

BECOMING TED: AN ASSEMBLAGE OF POST QUALITATIVE DIFFRACTIVE  
ANALYSES OF THEORY-METHOD-LIVING

by

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(Under the Direction of Donna Alvermann)

ABSTRACT

Post qualitative inquiry requires a different approach to performing the acts of social science research, which are, arguably, inseparable from the rhythms of life itself. This dissertation is an exercise in what I call theory-method-living, or rather an attempt to live in call and response to the theories that guide not only research, but also mundane day-to-day activities. In a sense, this is the deterritorialization of research and the reterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of life—one move—that explores what it may look like to do a post qualitative dissertation. Thus, this is not merely an exercise in knowledge-making, but a pedagogical, ontological, and ethical undertaking.

Within, readers will find the content organized by the philosophical concept of the plateau (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), a period of sustained intensity, a rhizomatic entity, which allows readers to consider different conceptual configurations in relation to the organization of TED and locally franchised partners called TEDx. Allowing the New Materialist concept of *diffraction* (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997) to guide this inquiry, readers will experience three main plateaus that focus on the enactment, embodiment, and encounter of this concept in various settings. Plateaus that act as propulsions thrust the

reader into new space for thought and action and serve as arbitrary boundaries for the document. This inquiry is based on the life lived through my intra-actions with TED and a local TEDx organization at my university. I performed several acts of research, such as interviews, surveys, and observations, but the richest activities of inquiry were found in the unplanned moments of thinking, writing, and living among my TEDx family. This assemblage of analyses should not be read as a complete, self-contained entity, but rather as a multiplicity of differences that are an on-going act of becoming.

INDEX WORDS:           Post qualitative inquiry, Diffraction, Ethnography,  
                                  Experiential learning, Ontology, Deleuze, Guattari, Barad

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## DEDICATION

To my TEDx and TEDxUGA families, many of whom are dedicated, not only to the spreading of ideas, but also of love, joy, curiosity, kindness, acceptance, and justice; and also for those who those who generally refuse to “bring it down a notch” (Saldaña, 2014).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
PLATEAUS	
1        PROPULSION: An Introduction to Theory-Method-Living.....	1
2        Plateaus.....	10
3        TED.....	18
4        A Conventional Qualitative Literature Review of TED.....	27
5        ENACTMENT: A Literature Review in Motion: A Diffractive Literature Review of TED.....	39
6        Sublime Inquiry: A Look into a Post Qualitative Dissertation in Progress.....	92
7        EMBODIMENT: Re-Arranging the Space of Knowledge: A Diffractive Ethnography of TED.....	102
8        The Boils: Dealing with Data.....	154
9        Being “There”: “Live” at TEDLive.....	166
10       ENCOUNTER: Thinking and Doing with TEDx: A Critical Diffractive Analysis of Modern Methods of Experiential Learning.....	174
11       PROPULSION: Theory-Method-Living as a Quantum Entanglement.....	245

APPENDICES.....	251
A TEDx Survey Instructions and Questions.....	251
B TEDx Interview Email and Questions.....	255

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Thomas Young's sketch of two-slit diffraction of light.....	52
Figure 2: Light Diffraction by a Razor Blade.....	53
Figure 3: Diffraction pattern of ocean waves.....	53
Figure 4: Light waves bending around a sphere, producing a diffraction pattern.....	54
Figure 5: James Shah. 2013, October 10. Tweet.....	67
Figure 6: Judy Golden. 2010, February 15 Tweet.....	78
Figure 7: Anthony Bosio. 2010, February 14. Tweet.....	78
Figure 8. Steve Tsuida. 2010, February 17. Tweet.....	78
Figure 9. TEDxTampaBay. 2010, April 10. Tweet.....	79
Figure 10. Half-standing ovation for Sarah Silverman. 2010.....	81
Figure 11. Byrdstown, Tennessee shirt factory employees circa 1950's. Picture posted by Carolyn Smith on Facebook.....	123
Figure 12. Grandma Holt's Double Wedding Ring Quilt. 2004.....	123
Figure 13. Grandma Riley's Scrappy Wedding Quilt. 2004. ....	124
Figure 14. Online digitization of the US AIDS quilt. ....	125
Figure 15. Carrel 423A. 2017. ....	127
Figure 16. Emerging Media Lab inside and outside. ....	129
Figure 17. Bricolage beginnings.....	130
Figure 18. Bricolage mid-point.....	130

