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# POETICS, DRAMATICS, AND TRANSGRESSIVE VALIDITY: The Case of the Skipped Line

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This article presents three social-science writing transgressions: writing an in-depth interview as a poem, writing field notes as a drama, and the article, itself, which deploys diverse genres, personal experiences, and critical analyses. Through these examples, I challenge traditional definitions of validity and call for different kinds of science practices. The science practice I model is a feminist-postmodernist one. It blurs genres, probes lived experience, enacts science, creates a female imaginary, breaks down dualisms, inscribes emotional labor and emotional response as valid, deconstructs the myth of an emotion-free social science, and makes a space for partiality, self-reflexivity, tension, and difference.

## THE PRESENTATION

At the 1990 meetings of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction (SSSI) I presented a paper, "The Poetic Representation of Lives: Writing a Postmodernist Sociology." The paper asked: Why prose? How does the prose trope conceal the position of the author (the sociologist) and prefigure judgments about the validity of a social science text? How does the convention of writing-up interviews as *prose* pieces re-inscribe an unexamined epistemic code regarding how knowledge *in general* should be presented? (See Richardson 1992a).

For that 1990 program I transformed an open-ended life history of an unwed mother, Louisa May, into a five-page poem, a copy of which is available in the Appendix. Related to similar critical developments in anthropology (cf. Brady 1991) and literary studies (cf. Patai 1988), I wanted to display "*a method* for linking lived, interactional experience to the writing enterprises of sociologists" (1992a, p. 20). I was not proposing a premature burial for prose science writing; but I was proposing poetry as a method for "seeing through and beyond sociological naturalisms." "Casting sociological interviews as poetry could make visible the underlying labor of sociological production as well as its potential as a human endeavor." Poetry "can touch us where we live, in our bodies" and invite us to "vicariously experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation

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. . . ” (1992b, p. 26.) Poetic representation could thus make visible, I argued, both *context* and *labor*.

Louisa May is the speaker in the poem, but I crafted it, using both scientific and poetic criteria. I used only her words, repetitions, phrases, hill-southern rhythms, and narrative strategies, such as multi-syllabic words, embedded dialogues, and conversational asides. My intent was for the poem to stand aesthetically and emotionally, for it to be, as Robert Frost would define a poem, “the shortest emotional distance between two points”—the speaker and the listener/reader; but I also wanted it to be faithful to my sociological understanding of Louisa May’s story of her life.

There are two intertwined texts in the poem. In one, Louisa May reminds us that the story she tells was constructed during an interview. She talks in asides, written in italics, to the interviewer about the interview, the tape recorder, her life, and her feelings about her mother, friends, sex life, and voice. In the other text, the “story line,” she tells us she grew up poor, hill-southern, but in a “very normal sort of way;” that she married her high school sweetheart, went north to college, got pregnant, lost the child, got a job in another town, and got divorced. She’s 41 and single when she becomes pregnant by John, a man with whom she has had a “happy kind of relationship, not a serious one.” She tells him forcefully and repeatedly that she “would never marry him, never, never never,” and that he should “just go away.” But he didn’t and hasn’t. She gives her daughter, Jody May, John’s last name because “If she wasn’t going to have a father/ . . . she should have a father, so to speak.” He visits on week-ends; sleeps on the floor. But Louisa May is not interested in having a “split family,” John taking Jody May away on Sundays. No, her daughter has a normal life, living with her mother on a “perfectly ordinary middle-class street.” In the final stanza of the poem, Louisa May tells us, “This is the happiest time in my life/ I am an entirely different person/ With no husband in the home there is less tension/ And I’m not talking about abnormal families here/ Just normal circumstances . . . .”

Writing “data” as a poem did two things: first, it changed me, personally, unexpectedly (Richardson 1992b); and second, it exposed the truth-constituting, legitimating, and deeply hidden validifying function of the genre, prose. Here are some comments from my process journal:

Whose poem should I write? I think Louisa May’s because it’s going to be difficult. She uses almost no poetic devices in her normal speech; her background, goals, and perspective are different from mine.

If I can construct a poem which creates a vivid, immediate, emotional experience for the reader/listener using Louisa May’s words, then I’m on to something.

I could write my own poem alongside hers, a poem about what it is I don’t say during the interview. Me, the deceiver, the deluder—of self and others. My thoughts would be the buried text that needed to be excavated. But then the focus would be on me in a way that it should not be.

