizing" in identifying dominant and resistant discourses at work. Escaping binaries into continuums and multiplicities, new events of thinking were materialized; data could be relived from differing subject positions; thinking became creation as researchers were transformed into creative thinkers in assemblage with one another in a state of virtuality. Here being used by thought has its pleasures, "zigzagging through networks of difference" in a non-hierarchical manner.

Framing theories of subjectivity within intra-actional, post-human, relational entanglements, the essay elaborates a "diffractive" reading that goes "beyond" performativity as a difference driven analytic. With thanks to Madonna, "molecular girl" enacts a gendered kind of collaborative analysis that is at the limits of not just philosophy but also feminism, a becoming woman as the woman who thinks in a way that needs others in order to displace and unhinge one's own understandings. Beyond habit via embodied and enabling violences, this is something other than negation, something Deleuzian in using positive and affirmative difference as both continuum and multiplicity. Data get lived in new ways. And so we move into pleasure and surprise in engaging with theory to displace the fear-terror that too often characterizes women's experiences with theory-enriched data analysis. Companionship becomes the dominant state as one opens up to being used by thought. "Making love to" one's data becomes thinkable as a kind of ethics, something quite different from "better or smarter," something more akin to the in-between places of pleasure and pain. Struggling with and against, becoming more and other, "in a field of production of desire," analysis moves way beyond interpretation.

### ***"Other" analytic practices***

From this essay, it appears that, in post-qualitative work, analytic practices are quite other to the cutting and pasting of coding. What the essay describes in the process of design is what Adrian Rifkin (in Bowman, 2003) terms a topographical analysis that uses bits and pieces of theory to listen to the dynamics attuned to "figural densities" of texts set alongside one another. This allows for patterns of configurations that open up to unexpected readings of and listenings to materials in what might be termed "fractal analysis." Here, a new kind of object comes to attention, an object "pulled out of shape by its framings" and, equally importantly, "framings pulled out of shape by the object." This challenges who you think you are in a way that holds promise for advancing the critical edge of practice.

***“Other” researcher subjectivities***

Another kind of researcher subjectivity is also called for. Affect theory might provide some direction as it is, in Berlant’s argument, a new phase in ideology theory (2011, p. 53). Berlant’s take on affect theory troubles “the liberal culture of true feeling” (p. 65) that is so sentimentally present in much of the qualitative research about the “vulnerable ethnographer” (Behar, 1996) and autoethnography. To interrupt the drama of the self, Berlant articulates a Raymond Williams “structure of feeling” that is refracted in shared historical time. Bespeaking a shared nervous system in this time of surviving neo-liberalism, Berlant terms this “a desubjective queerness” (p. 18) that is not so much internal self-involvement mired in narcissism as a sort of counter-affect that works against the “inflated poetic interiority” (p. 157), of a liberal investment in emotional authenticity, what Berlant terms “the demand for a feeling fix” (p. 176) that is a kind of “noisy affectivity.”

Berlant’s interest, as is mine, is in a post-spectacular dedramatized story, a deflationary aesthetic that points to the insecurity of knowing. Calling on Agamben’s inoperative community, this is a non-relation that performs the impasse and the limitation of what feelings can do. Working out of a fatigue with affective inflation and resulting intensities, Berlant’s counter-affect positions feeling as just one nodal point among many and not the most important. The rescuing researcher is displaced in the transition from less heroic practices (Britzman, 2009) to a place where “a brush with solidarity” might be the best we can hope for in the present “bruising” affectsphere of “what is already not working” (Berlant, 2011, p. 263).

***An “Other” theory of change***

A third aspect of post-qualitative work is another theory of change. In *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, Nealon (2008) lauds the profound Nietzscheanism that Deleuze reads in Foucault (p. 38) and articulates a theory of change that is immanent rather than vanguard and practice-based accretions rather than the “big bang” of some new paradigm.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than a sudden discovery, Nealon tracks “slow mutations, accretions, and accumulations” (2008, p. 38) that occur at a low level of visibility, thereby evoking little resistance, as they remake through a network of mutual determinations. His example is the cell phone and how it works “from within the mutation of forces and practices” out of “a multiplicity of minor processes of different origins and scattered locations” to overlap, repeat, and imitate, gradually producing a blueprint (p. 38).

So what might the blueprint for post-qualitative look like? Out of mutated dominant practices, through a convergence of practices of intensity and emergence, both practice and objects of a field are redefined and reconfigured. What is key for Foucault is that practice itself is the motor and mode of change (Nealon, 2008, p. 43). Dominance emerges out of infiltrating/embedding/infusing, not killing. Intensifying, multiplying, and extending its realms of application, such change is wholly immanent.