Figure 19. Bricolage complete with letters. ....	131
Figure 20. Bricolage complete without letters.....	131
Figure 21. Outside illumination of the bricolage piece.....	132
Figure 22. Yellow and pink post-it note data. ....	133
Figure 23. Mount Everest rhizome/nodule. ....	135
Figure 24. Steering committee interaction.....	137
Figure 25. Theory data.....	139
Figure 26. Handwritten data. ....	140
Figure 27. Interview and survey data.....	142
Figure 28. Google Alerts.....	142
Figure 29. Shaping data, 1. ....	144
Figure 30. Shaping data, 2. ....	144
Figure 31. The Boils, still image taken from video by Chuck Sutherland. 2015.....	154
Figure 32. Jay Horton. 2016, February 16. Tweet.....	167
Figure 33. Jessie Daniels. 2016, February 16. Tweet.....	168
Figure 34. Tim Leberecht. 2016, February 15. Tweet.....	172
Figure 35. Interview information.....	190
Figure 36. Screen shot. TED will “change your life”.....	216
Figure 37. Screen shot of a Facebook post by Emily Dardaman; picture by Mollie Simon. March 26, 2017.....	220-221
Figure 38. Wall hanging of the LHC at CERN.....	247
Figure 39. Part of the underground track of the LHC.....	248

## PROPULSION

### An Introduction to Theory-Method-Living

*There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made. Therefore a book also has no object. As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4).

The following is an experiment, or rather exercise, in theory-method-living. At first brush, one may write off this experiment as transcendental naval-gazing, a simple rejection of traditional formats and methods; upon further consideration, I pray something looks different. Difference has been the goal all along—not just to provide a different outlook for contrast’s sake, but to actually try to do something that lives out post qualitative theories, to wrestle both materially and discursively. I’ve taken classes, read more books than I can count, followed others doing this kind of work, and done my best to examine, critique, and write about lived experience in a way that explores the systems of power involved in social science inquiry and does not privilege the human subject or place experience on a pedestal of the real.

The organization of TED is an excellent site for tracing systems of power that constitute the existence of this organization. Many discourses about the organization of TED exist; rather than try to formulate the *truth* about TED or expose falsehoods designed to conceal the truth (Foucault, 1976/1978, p.11-12), this work exposes the “will to knowledge” (p.12) and means to play and tease existing discourses, while generating new discourses. Following Foucault, the intent for this inquiry was not to try to fill gaps of knowledge in an academic economy of scarcity. I wanted to:

search instead for instances of discursive production (which also administer silences, to be sure), of the production of power (which sometimes have the function of prohibiting), of the propagation of knowledge (which often cause mistaken beliefs or systematic misconceptions to circulate); (Foucault, 1976/1978, p.12).

In a sense, this is a “history of these instances and their transformations” (p.12) in the discourse of TED.

This collection is a compilation of a living experiment; the past five years spent working within and studying the organization of TED through local TEDx events, digital involvement, and international interactions have uniquely contributed to this project. However, to propose this story as a master narrative of the TED experience would do a disservice to my community of TEDx organizers, to TED’s role and possible roles in the global network of education and digital media, and to the theories I think and live out. Instead, this account of involvement is presented as a counter-history.

A counter-history is opposed to master or metanarratives. It focuses on what has not been seen, heard, or integrated in official histories. It is remembering against the

grain (Medina, 2011, p.12). They undo silences and refuse to forcefully refute metanarratives. By subversively “undermining the unity of continuity” (Medina, 2011, p.14), counter-histories work to expose and tear away at the produced narratives that provide stability and assurance.

Thus, this work is as much of a counter-history of qualitative and post qualitative inquiry as it is of TED. Refusing to artificially separate the subjects, theories, and methodologies used in this inquiry creates a new kind of work that radiates from engagement with this particular assemblage of theories and interactions. Dividing practices and discourses of legitimization exist, not only within the realm of the “subject”, but also within the practices of inquiry. Muddying the waters of subject and object, forcing them to act and re-act in different configurations within changing relations is important to one participating in post qualitative inquiry, or rather a “body in inquiry”; the body is imprinted with the experiences related to interaction with an outside subject.

The body is also imprinted with the theories lived, with the interactions and intra-actions of method and thought and human and material. Researchers who engage in post qualitative inquiry must resist the portrayal of the “before inquiry” and “after inquiry” methodologist. The traditional research organization of identifying a problem, engaging with the subject of the problem, dispelling the findings, and suggesting solutions works within a particular discourse that allows such separation of subject, object, and method. Refusing the basic model pulls at the metanarrative of research and of knowledge itself. Can inquiry be about anything other than knowledge?

Inquiry attuned to privilege epistemology cannot be about anything other than knowledge. Thus, a shift in the ontology of research is necessary if one wishes to do

different work. Inquiry can be about how to be and become in the world. This allows exploration of not only the world and how it is defined and delineated, but also embraces the fluidity of movement within worlds. The tension between meaning and movement is best seen through language. Often language stops fluidity; concepts get stuck in language and can be difficult to change. However, language also has production power. For example, naming something automatically solidifies relations created through language; yet, naming also brings something into being. Theory-method-living is a concept that I created to describe the entanglement of post qualitative inquiry that refuses to privilege one aspect of research (i.e. methodology) over another.

This dissertation draws and redraws the boundaries of inquiry, purposefully churning theory and method to create something new. I followed Deleuze's advice to "plug in reading and turn it on" (as cited in Braidotti, 1991, p.69). I lived my involvement with TED and TEDx university organizations alongside the theories and concepts I was thinking about in my graduate studies. Thus, the result is part traditional product, part rhizomatic machine.