I resist beginning the poem because I don’t want to be in anyone’s head for as long and as deeply as I’ll have to be in order to write poetry.

Fourth Draft! I like it. I love this work. I feel I am integrating the sociological and the poetic at the professional, political, and personal levels. I love what I am doing. I love the process.

I am showing a different way of displaying a life. I am deconstructing the formats sociologists have chosen. I'm not just talking strategies: I'm showing them.

Bliss.

In writing sociological findings as poetry, I felt I had discovered a method which displayed the deep, unchallenged constructedness of sociological truth claims, and a method for opening the discipline to other speakers and ways of speaking. I could foresee the possibility of building cultural alliances with poetry and politics (cf. Brown 1977; Carey 1989), of taking seriously William Wordsworth's vision of a poetics applied to science:

The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, the Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings (Wordsworth, quoted in Noyes 1956, p. 363).

I had in mind writing sociologies which displayed how meaning was constructed, and which were helpful to people, and not boring.

In August, 1990, I sat at a long table at the front of a conference room, a happy actor in the ritual drama that Norman Denzin organizes each year on postmodernism for the SSSI convention. I was grateful for a respite from my department's "hobby-horse," logico-empiricism. In the *STANDING ROOM ONLY* room, I felt there was space. I could breathe. I could speak and be heard.

Two panelists read their papers. My turn. I handed out copies of the poem, read my paper in my normal voice, while reading Louisa May's poem and words in her hill-southern accent. Two more papers were read. Nobody hogged the podium. There was time for discussion. I loved how it all was.

## THE DISCUSSION

The ensuing 40 minute discussion period focused entirely on "Louisa May." I became a participant-observer and took extensive field notes, which I later constructed into an ethnographic drama. In the drama, the comments appear in the same order in which they were spoken during the discussion. Following ethnographic conventions, I abbreviated comments, but strove for accurate renditions of tone and content. Three of the characters are 1990 panel members—Norman Denzin, Patricia Ticento Clough, and myself. The other characters, members of the audience, are without names or identities, other than gender—ten men and five women. They are treated here as anonymous speakers—speaking positions, not personages.

I had not intended to create an ethnographic drama when I took my field- notes. I had planned to write them up as part of a larger paper on the reception of "Louisa May" by different audiences. But I was unable to shape the experience in prose without losing the experience; the material was intractable, unruly, transgressive. But a drama, I thought, could capture and communicate the event.

I beseeched myself with ethical questions. Did I have a right to write this play? Who

has ownership of words spoken in a public meeting? Was I plagiarizing? (I decided I was not.) Was I violating some human subjects code? (According to my university's rules, no.) Was I violating some unwritten courtesy code—doing “covert” ethnographic research on ethnographers—and thereby committing academic suicide? Would anyone ever “trust” me again? Would I be attacked? sued?

At the previous year's (1991) SSSI meetings, I had presented a paper, “Ethics and Ethnography.” That paper argued that ethnographers always run the risk of hurting their hosts, particularly if they used the norms of the community to gain entry and rapport and if the published material might not reflect the host's visions of self. Now, here I was in the very ethical dilemma I had discussed abstractly. Would my consternation be less, I wondered, if the *dramatis personae* were not drawn from my academic family? I resent being “sociologized”; will they? I felt great relief when Norman Denzin and Patricia Clough read the script, consented to the use of their names, and assured me that I had “heard” them. If others recognize their speaking positions in this script, I hope they will also feel that they were heard.

Once the drama was written, I cast members of my family into the roles, and tape recorded them. In addition, using the dramatic convention of the “interior monologue” or “talking to oneself,” I left blank time on the tape for me to speak live what I had been thinking but did not say in 1990. I did the ethnographic performance at the 1992 SSSI meetings, using the prerecorded tape and speaking out loud in 1992 what was unspoken in 1990. (A discussion of the reception of the drama will be taken up in a later paper.)

The process of constructing the drama led me to reconsider the postmodern debates about “oral” and “written” texts. Which comes first? Which one should be (is) privileged and with what consequences? And, why the bifurcation between “oral” and “written”? Originating in the lived experience of the 1990 discussion, encoded as field notes, transformed into an ethnographic play, tape recorded, performed using both the taped and live speech, and now re-edited for publication, the script for *The Case of the Skipped Line* might well be fancied the “definitive” or “valid” version, particularly to those who privilege the published over the “original” or over the performance or over the lived experience. What happens if we accept this validity claim? *The Case of the Skipped Line* incorporates in its construction multiple sites of invention and potential contestation for validity, the blurring of oral and written texts, rhetorical moves, ethical dilemmas, and authority/authorship. It doesn't just “talk about” these issues, *it is these issues*.