Rather than the “oppositional pathos” of humanism, Foucault’s resistance is about power and the body as they are enacted, intensifications turned on themselves, a kind of jujitsu spread across a wide field and its contacts with power. As Nealon says about agency in Foucault, the problem is that resistance is everywhere (2008, p. 101). It is everywhere and nowhere. It exists only in a field of relations and “miniscule commotions” (p. 108). He recommends a kind of “hacking” of “a series of conflicting points



and issues”: this is our critical project that is not about individual but collective procedure, a very social enterprise where we start where we are.

To explore what this might look like, I call upon two Australian studies: the first is *Water in a Dry Land*, by Somerville (2013), and the second is Povinelli’s (2011) book on the shift in Australian Aboriginal politics from a state policy based on recognition to one based on neo-liberal intervention.

The Somerville study is a story of water and a writing that longs to *be* water. A searching of water in a dry land, rain that never and then finally comes, it encompasses environmental limits, decades of global mobilization, and indigenous stories and ceremonies as resources to link language, landscape, and cultures toward living in balance with nature. A five-year collaborative (auto) ethnographic study of drought in Australia by a team of indigenous and non-indigenous researchers, it has planetary implications for resource management and embodied arts-based methodologies across cultural differences. Containing important web links to the visual elements of the project, it elaborates place pedagogy, practices of everyday life, a literature review of water, sharp-tongued women, elusive lakes, racial violence, and moving between Western and Aboriginal knowledge systems. Touching upon deep mapping and sacred waters, it is a unique and strong voiced book in its elaboration of art and place as public pedagogy.

Shoring up local communities and knowledges as key to survival, it generates a radical alternative methodology across worlds that cannot know one another, what Somerville calls “a methodology of lemons” of entanglement and reflexivity out of bodywork. Artwork and stories were produced; journals, photos, and interviews were collected in order to document “emerging relationships, conversations, images, and ideas” that were then shaped into a series of public exhibitions of artworks and texts.

In a second exemplar, anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli has been working with Australian Aboriginal peoples across a digital archive that has resulted in several books.<sup>6</sup> Her latest work (2011) tracks the shift in Australian neo-liberalism from a politics of cultural recognition and self-determination to what she calls neo-liberal “economies of abandonment” dominated by privatization and individualization. She frames a collaborative “augmented reality” project using digital tools as about a “geobiographics” or “positive biopolitics” that refigures markets and difference toward mutual obligation in late liberal governance. Growing out of the land claims struggles of the 1970s, she articulates a move from static animism to “geontologies” where the energy of disrupting Western binaries of organic/inorganic, agency/subjectivity is channeled toward a new animism, a new materialism, and a new vitalism toward new possible destinies. Positing a new geological era, the anthropocene, using GPS technology to focus on the effect of human behavior on the ecosystem, the project raises such questions as, does the earth have a metabolism, can rocks listen, what are the rights of a creek?

It is an analytic purchase on truth that Povinelli wants for her praxis. She uses the collapse of neo-liberalism toward an emplacement of displaced populations that offers the possibility of indwelling otherwise. This is an animism that she calls “a queer move toward an environmental ethics based on the return.” Mixing cutting-edge technology with an obligation to the totemic imaginary, she seeks to abstract a truth from the interactions between human and space that can give room for new thought. Methodologically, this entails the use of tools, e.g. GPS and geocoding, to visibilize activity on the land so as to learn a “cosmological gaze in cartographic times” in order to see what can be sustained by a people who refuse to be governed

by neo-liberalism.<sup>7</sup> Most interested in how power is organized in late liberalism, she helps imagine and fund this “Indigenous grassroots project on mixed reality” (2011, p. 190) that might be socially and economically supportive with an eye toward engaging critically with what is wrought.

Such exemplars are in excess of intersectionality in their attention to multi-directionalities, post-human bodies, intra-actional networks, contingency, non-mastery, and incalculables. They take on issues of messy conceptual labor, difference, otherness and disparity, and incompleteness as a positive norm. This is beyond tensions between tradition and avant-garde. It is about working the stuck places into which such tensions have gotten us. Critical ideas have become their own orthodoxy in “the reflexive turn” that is its own “best practice” and limit situation. Moving toward glimmers of alternative understandings and practices that give coherence and imaginary to whatever “post-qualitative” might mean, it explores a new culture of method of breaking methodological routine by savoring our critical edges, aporias, and discontents. It troubles visibility and holds up blind spots as productive sites toward “the risk of a new relationality” (Berlant in Davis & Sarlin, 2008). Instead of a voice of masterful, individual authority, it does what Ronell (2010) calls “partnering up with the questioning other” in order to disrupt any settled places in our work.