This dissertation should be read rhizomatically. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write that rhizomes:

connect any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. [...] It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which is grows and which is overflows (p.21).



Strangely enough, the “rhizome is antigenealogy” or rather, short-term memory (p.21).

Yet, dissertations are not. They are produced and live forever in a static state. Therefore, I have tried to hold this product of inquiry and the movement required for this type of research in an affirmative tension.

Thus, reading this dissertation is an action that should always take place in the middle. I have written *only* middles. There is no real beginning and no real end. No great conclusions, prescriptions, or findings. Instead, readers will find plateaus—some longer, some short—allowing some time to be spent in the middle: “If a book is treated as a small a-signifying machine, the only question is: does it function, and if so how? This other (kind of) reading is an intensive reading; something does or does not happen. There is nothing to explain, understand, or interpret. Plug in reading and turn it on” (Deleuze, as cited in Braidotti, 1991, p.69).

This dissertation functions as a Body without Organs (BwO). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, “A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass” (p.153). A BwO is “made up of plateaus. Every BwO is itself a plateau in communication with other plateaus on the plane of consistency” (p.158). This inquiry is recognizable as a dissertation, because as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain:

You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of

subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality (p.160).

Therefore, the organism that this dissertation both immolates and rejects is a conventional humanist qualitative dissertation. At times, I embrace and stratify the organism, allow it to breathe for a few minutes, then I deconstruct that organism, remove those organs that make up the “essence” of the product of inquiry. In reality, the BwO is not the “opposite of the organs. The organs are not the enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism” (p.158). Organisms live in fear of being dismantled; thus this dissertation works to disassemble the organism of a dissertation, to try it a new way, giving it new room to move and change.

In this way, a post qualitative dissertation is not an attack on qualitative research. It just works to dismantle the organism in order to turn the inquiry on the system of research. The poststructural and post qualitative concepts that power this piece allow for critique and inquiry of both TED and TEDx organizations as well as conventional humanist qualitative research.

The concept of the plateau can be used as a positioning device; while they are sustained intensities, they can invite and incite movement. I call the first and the last plateau *propulsions*, as they serve to create energy and movement. The introduction comes first in the series of plateaus as a positioning device; it is not the beginning, but it is a good place to begin. The next plateau describes plateaus as an organizational device and allows readers to stay a little while in my geographical neck of the woods. The next plateau provides background information about the organization of TED. This plateau is

an informational piece meant to provide some basic background about the organization of and affiliations with TED. The next plateau is a foray into a conventional qualitative literature; this is used as an organizational and information example that is disrupted by the next plateau, the first longer plateau of three. This plateau is a Diffractive Literature Review of TED. Here, the diffractive methodology combines with the traditional product of a literature review to produce something new. This unique plateau is called an *enactment*. I call this an enactment because it is an attempt to enact a specific type or piece of writing required for many traditional dissertations. Rethinking this piece in light of a new conceptual framework is an enactment of this conventional requirement.

The next is a foray into new types of data and how to approach post qualitative data and inquiry. The second longest plateau contains an experimental product of inquiry in the form of diffractive bricolage; it is entitled “Becoming TED: Diffractive Ethnography of TED.” I call this plateau an *embodiment* as the product of inquiry called out and demanded to be physically performed.

The next section of plateaus includes one entitled “The Boils.” This plateau describes how data functions in conventional humanist qualitative research and how it changes when confronted by post qualitative concepts through the illustration of a unique geographical feature. The next plateau is an observational write up of field notes included for the sake of experiential reflection and diffraction. It is a reflective piece illustrative of the range of types of writing available to post qualitative researchers; the function and stylistic differences of this piece and other diffractive pieces will highlight the inclusive nature of post qualitative research. The final long plateau is entitled “Thinking and Doing with TEDx: A Critical Diffractive Analysis of Modern Methods of Experiential

Learning” and describes higher education’s fascination with the concept of experience and explores how post qualitative notions of performance can offer a different ontological expression of experiential learning. I call this plateau an *encounter*; it involves a formulated mash-up between different concepts to see how they change ontologically when they encounter each other.

Finally, the last plateau works to provide a sort of artificial boundary that serves as a *propulsion* that sends readers out from the text, inviting them to plug into other machines using the concepts provided in this particular machine. In the appendix, readers will find the instruments used for “data collection”. These must reside in this dissertation to provide an illusion of legitimacy and uphold the fallacy of validity of what can be called “research”. They are entirely uninteresting to me now.

These plateaus exist on a plane of immanence and embody the movement of inquiry. One may begin with any plateau they choose. My hope is that as reading, one stops and starts, begins again in a new place, and rejects the urge to view this dissertation as an organism.