Below is a script, *The Case of the Skipped Line*, a representation of the 1990 SSSI session on “Postmodernism and Cultural Studies.”

## THE CASE OF THE SKIPPED LINE

### An Ethnographic Presentation in One Act and Many Scenes

CHARACTERS: Norm Denzin, moderator  
 Patricia Ticento Clough, panelist  
 Laurel Richardson, panelist—1990 and 1992  
 Male Conferees—10 different Voices  
 Female Conferees—5 different Voices

(SETTING: August, 1990. A large hotel conference room at the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction Meetings, Washington, D. C. The room is over packed;

*people are standing at the back, trailing out into the hall, peering in. The panelists are sitting equidistant behind a long skirted table at the front of the room.)*

**NORM:** Questions—comments? Yes..

**MALE-1:** My question is for Laurel. Your oral text—poem—was different from the written poem you handed out. Why didn't you read the poem just as it appeared on the handout? I wonder why you changed it?

**LAUREL:** Easy—my bifocals skipped a line.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*I'm confused by the question. Reading poetry out loud is a performance art; the evocative, smooth performance of the poem is my priority. It would not occur to me to stop the flow of the poem to pick up the lost line.*

*Mmm . . . Would someone have commented about a "slip" in a prose text? Would anyone at a sociology conference question the difference between an oral and written rendition of an interview snippet?*

*Ah, I get it: The written text is being privileged over the spoken one! If I hadn't distributed the written text, no one would have thought I had made a "slip." Maybe I shouldn't have handed out the poem . . .*

**NORM:** Patricia?

**PATRICIA:** He has not asked an interesting question and Laurel has not given an interesting answer. I want to make it more interesting. Laurel, you slipped—you made a slip. There are no slips. I want to know about the accent that you used when you read the poem and its relationship to slips.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*Oh, no, Pat, are we going to get into this Freudian stuff again? Maybe, I can fend it off with a minimal negative response.*

**LAUREL:** Patricia's question is not interesting to me.

**MALE-2:** (*speaking with increasing anger and volatility*) What about the reliability and credibility of the original experience? You have collapsed three moments of doing research into one. Because of what you have done, we cannot accept your findings as an accurate story.

*(continues a kind of background chanting beneath the sotto voce exchange that follows)*

reliability—validity—cannot accept your findings—inaccuracy—reliability—  
validity—  
cannot accept your findings—cannot accept your findings—

**NORM** (*sotte voce, aside to Laurel, supportively nodding his head*): Go on. Aren't you going to respond?

**LAUREL** (*aside to Norm*): NO, I'm too busy taking field-notes. I'm doing science.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*Over the years, participant-observation has been a convenient shield. Now, too.*

**MALE-3**: What is an accurate realization?

**LAUREL** (*Interior Monologue*):

*Yeah! A smart male ally in the audience to do answering. Great!*

**MALE-2**: (*with drill-sargaent stridency*): I want to see your transcripts and the poem and reconcile the two.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*Why doesn't he ask to hear the tape? Or, speak face-to-face with Louisa May? Why is he so tied to the written word?*

**MALE-2**: (*more and more huffy and angry*) Does the original, the written text, relate to anything? Did you actually do an interview? Is there a Louisa May? If you want to display originality, then how can we trust you? What is the truth here? How do we know that you haven't made the whole thing up?

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*This is outrageous. I am being subject to a vitriolic, out-of-control, libelous attack on my professional ethics. Why? Because my oral reading differed from a written text? If I had written Louisa May's interview in a normative way, would I be accused of fabricating research? Or is there something deeper in this assault that I don't quite get yet?*

**MALE-4**: I'm interested in how the previous questioner shifted from "original" to "originality."

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*Yeah. Like we should only trust the unoriginal.*

**MALE-5**: What Laurel Richardson has presented us is the grounds of Laurel Richardson's loyalty. The poem reflects her loyalty to Louisa May's story? Why didn't you tell us John's story?

