
Qualitative Inquiry: Where Are the Ruins?

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Abstract

The article interrogates the notion of “the ruins” and its cognates (rupture, loss, failure, etc.) as productively destructive figures for postfoundational methodology and wonders how much damage has actually been done. Hoping for ruins, have scholars merely produced a picturesque gloss on the same old Enlightenment edifice? The author finds some promise in Deleuze’s notion of the *rhizome* at what happens when the global body surface of the edifice is ploughed. It promises to

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

I see some promise, though, in the recent reappearance of empiricism in philosophy and the social sciences and the possibility of a more materially engaged research practice. This is not empiricism as we formerly knew it. Brian Massumi (2002, p. 208) calls it an “expanded” empiricism, Patricia Clough (2009, p. 2) calls it “infra-empiricism,” and both are working from Deleuze’s (1994a) concept of “transcendental” empiricism (p. 181). It is ~~an~~fra-empiricism because it attends to sensations, forces, and movements beneath the skin, in matter, in cells, and in the gut, as well as between individuals and groups. This kind of empiricism traces intensities of affect that move and connect bodies,

2006). Deleuze (2004) argued that there is a second, not the researched in favor of multiple interpretations and representational dimension or tendency that subsists in language and undermine the prospect of political action by disseminating language, hidden by the tremendous power of representation and uncertainty.

cut into the flow of difference to bring forth stable referents, So to make language stutter, we need somehow to interrupt its usual workings. One way of doing this is to refuse to tendency a "wild discourse" or a "becoming-mad" of language—forget the bodily engagements of language: the way speech language that slides over its referents and transcends its own limits, restoring language to the open potential of becoming from the mouth, yet tied to the movements of tongue. (pp. 3, 4). This wild discourse does not mediate anything. Speech affects other bodies, registering not only in the brain does not refer outside of itself or build toward some higher and the ears, but in the heartbeat and the skin, in the sensa- fulfillment. And it does not emanate from, or attach itself to, things that we learn, later, to label surprise, boredom, shame, an already formed, phenomenological subject. or interest. Indeed the predicament of stuttering encapsu-

For Deleuze (1994b), the way to mobilize this paradoxicalizes the entanglement of body and language—it lodges in cal logic inhering in language is—in his famous formulation—the body but gets expressed in the language system. The to "make the language system stutter" (p. 24). To make stutter is a point of vibration and impasse where sound is no language interfere with its own tendency toward homogeneity a bodily noise—such as a cough or a yawn—but still neity, categorization, and equilibrium so that it begins to cannot quite free itself from the body and deliver itself up to "vibrate," releasing variation and singularity. However, as the discipline of syntax and the logic of propositions.

Deleuze (1989) notes, it is difficult to make language itself Sounds belong, then, both to language and bodies. But as stutter, and we may think we have managed it when, in fact Dorothea Olkowski (1999) notes, "If sounds remain we have only described or impersonated stuttering. Thinking attached to bodies as qualities, then the sound is that of a we are bringing forth the new, we may still be caught in the body eating or of a body sleeping, yawning, chewing, slob- repetitious production of what he calls "everyday banality" bering, sputtering, choking" (p. 222). Something needs to (p. 164). happen to transform bodily noises into elements of the lin-

This brings me to the issue of linguistic experimentation in linguistic system. In Deleuze's (2004) words, in qualitative research. For there have been many attempts

to make language "stutter" in research within the postmod- To render language possible thus signifies assuring ern or poststructural turn—to unsettle the foundations and that sounds are not confused with the sonorous quali- structure of academic language in order to release some- ties of things, with the sound effects of bodies, or thing unrecognizable, and therefore, something that could with their actions and passions. What renders lan- escape the structures of power, subjectivity, and colonial- guage possible is that which separates sounds from bodies and organizes them into propositions, freeing them for the expressive function. It is always a mouth under the influence of literary theory, deconstruction, and which speaks: but the sound is no longer the noise of the experimental ethnography of the mid-1980s. Research a body which eats—a pure orality—in order to become has been written in the form of play scripts, fairy tales, the manifestation of a subject expressing itself. (p. 208; poems, novellas, and confessions. It has been done in inno- italics added)

vative textual formats, with split pages to register dissonant voices, or to unsettle the authority of arguments before they Language is only possible, then, when sound enters into have had time to solidify. We have had footnotes speaking new relationship with bodies, and this happens, Deleuze back to the "main" text and different fonts for multiple writes, when something traces a line that becomes a frontier voices. I have done many of these things myself. between body and language, things and propositions—

I want to make one important point here: linguistic something that, nevertheless, does not exist apart from the experimentation is not enough. If a play script is just a map proposition that expresses it or the body from which it ter of converting propositions into spoken turns in a not issues. This something that is nothing is sense or the pure very-interesting dialogue, it will not make language stutterevent.

If interpretation is merely written up, or dressed up, in the I will not dwell on the nature of sense here—though it is style of a fairy tale, it will not make the language stutter everywhere implicated in my arguments. Instead, I want to Multiple voices will not make language stutter, if each focus on what happens when that frontier line between voice is that of an intact phenomenological subject and the proposition and thing, language and body is not properly voices are orchestrated and surveyed by the off-stage writer drawn, and the body rises up into language. It happens that researcher. At worst, as Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins traces of bodily stuff—animal noises, moist emissions, and (2008) argue, multiple voices keep the fiction of democracy visceral rumblings—do sometimes seep or irrupt into lan- and equity in play, but they displace the material reality of guage, with ruinous effect. And with considerable social

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

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

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

And yet, I heard her speaking english sounds much
 smoother,
and tender

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

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

Acknowledgement

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