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## PLATEAU

### Plateaus

Growing up at the base of the Cumberland Plateau in middle Tennessee, the concept of the plateau is special to me. Putnam County spans the valley at the base of the Cumberland Plateau and includes the winding, uphill passage to the east, to a tableland of sandy rock and layers of fragile Chattanooga Shale. From down in the valley, the plateau is effectively a mountain, rising nearly one thousand feet in just a few miles, casting a protective shadow on those below.

I learned as a child, that things were different up on the “mountain.” The weather was colder and more volatile, causing many revered “snow days” for the county schools; those not living in the hills or hollers enjoyed clear roads and restful weekdays, while others were trapped by ice for days. The weather is not all that changes on the plateau; I grew up thirty minutes from the Central/Eastern time-zone line. After driving for half an hour, I was suddenly an hour ahead of my “down in the valley” self. Things like doctor’s appointments and high school ball games were difficult to manage because one could never be sure, that close to the line, which time to inhabit.

In my youth, I didn’t realize that where I lived was a true space of delightful instability. Socially, I learned some basic patterns of unpredictability and discovered that constant anomalies were covered by language. The phrase, “You never know how it’s gonna be up on the mountain” was common and often followed by pleas to take a sweater, get gas, or to make sure I had bottled water in my car (wrecks, icy roads, and

rockslides are fairly common on that stretch of highway). Treks up the mountain were slow and cautious; traveling down the mountain was often more dangerous, racing down the serpentine curves, bathed in the smell of burning rotors, the dotted drone of Jake brakes drowning out the patchy radio signals.

This illustration from the landscape of my home helps me make connections to the work of thought in post qualitative inquiry. Feeling out this difficult thinking, finding the limits of knowledge, and trying to do so with language is not easy. Therefore, using concepts as organizational devices is quite helpful. They are also useful as methodological structures.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) use of the concept of a plateau, especially as an organizational structure, is not primarily about the physical or geographical landscape, but physical landforms can help us make connections to the concept. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote that plateaus are always in the middle; think about the aforementioned example of the Cumberland Plateau. The plateau has no clear beginning or end. It flows continuously from all directions. The flat area between the valley to the west and the mountains to the east is not leading one direction or another; it simply exists in between. It does not begin or end in some spectacular culmination. It could be considered what Deleuze and Guattari call "smooth space" (1987).

Smooth spaces are spaces of "affects, more than one of properties"; they are "filled with events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things" (p.479). Deleuze and Guattari described it as "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation towards a culmination point or external end" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.22). Therefore, plateaus are more about a maintained

region of intensity rather than the formation itself. Using the concept of the plateau, I want to put it to work to describe a different model for inquiry.

Consider the concept of research or inquiry. If inquiry was considered as and conducted like a plateau, it would be difficult to separate the researcher, subject, environment, methods, and tools. All would flow together to create an amalgamation of intensity. Deleuze and Guattari would call this an “assemblage” (1987). If inquiry were imagined as a plateau or a series of intensities, many staples of traditional research would fall away. There would be no prescribed research plan or pre-fabricated methods concocted before the inquiry began; in fact, there would be no such thing as the beginning. It is not as if it *never* began; but whatever one may call the beginning is ill defined and inconsequential. The researcher would find herself always already in the middle. There would be no predictions or “findings” to conclude the inquiry giving supposed value to the endeavor; those may emerge, but they would not drive the inquiry. In many senses, the inquiry would never really end. Rather, the wind would shift or the intensity would change. Noise or force would change the movement and before the researcher could stop to switch directions, she would be part of a new assemblage, always already in the middle of it all.

During this time of intensity or “inquiry”, the researcher might very well produce something. Given tradition and restrictions of the profession, these products would likely be rooted in language, producing artifacts like journal articles, books, or papers. However, other affects would have been produced as well: a shift in thinking or doing, the formation of different personal and professional connections and relationships, or even creative engagements in art, music, food, or design. Why must inquiry be so small



by way of defining its beginning and ends? Why must it become so weak by confining it to methods and findings?

Those questions may be a bit dramatic; however, perhaps a little drama is needed to push into a new space for inquiry, a space balancing and moving between becoming and progress. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote, “Nothing is ever done with: smooth space allows itself to be striated, and striated space reimparts a smooth space, with potentially very different values, scope, and signs. Perhaps we must say that all progress is made by and in striated space, but all becoming occurs in smooth space” (p.486). Following these theories, inquiry is something that becomes often in the unmeasured spaces.

Therefore, I envision this product of inquiry a linguistic model of these strivings. At times, it may seem conventional, at times experimental. This is the philosophy of “and” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.25). This is the space of the post-human where thing-power is exerted. This new space is uprooting the “being” of inquiry in social science and education. What we make and think will be different than what has been produced in the past. Appeals to epistemology are no longer the main priority; researchers may stop asking, “Is it true?” and may perhaps begin asking, “Does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?” (Massumi, 1987, p.xv).