**LAUREL**: I am telling Louisa May's story. The material was collected in the context of a larger research project on unwed mothers.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*You look satisfied with my answer. You nod your head. Is it because I couched my answer traditionally. Because I spoke of a research project, data set, interviews? Because I spoke in the passive voice? Or, are you nodding because I confirmed your suspicions that I'm always on the woman's side. What if I had said, I am not interested in John's story? He is irrelevant. . . . Maybe that is what I am saying.*

**PATRICIA:** I am asking the question about accent because Laurel's reading was different than what/how we were reading the written text. She's pointing to the difference between poetry and narrative. The narrative voice sometimes takes the "I" of the poem, and I thought it could be Laurel—a poem about herself—and I at times I thought it was about me—my divorce. The poem shows how hard the narrator has to work to make those identifications possible and at the same time to make those identifications invisible. The slips make all that visible again.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*I'm stunned. Pat thinks what really slipped out in my reading was my concealed identity . . .*

*And, smart, very smart, very very smart fast talking psychoanalytic Patricia, identifies with Louisa May. Identifies. Can merge. The poem is working . . .*

*Mmm..Maybe Patricia is right. Maybe, all mothers ARE deeply quintessentially unwed mothers . . .*

**MALE-3:** The poem evokes bodily and sensory experience. I don't accept the written text as the denotative reading. I reject the idea that she "slipped" in her oral presentation. I will not privilege the written text over speech.

**PATRICIA:** Laurel's was a slip. But her slip is prior to the text . . . Was there a text before the slip?

**NORM:** What is this obsession with the REAL—with the REAL—with the idea of an "original" text?

**MALE-2:** (*Furious*) People are losing their MINDS!!! We must make a distinction between her life and her speech. These are methodological and technical issues. The interview was obviously flawed. There is no reliability or validity here.

**MALE-3:** Don't you get it? She's problematizing reliability and validity. She asks questions about that which you take for granted. She doesn't have the authoritative spirit.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*THANKS. Keep talking . . . keep talking.*

**FEMALE-1:** I saw a dramatization of the Ollie North trial, and through it I could see

Ollie North differently. That is what this poem is doing. We see unwed mothers differently. We see beyond the veil of data.

**NORM:**—as though cinematic realism is verification. As if doing something like it is supposed to be done makes its real and true . . .

**MALE-6:** What are the concepts? What do we learn about someone's life?

**LAUREL:** In the poem, Louisa May talks about her own social mobility, her normalness because she lives a middle class life.

**LAUREL** (*Interior monologue*):

*I can't believe I'm doing this, that I am succumbing to the conventions of soc-talk . . . That I am defending myself by talking concepts.*

**PATRICIA:** The poem is about MY life

**MALE-6:** So, it's a T.A.T. test?

**MALE-1:** What is sociology? What about the grand narrative? The sociological deviant man? the mobility man? How do we represent the sociological without the grand narratives?

**MALE-7:** If we lose the grand narratives that we cannot love, we lose..

**MALE-3:** It may not be such a loss.

**NORM:** Many thanks to our panel. If anyone has more comments perhaps they can talk to the panelists privately.

APPLAUSE APPLAUSE SHUFFLE SHUFFLE SHUFFLE NOISE—Papers rattling,  
(*People come forward and form a loose queue.*)

**FEMALE-2:** I didn't know you had that accent in your background, Laurel, that you were from the south. I could see how your identity sometimes blurred with Louisa May's.

**FEMALE-3:** I know you were talking about yourself, Laurel, and that is good. We should be able to talk about ourselves. But when we disguise and hide our identities, we just feed the woman's problem—the denial of self.

**FEMALE-4:** You're very talented.

**FEMALE-5:** The space was suddenly filled with male voices, loud and booming. We women couldn't breathe. We were gasping for breathe.

**MALE-8:** You brought life into the room, dispelling weight and negativity. We could breathe. I want to do work where we can breathe.

**MALE-9:** I liked your poem. I, too, tried writing fiction some years ago. I sent a piece to the ASR—of course, it was summarily rejected.

**MALE 10:** All this happened, Laurel, because you were wearing orange.

### THE INTERPRETATION

How to interpret my lived experience? Why had the discussion happened as it did? I offer an interpretation which has the virtue of meeting a criterion favored by both poets and scientists: parsimony. The interpretation explains both the masculinist and feminist responses to “Louisa May.”