This is a restorying out of relations tuned “to the ear of the future” of a people to come (Ranciere, 2009, p. 55). Instead of papering over difference, otherness, and disparity, such work reflects/enacts these issues, suggesting further direction and broader possibilities of “being-acting-feeling together” through the production of new terms of belonging (MacLellan & Talpalaru, 2012). Clearly more could be said, but the point is this: method is political and that is a good thing to think with as we explore how much the development of a counter science “on our own terms” can be community based, community sustaining, and community serving in ways that might help alter the structures of institutions in more expansive democratizing ways. Each exemplifies an engaged social science that is between being “in trouble” and “of use” (Childers, 2008) where we inherit and invent, each time anew toward the something to come that is already at work. Here, perhaps, “getting lost” might exactly be about an accountability to complexity and the political value of not being so sure (Lather, 2007).

A final example that enflashes such ideas of moving beyond critical orthodoxies in the ruins of empire is a study of the Egyptian women’s mosque movement (Mahmood, 2001) that puts under pressure the secular liberal politics of feminism. Powerfully using ethnographic data, what she terms “this visceral register” (p. 224), to rethink agency, the normative subject of feminist theory and the ideology of emancipation that underwrites feminism, Mahmood troubles Western ideas of piety, reserve, restraint, and modesty in order to understand desire as shaped by non-liberal traditions. Willing to unsettle her own views, Mahmood departs not from a position of certainty but one of risk to one’s own sense of political engagement.

Mahmood’s very situated inquiry undergirds my suspicions of efforts to codify and discipline the “beyond” of qualitative work as having little room for the incalculable, the messy, not knowing, and epistemologies of ruins. Such efforts would benefit from an immersion in vitally minor possibilities that work against the forces of homogenization. In Deleuzian terms, this is a molecular vision of the alternative, a plurality of fissions and margins, a system of deviances straining for communicability while protecting its marginality, registering in the local, enacting the future life of difference, and a way to dream and perhaps enact a social science for the twenty-first century.

## Conclusion

Every field is heavily fractured and contested in terms of moving beyond the capture of a narrow scientism and reduction to an instrumentalism that meets the demands of audit culture. In inventing practices that do not yet exist, “deep critical rumblings” abound, with political science being, perhaps, the hottest these days. Shared standards and other such “assimilating moves” (Mihic, Engelmann, & Wingrove, 2005, p. 484) appear to have peaked and maybe even blinked in the face of resistance from post-foundational advocates. Talk of post-neo-liberalism is beginning to be heard in some corners of South America and US art speak.<sup>8</sup> Evidence-based practice seems to be sputtering on its own failure to produce. Even Bill Gates is newly enamored of stories (*Newsweek*, February 13, 2012, p. 5).

On the other hand, while counter movements abound, the National Science Foundation continues to spend millions a year on the importance of hypothetico deductive research (Clark & Primo, 2012). The “age of big data” and the “march of quantification” are not going away (Lohr, 2012). But the ascendance of reflexive knowledge is a more general pattern (Mihic et al., 2005, p. 524) and even “metric mania” is up against its limits as our love affair with numbers is, perhaps, beginning to run its course in the public imaginary (Kohn, 2012).

Structured by relations of difference and ontological troubles, across a variety of angles and different registers, we “imagine forward” (Gaventa, 2006) out of troubling a scientificity that claims that objectivity is not political, empiricism is not interpretive, chance can be tamed via mathematization, and progress equals greater governmentality. In my reading of the tea leaves, what appears to be amassing is a widespread recognition that to do less than a kind of performing forward, an enactment of the “after” of neo-liberalism, is to court not just a narrowed science but a narrowed future.

## Acknowledgements

My title comes from Art: 21 blog in reference to art in the twenty-first century regarding Maya Lin: Systematic Landscapes show at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 14 March–12 July 2009.

## Notes

1. This is adapted from St. Pierre’s proposal to AERA 2012. For a more developed schema, see Lather (2007, ch. 4).
2. Deleuze is referring to sexualities in Grosz (1993).
3. [www.lcqi.org](http://www.lcqi.org).
4. <http://ed.stanford.edu/suse/spencerfinalreport.pdf>.
5. A particularly useful take on this is global justice movement theorist David Graeber’s “The Twilight of Vanguardism” (2007). Graeber is much involved with the Occupy movement.
6. The archive consists of material from 25 years of working with families of her young project members that connects with a local epistemology toward “embodied obligation” (Povinelli, 2011, p. 142).
7. Much of this comes from Povinelli’s talk, “Geontologies: Indigenous Transmedia and the Anthropocene,” Ohio State University, 12 October 2012. Sponsored by Precarity and Social Contract Working Group.
8. A group of academics, artists and activists met at the 2011 Banff Research in Culture seminar to pursue new modes of “being-acting-feeling together” in the contributions of art toward the production of new terms of belonging and new relationalities that interrupt neoliberalism’s imputed totalization (MacLellan & Talpalaru, 2012). See [www.banff-research.com](http://www.banff-research.com).

ffcentre.ca/programs/program.aspx?ed=1068. See Lather (2012), for a more developed sense of “post-neoliberal.”

### Notes on contributor

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