One cannot stay on the plateau forever. At times, one climbs the mountain, slow and steady, marking progress one step at a time. At other times, one descends at breakneck speed. But on the plateau, one can enjoy a time of prolonged intensity, exploring something new or something old in a new way. This dissertation is organized

this in this way—not to be consumed as a whole or even to be expectantly read with a clear culmination or solution to a problem. It attends to the intensities of inquiry. It has begun, but will never be complete. Time is out of joint, always in the middle. Readers are invited to stay awhile at any place that gives them pause; the pause is the space of becoming.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the term *involution* to address the form of evolution between heterogeneous terms (p.238); this term is useful for explaining the tension of what happens during inquiry. Conventional qualitative inquiry has struggled with the concept of evolution through inquiry; subjectivity statements, IRB rules, established research methods, and firm definitions of subjects and participants were created to limit the amount of influence a researcher may make on participants or on the research environment. Early on, this was problematic as it was clear that inquiry often changed both the researcher and the participants in some way. However, this evolution was viewed negatively, as a form of regression; “to regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated” (p.238). Therefore, researchers strived for a sort of objectivity in research settings. After many years of struggling with this interference, it’s clear that one cannot enter an assemblage without modifying that assemblage in significant ways.

Therefore, the time to embrace a new kind of inquiry has come. This inquiry is one of *involution*. It embraces the evolution of inquiry within the assemblage of research while acknowledging the heterogeneous nature of all agents within. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state “becoming is involuntary, involution is creative” (p.238). This term allows researchers the freedom to create, act, and do inquiry, but acknowledges the ethical

implication that all participants in the research assemblage become and change in relation to each other. This is not intentionality, but it allows for rhizomatic curation of some aspects by the researcher while also acknowledging the agency and movement of all participants, human and non-human.

Plateaus are important organizational devices when one engages in involutive inquiry. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain how they use plateaus in their work:

We call a 'plateau' any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. [...] Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau. To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it (p.22).

Plateaus can be used as organizational devices in order to illustrate sustained intensities in areas of inquiry. Refrains can be seen throughout the oeuvre to demonstrate creative involution. Smooth space will open up for striation; striated space suddenly finds itself smooth. Concepts will appear rhizomatically throughout.

In this product of the research assemblage, I use the concept of the plateau as an organizational device, just as Deleuze and Guattari use it as the key concept and structural device in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Readers of both texts are invited to move from one plateau to another without worrying about sequence or continuity. Important concepts appear and reappear through the device of a refrain. In the same way, one will continually note some common refrains in this dissertation, some intentional, some emergent. The short plateaus found throughout give the reader pause to consider a concept. The middle "chapters" of this dissertation could be read in any order, removed,

redone, or revised in many different directions. The “beginning” and “end” of the dissertation are helpful devices of propulsion for this particular product, meant to move readers, thrust them into different space, but somehow still remain in the middle of it all. In each plateau, I adopt and trouble different ontological aspects of inquiry. Thus, in this assemblage of text, one can follow different lines of flight, sustained intensity on some areas of post qualitative inquiry. Plateaus offer a place to inhabit for a short while, a place to come back to with a new understanding; they are used to get a view from elsewhere. Each piece is a written manifestation of years of striving, thinking, doing, writing, talking, and living—in short, it’s a record of becoming and at the same time, still actively becoming.

At the end of a conventional humanist qualitative research project, readers are equipped with findings and solutions, ready to fill gaps in literature and knowledge. However, the highest-level engagement with post qualitative inquiry is the provocation. The hope is that these plateaus are provocations; each sustained piece of intensity in some area of inquiry should push readers out into another plateau with new energy and information. Movement and engagement is the goal; the product of a provocation is the endless act of becoming.

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## PLATEAU

### TED

This plateau serves to provide the reader with an overview of the subject of this dissertation, the organization of TED, and the main product of TED, TED Talks. TED began in 1984 as a conference that brought together leaders in the field of (T)echnology, (E)ntertainment<sup>1</sup>, and (D)esign. Envisioned by its founder, Richard Saul Wurman, as the “ultimate dinner party with him as the host”, TED became the place “to preview bold new ideas” (CBS, 2015). While the line-up for the first TED event was impressive (including a demo of the compact disc (TED.com, Happy 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 2014), e-book (Negroponte, 1984), and 3-D digital printing, the event lost money and Wurman was unable to host the event again until 1990. This innovative endeavor spurred the beginning of the annual, invitation-only, conferences and events. Although the leading scientists and experts in the field of technology, entertainment, and design gave the talks, the style of delivery was casual and relaxed. This shift from scientific lectures to a “dinner party” style engagement of the audience was the catalyst for a rhetorical shift in content delivery. As TED became viewed as one the most refreshing intellectual events of the time, it caught the eye of publisher and non-profit leader, Chris Anderson, who bought TED from Wurman in 2001.