“Louisa May” revealed the phallogentrism of sociological discourse. The revelation of how sociological knowledge is constructed was a revelation of phallogentrism. The heated controversy over the “skipped line” was a fig leaf, a cover, a covering up, a covering over of that which Adam had, but “Louisa May” put asunder: the phallus. The case of the skipped line is the case of the missing phallus. “Louisa May” was felt below the belt.

The content, form, method, and presentation of “Louisa May” are not “anti-male,” a familiar and conservative stance that binds feminist dialogue to phallogentrism, as atheism is tied to theism. No, “Louisa May” is something qualitatively different; the work is outside the phallogentric discourse; the phallus is unremarked, absent, simply irrelevant; and yet, “Louisa May” is at a disciplinary conference, presented and legitimated. This shift to an *unremarked* gynocentric world, I believe, stimulated the energetic responses from both masculinist and feminist speakers.

Louisa May is a voluntary unwed mother who chose to raise her daughter without a husband. She is a marriage resistor, celebrating a peaceful, husbandless world. She claims the patriarchal right to language, the power to name. Her daughter’s first name, Jody May, echoes Louisa May’s and portends the reproduction of a happy, manless future for Jody May and other mothers’ daughters. In a self-conscious ironic move, she gives Jody May her father’s last name, a tip of the pelvis, so to speak, to the father, so to speak; in Lacanian terms, Louisa May displaces the symbolic and embodied father, the source of law and the self-other separation.

Louisa May is also the speaker in the poem. We hear her voice, words, pauses, emphases; in the oral version, we hear her accent, inflections, intonations. In the interview, she did not construct herself as sociologists might. In narrating her life, she decides what is worthy of naming. Education, occupation, and income are not. Louisa May refuses to give way to abstracted identities with which she does not identify; she resists categorization into and through a sociology which constructs and then reifies patriarchal concepts, as though the way to know or know about someone is through their SES.

There are three additional women’s presences in the paper. First, there is Louisa May’s mother, Jody May’s grandmother, foreshadowing the triumph of the future of matrilineage. Second, there is the silent character of the listener to Louisa May’s speech. In the poem, Louisa May talks in asides to this listener (“Is this helpful?” “I’ve talked so much my throat hurts.”) Evoked is a private, two-woman space where woman talk is the only discourse. Third, there is the writer of the paper and the crafter of the poem, myself,

a woman. That live woman is given time, space, and attention to speak at a convention; to raise questions about sociological knowing and telling.

Interviewing is a standard sociological technique for acquiring knowledge, for "knowing." Interviews are co-created through the intersection of two subjectivities, the interviewee and the interviewer. In the poem, Louisa May reminds us from the opening line ("The most important thing") to the closing line ("I've talked so much my throat hurts") that she is constructing her life story in an interactional context. What we claim to know as sociologists is displayed as constructed knowledge. What happens, then, to our authority? our definitive readings? Questioning the grounds of authority implicitly challenges phallocentrism.

But "Louisa May" represents phallocentric displacement in more immediate ways. The poem confronts and threatens sociological epistemology and ontology. What we know about Louisa May is not just the plot of her life, but her feelings, spoken as intimate asides to another woman during an interview. Knowing about emotions requires "emotional work" on the part of the sociologist, including giving up power and privilege within an interview. As a gender-class, women are skilled in, sensitive to, and interested in doing this kind of emotional work, and the sociology of emotions is growing rapidly within sociology (cf. Ellis and Flaherty 1992). Might not the masculinist interviewer feel threatened? Can he foresee a future where he is handicapped, perhaps mortally, from plying his trade? These grown men will still be able to watch boys on playing fields and bluster about rationality, but do they fret because they cannot locate the newly mown sociological field, or, if they should find it, do they fear they'll lack sufficient equipment?

Lest these ruminations seem far afield, let me turn to the issue of "telling." Writing Louisa May's life as a poem displays how sociological authority is constructed, and problematizes reliability, validity, and truth. Poetics strips those methodological bogeymen of their power to control and constrain. A poem as "findings" resituates ideas of validity and reliability from "knowing" to "telling." Everybody's writing is suspect—not just those who write poems. In sociological research the *findings* have been safely staged within the language of the fathers, the domain of science writing. "Louisa May" challenges the language, tropes, emotional suppressions, and presumptive validity claims of masculinist social science.