Anderson had a different vision for TED, one that reached far past the intimate, invitation only setting; he turned it into highly curated, non-profit conference with a

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<sup>1</sup> Many people incorrectly attribute the “E” to education; Gallo (2014) makes this error throughout his entire book *Talk Like TED*.

world-wide technological reach. While the conferences themselves remained an expensive opportunity only for the elite, the talks themselves were curated for a wider audience. In 2006, he put a hand-full of videos online. Within months, they had over a million views. Now, in 2016, TED is a world leader in media production, with over 2000 TED Talks online, touting over a billion views.

### Events

TED is an organization that hosts events. They organize three main events per year—TED, TEDActive, and TEDGlobal. They have also hosted what they call “deep-dive”<sup>2</sup> conferences—TEDWomen, TEDYouth, and TEDIndia (TED.com, Past TEDs, n.d.). These conferences typically have over fifty speakers from vastly different fields, take place over several days, and incorporate art, music, or other creative forms. These speakers and presenters are invited and vetted heavily to help create the organization’s reputation as a leading producer of Internet video content.

Attendees at these conferences are vetted almost as closely as the speakers in order to bring together “up to 1,200 of the world’s most remarkable people across many fields” (TED.com, Conferences, n.d.). TED conferences are expensive<sup>3</sup> and it is difficult to gain access<sup>4</sup>; through the offering of independently organized, locally franchised TEDx events, TED offers a way for anyone to attend a TED event.

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<sup>2</sup> *Deep-dive* is an interesting term that uses scuba diving imagery to evoke a concept of a thorough, investigative exploration of a topic. This term is becoming popular in technology sectors, as “Big Data” has provided an opportunity for finding the *meaning* behind the massive amounts of data produced by new internet based analytical tools. In business, this approach has typically meant a hands-on approach by upper level executives to get involved in a company’s day-to-day processes in order to implement strategic initiative at every level of the organization (Yu and Bower, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Conference registration for TED events costs between \$4,250 and \$150,000 to attend, depending on membership and commitment level; \$6,000 is the commonly touted price. TED conferences have been criticized for being elitist and exclusionary, mainly because of this high price of admission.

<sup>4</sup> Attendance to the event is quite limited and extremely coveted. Duncan Davidson reported that he was attacked in Long Beach during the conference by a man who grabbed him from behind saying, “I need your badge right fucking now!...I don’t want to hurt you, but I will” (Wallace, 2012, para. 1, 2).

## TEDx

Through TEDx events, the *what* of TED is transformed into a *who*. TEDx events are independently organized and locally franchised. Krisztina Holly (2013) describes this organizational strategy as one that taps into the energy of people who want to contribute from everywhere that “grows and scales its impact outward by empowering the success of others” (para. 5). This concept is called *crowdscaling*. This is a risky<sup>5</sup> move by companies, but it can result in large returns. This is especially true for TED; there have been over 6,000 TEDx events held all over the world since 2009 when the initiative began<sup>6</sup>.

Every TEDx event starts with a single person who becomes the license holder for that TEDx name; thus, each TEDx event is directly linked to that license holder. This is interesting because one person, in a sense, owns and controls an event that is representative of a whole city, neighborhood, or university, under the guidance and authority of the main TED organization. All TEDx events are geographically based, and always local. Thus, in Atlanta, for example, there are multiple events and licenses: TEDxAtlanta, TEDxPeachtree, TEDxGeorgiaTech, TEDxEmory, and TEDxCentennial Park Women. The audience size for TEDx events typically range between one hundred<sup>7</sup> and one thousand participants.

Normally, license holders work with a committee or group of organizers to create a theme that fits their local context and find speakers who loosely fit the theme or

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<sup>5</sup> Holly (2013) described this situation: “Imagine having over a thousand volunteer teams, who aren't employed by you and can't be fired by you, creating events around the world in your name! That's enough to give a typical corporate executive night sweats” (para. 7).

<sup>6</sup> The first TEDx event was at USC; that license is now inactive or defunct.

<sup>7</sup> Unless the license holder has been to an actual TED event, they are limited to one hundred attendees at their events. Some events are much larger; TEDxRiodelaPlata packed the Tecnópolis in Argentina in October of 2014, filling over 10,000 seats (Reissman, 2014).



represent something about that local area. Although each event is locally organized, the main organization of TED looms as regulator of format, design, and content. One main organizer from TEDxUWMilwaukee described the structure of TEDx events well: “You kind of think of this area of limitless possibility when you think about a TED conference...But it’s very structured, which has helped us think through what we can and can’t do, but also what we should want to do and could do” (Mueller, 2014, para.15). TED lends its name and branding to an event and that means that it has quite a bit of say about what happens there, even if they take a hands-off approach to any direct oversight. The curator of TED, Chris Anderson (2014) says that the system of TEDx *self-corrects* over time. Holly (2013) reported, “TEDx organizers really feel like they *are* TED. They try hard not to betray the trust, and the tribal bond leads organizers to ‘self-police’ when they sense another organizer is out of line” (para.13).