Louisa May's poem models a way of telling that creates in its readers/listeners bodily and emotional response. The subtext of Louisa May's poem is loss and displacement, bodily experienced, emotionally powerful themes. The deepest loss the poem inscribes is that of the father, the male authority over the staging of knowledge. We feel this loss because poetry joins emotional and intellectual labors.

Poetry may actually be a preferable way to tell *some* kinds of sociological knowing. Interactionists theorize that a person's thoughts are always in deferral when they are speaking. Nothing is simply present or absent but ideas are in transformation; "facts" are interpretations "after the fact." Self-knowledge is reflexive knowledge. Poetic representation reveals the process of self-construction, deferrals and transformations, the reflexive basis of self-knowledge, the inconsistencies and contradictions of a life spoken as a meaningful whole. The poem is a whole which makes sense of its parts; and a poem is parts that anticipate, shadow, undergird the whole. That is poems can be experienced simultaneously as both whole and partial; text and subtext; the tail can *be* the dog.

Because of its rhythms, silences, spaces, breath points, poetry engages the listener's body, even when the mind resists and denies it. "Poetry is above all a concentration of the

power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe. It is as if forces we can lay claim to in no other way become present to us in sensuous form." (DeShazer, p. 138). By settling words together in new configurations, the relations created through echo, repetition, rhythm, rhyme let us hear and see the world in a new dimension. Poetry is thus a *practical* and *powerful* means for reconstitution of worlds. It suggests a way out of the numbing and deadening, disaffective, disembodied, schizoid sensibilities characteristic of phallogocentric social science.

But to conjure a different kind of social science means changing one's relationship to one's work; *how* one knows and tells about the sociological. The distant, separate "I" of normative sociology which objectifies both the product and the process as "other," outside the self, won't do. That kind of constructed self can neither do the work that faces contemporary sociology, nor understand why it is important (cf. Krieger 1991). The relationship to one's work modeled by "Louisa May" alters both social science and the self that produces it. This relationship draws upon feminist ethics and gynocentric values.

In feminist writings of poets and social scientists, the position of the author is linked aesthetically, politically, emotionally, with those about whom they write. Knowledge is not appropriated and controlled, but shared; authors recognize a multiplicity of selves within themselves as well as interdependence with others, shadows and doubles. Alternate selves are interwoven by common threads of lived experiences. It is this feminist process of "knowing/telling" which led women listening to Louisa May's poem to feel that I was talking about my own life—or theirs. It is this potential for relating, merging, being a primary presence to ourselves and each other which makes possible the validation of transgressive writing, not for the sake of sinning or thumbing one's nose at authority, nor for the sake of only and just writing poetry—which may be ill suited for many topics, audiences, and writers—but for the sake of knowing about lived experiences which are unspeakable in the "father's voice," the voice of objectivity; flattened worlds.

### VALIDATING TRANSGRESSION

"Louisa May," the "Case of the Skipped Line," and, now, also, this paper, I submit, are demonstrations of how transgression looks and how it feels. My intent is not to tell sociologists to write poems or drama—like Poe, most of us will at best be only almost poets. My intention is more radical: find and deploy methods which allow us to uncover the hidden assumptions and life-denying repressions of sociology; resee/refeel sociology. Reseeing and retelling are inseparable.

The three texts within and of this paper step outside the normative constraints for social science writing: in-depth interview "findings" transformed into a poem; ethnographic field notes turned into a drama; and a *Sociological Quarterly* article with a poem, drama, journal entries, personal experiences, feminist humor, irony, odd section headings, and as few references as the editor would allow. (References are authority moves; disruptions; invite the reader to disengage from the text, like answering the doorbell in the middle of a lively conversation.)

Because the three texts violate conventions, they are vulnerable to dismissal and to trivialization as commonplace. Quoted here *in toto* is a dismissive reading of this paper, a reviewer's "Comments": "It is difficult for me to see that this article will be of interest to the readership of *The Sociological Quarterly*. It is too sectarian and other than that intensity (sic) I think the piece doesn't really work through its points with care." Ex-

cerpted here is a reviewer's trivializing-as-commonplace remarks: "In fact, the poetry only shows what we always do, especially us qualitative types . . . So, there isn't much new there about the poem." Sure.

I try to write sociology that moves people emotionally and intellectually. When successful, the texts violate sociology's unwritten emotional rules. Social science writing is supposedly emotionless, the reader unmoved. But, just as other social science writing conventions (e.g. prose, passive voice, omniscient narrator) conceal how truth-value is constituted, the affectless prose style conceals how emotions are harnessed in service of a presumed truth-value. Readers of traditional sociology think they are feeling nothing because what they are feeling is the comfort of Similac, a formula, which maintains the illusion that social science is all intellect. Suppressed are complex, differentiated, intense, and more mature feelings. The suppression of these feelings shapes a sociology which is lopsided—lopped off is the body. How valid can the knowledge of a floating head be?

Postmodernist culture permits us—indeed, encourages us—to doubt that any method of knowing or telling can claim authoritative truth. We have an historical opportunity to create a space for different kinds of science practice. As one possible practice, I have modeled here a feminist-postmodernist practice. In that practice, one's relationship to one's work is displayed. There is a sense of immediacy, of an author's presence and pleasure in doing the work. Lived-experience is not "talked about," it is demonstrated; science is created as a lived-experience. Dualisms—"mind-body," "intellect-emotion," "self-other," "researcher-research," "literary writing-science writing"—are collapsed. The researcher is embodied, reflexive, self-consciously partial. A female imaginary, an unremarked gynocentric world, centers and grounds the practice. Space is left for others to speak, for tension and differences to be acknowledged, celebrated, rather than buried alive.

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### APPENDIX

#### LOUISA MAY'S STORY OF HER LIFE

The most important thing  
to say is that  
I grew up in the South.  
Being Southern shapes  
aspirations shapes  
what you think you are  
and what you think you're going to be.

*(When I hear myself, my Ladybird  
kind of accent on tape. I think, OH Lord,  
You're from Tennessee.)*

No one ever suggested to me  
that anything  
might happen *with* my life.

I grew up poor in a rented house  
in a very normal sort of way  
on a very normal sort of street  
with some very nice middle class friends

*(Some still to this day)*

and so I thought I'd have a lot of children.

I lived outside.

Unhappy home. Stable family, till it fell apart.  
The first divorce in Milfrount County.

So, that's how that was worked out.

ii

Well, one thing that happens  
growing up in the South  
is that you leave. I  
always knew I would  
I would leave.

*(I don't know what to say . . .  
I don't know what's germane.)*

My high school sweetheart and I married,  
and went north to college.

I got pregnant and miscarried,  
and I lost the child.

*(As I see it now it was a marriage  
situation which got increasingly horrendous  
where I was under the most stress  
and strain without any sense  
of how to extricate myself.)*

It was purely chance  
that I got a job here,  
and he didn't.  
I was mildly happy.

After 14 years of marriage,  
That was the break.  
We divorced.

A normal sort of life.

iii

So, the Doctor said, "You're pregnant."  
I was 41. John and I  
had had a happy kind of relationship,  
not a serious one.  
But beside himself with fear and anger,  
awful, rageful, vengeful, horrid,  
Jody May's father said,  
"Get an Abortion."

I told him,  
"I would never marry you.  
I would never marry you.  
I would never.

"I am going to have this child.  
I am going to.  
I am. I am.

"Just Go Away!"

But he wouldn't. He painted the nursery.  
He slept on the floor. He went to therapy.  
We went to LaMaze.

*(We ceased having a sexual relationship directly  
after I had gotten pregnant and that has never again  
entered the situation.)*

He lives 100 miles away now.  
He visits every weekend.  
He sleeps on the floor.  
We all vacation together.  
We go camping.

I am not interested in a split-family,  
her father taking her on Sundays.  
I'm not interested in doing so.

So, little Jody May always has had a situation which is normal.

Mother—bless her—the word “married” never crossed her lips.

*(I do resent mother's stroke.  
Other mothers have their mothers.)*

So, it never occurs to me really that we are unusual in any way.

No, our life really is very normal. I own my house.  
I live on a perfectly ordinary middle-class street.

So, that's the way that was worked out.

iv

She has his name. If she wasn't going to have a father,  
I thought she should have a father, so to speak.

We both adore her.  
John says Jody May saved his life.

OH, I do fear that something will change—

v

*(Is this helpful?)*

This is the happiest time in my life.

I am an entirely different person.

With no husband in the home there is less tension.  
And I'm not talking about abnormal families here.  
Just normal circumstances. Everyone comes home tired.

I left the south a long time ago.  
I had no idea how I would do it.

So, that's the way that worked out.  
*(I've talked so much my throat hurts.)*

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