### **TED Motto**

The TED motto is “ideas worth spreading.” Thus, the organization works to “share ideas that matter” (TEDx Manual, 2015, p.20). For TED, the ideas actually matter more than the speakers themselves: “The goal of every TED talk is not just to tell a story, or to inspire or invoke emotions—it’s simply to communicate an idea” (TEDx Manual, 2015, p.64). There are two main guidelines for ideas; ideas should be new (to most) and realistic (TEDx Manual, 2015, p.60). Hence, if ideas are new and realistic, they are “worthy” of “spreading”. The spreading of these ideas is often achieved virally on the Internet. The TED website is the hub of what they call “a clearinghouse of free knowledge from the world’s most inspired thinkers” (TED.com, Our organization, n.d.). They continue to say that “everything we do is driven by this goal: How can we best

spread ideas?” (TED.com, Our organization, n.d.). Thus, TED talks themselves are designed to be “shareable”; therefore, one shares the *idea* by sharing the *video* itself, often through social media or through active engagement with the video in the form of a “like” or “share.” TED states that sharing the idea is just the beginning, but functionally, it is the end. Once the talk is shared, the idea is spread. This completes the mission of TED: they determine which ideas are worth sharing; they share them with an audience; the audience shares them with others. Being shared or getting spread is the culminating event for a TED talk.

### **TED Talks**

A TED talk is simply a talk given at a TED or TEDx conference. However, now it seems like the “TED talk” has taken on a power separate from the affiliation with the organization. More important than the actual content of the talk is the form of the talk. There are several key aspects of a TED talk that has made “the TED talk” a recognizable medium, so recognizable, in fact, that parodies of TED talks are just as popular as talks with actual content<sup>8</sup>. Many web users have even run analyses on talks to garner a formula of what makes a good TED talk (Kehe, 2013) or even how to create a really bad TED talk (Wernicke, 2010). Here, I will briefly describe some of the characteristics of a TED talk that makes them such a recognizable form.

### **Length**

A TED talk is a short talk, typically under eighteen minutes that “conveys some of the most innovative ideas on the planet with a passion” (TEDxManual, 2015, p.54).

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<sup>8</sup> Some of my favorite TED parodies are produced by the fake news source, The Onion; two particularly fun ones are “[Compost-Fueled Cars: Wouldn't that be Great?](#)” (Haggerty and West, 2012a) and “[Using Social Media to Cover for Lack of Original Thought](#)” (Haggerty and West, 2012b).

Because of this time restriction, one common criticism of TED talks is that they are too simplistic, idealistic, and reductive. However, this size is perfect for the consumptive nature of TED talks; easily watched, shared, and summarized. In fact, the one sentence summary/catchy title is part of the TED form.

### **Style**

Typically, a TED talk is given by one person on a stage facing an audience. These talks are purposefully called “talks” because it should be in the form of a narrative or dialogue with the audience. These talks are filmed from multiple camera angles so that the viewer can experience the feeling of being a part of the audience, or feel like they were “there.” Often the camera angle changes to incorporate the audience’s reaction to the talk in the video.

### **Visual/Material Identifiers**

The colors of TED are red, white, and black. A round, red rug is usually part of the stage design used to limit the speaker’s range of movement so the speaker is always in view of the camera. Many TED talks are accompanied by PowerPoint style visuals; visuals are usually meant to be simple, clear, and should be used to enhance the spoken word. No copyright images can be used in the visuals, as the talk will be posted online. The key material element noticeable in almost all TED talks that use visual elements is the slide clicker held firmly in the hand of the speaker.

### **Conclusion**

This background information provides readers who are unfamiliar with TED some insight as to some of the most recognizable elements of the discourse surrounding TED. In many ways, this information is part of the metanarrative about TED. Thus, for

the purposes of this inquiry, this information is provided as another point of interaction with the various power relations at work in the many discourses involving TED.

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## PLATEAU

### Conventional Qualitative Literature Review of TED

#### **Preface**

This plateau serves as a traditional literature review of existing sources about TED in the sphere of academia. While one of the articles in this dissertation provides an alternate literature review, a new way of thinking the literature review in post qualitative research, this traditional literature review is included for two important reasons.

The first reason is that it provides a contrast to the article about post qualitative literature reviews. Providing a short, traditional literature highlights the difference in purpose and impact; in no way do I propose that one way is better than the other. I want to purposefully highlight that they have different ontological commitments, both to the references and the dissertation as a whole. The purpose of the traditional literature review is to provide citational authority and a background of existing knowledge about the subject. However, the purpose of a post qualitative review is to put theoretical concepts to work, rethinking the ontology of what a literature review could possibly do.

The second reason is that I have decided to include a traditional literature review is to fulfill the requirements of the University of Georgia's College of Education, Department of Language and Literacy. The requirements state that only two dissertation formats are acceptable, the traditional dissertation or a three-article dissertation, with the inclusion of a literature review. I found a traditional dissertation impossible thinking with post qualitative theories. Therefore, my only option was a three-article dissertation. Fortunately, this format suited my needs; however, this additional literature review is a formality that must be fulfilled. Therefore, I have chosen to provide the traditional

literature review to satisfy the demands on the institution, but also strategically to show contrast between a traditional qualitative literature review and something new that could be written using post qualitative theories.

### **Literature Review**

While TED is a common subject in the media, there is little academic research about the structure of TED. Therefore, this subject is a rich area for producing new knowledges beyond the production of new content for the organization itself. This situation poses the question of whether TED is “academic” and what power that designation has over the use of the content and structure of TED.

What kind of structure exists that allows us to consider something academic or scholarly? The organization or franchisement of TED is not a “hot topic” for many academics. However, the content of TED videos are a widely used subject and resource for many academic writings. Perhaps, academics are mainly concerned with the products produced from structures such as TED, rather than questioning the structure itself. The structure seems to be *curated* out of the final product, making it an invisible force that does not illicit criticism, leaving all attention and criticism to fall on the speaking subjects and the topics they present. Perhaps since TED does not have a “face,” scholars value or target the faces we do find.

Teacher educators often focus on TED as a source for classroom content; TED is a popular way to incorporate digital literacies and engage students. Scholars from communication studies have analyzed the rhetorical design of TED Talks signature format of content delivery and audience engagement. TED Talks have also offered opportunities for analysis of viewer and commenter behavior. The easily digestible



format and the seemingly unlimited library of topics have been used as the foundation for course syllabi and professional development seminars. The field of pharmaceutical education and health care has been especially engaged in the possibilities for this type of content delivery as an extension and supplement for expensive conferences that are not always accessible for all health care workers.

### **Rhetoric and Communication Studies**

Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo (2013) has published several articles about TED Talks and various aspects of communication related to the popularization of the genre and knowledge dissemination. In 2013, she analyzed the humor in TED talks, positing that humor is an “endemic feature of this genre of popularizing texts” (p.81). Scotto di Carlo notes that humor is a way to breach the “scientist-mediator-audience” separation, and that it can be used as a function of superiority, to laugh about one’s own misfortune or the misfortune of others, or to release tension surrounding taboo topics, such as sex, politics, or religion. In two other articles, she draws upon figurative language (2014a) and Hyland’s concept of proximity (2014b) to show how speakers who give TED Talks use the elements of figurative language and proximity to “negotiate their role as experts” to “establish a closer relationship to the audience” (2014b, p.591). Drawing on her analysis and from Hyland’s theories, Scotto di Carlo makes the argument that “science should be considered a communicative activity, so science once again becomes ideas to be discussed rather than information to be received” (2014b, p.605).

Scotto di Carlo ventures further into the idea that TED Talks have the power to breach the “typical triangularisation of ‘scientist-mediator-audience’, bringing scientists directly into contact with their audiences” (2014c, p.121). She does a rhetorical analysis

of two different speeches by the same author to explain the role of ethos, pathos, and logos in the popularization of TED Talks. Another related study, written by Sugimoto, et. al. (2013), focuses on analyzing the characteristics and credentials of the TED speakers themselves. These authors analyze the demographic characteristics, the relationship between these characteristics and video popularity, and the citation impact of presenting at TED.

In a dissertation written in 2014, Joseph A. Watson shows how TED engages the “ethos of the expertise within public culture” (p.vi). Watson’s study is poised at the intersection of rhetoric, digital media, and pedagogy. He focuses on the rhetorical situations created by TED and how rhetorical strategies have been used to create source credibility and to protect the brand. He also poses an interesting question, asking how TED “can be optimized for educational use, and if so, what happens to the teacher as the possessor of expertise?” (p.10). Watson also notes that TED “opens a pathway for the traditional university to follow as TED’s evolution coincides with the expansion of new pedagogies of active learning” (p.16).

### **TED in Teacher Education**

Lisa DaVia Rubenstein (2012) discusses the use of TED talks as tools to inspire thoughtful practice in classrooms. She mainly uses the content of TED talks as a way to enhance course content and motivate students. Rubenstein addresses the branch of TED dedicated to educators—TED-ED. She notes that the true power of this resource is in its rich content that makes it easy to “flip” the classroom. Flipping the classroom is a common idea that traditional content delivery should be delivered outside of class-time, offering the actual time in class as an opportunity for meaningful explorations and deeper

analysis of the content. The content offered on TED-ED allows customization of the content by the educator: “The educator can adjust the title, add comprehension and higher-level questions, and provide additional resources” (2012, p.262). She uses the rest of her article to highlight TED Talks on the subject of motivation to promote teacher’s understanding of student motivation and encourage the use of TED Talks as relevant content. In a similarly formatted feature, Rubenstein (2013) enacts her proposition in the 2012 article by proposing a new professional development paradigm, using TED Talks as the main content anchors. She uses the content in these TED Talks to highlight a variety of leadership ideas designed for the implementation of a curriculum of transformative leadership for educations (2013).

Paul W. Hankins (2015) writes about how he uses TED Talks as texts in his Room 407 learning community, used as a platform for his blog and other practitioner writings. He vividly describes the student responses to these talks and specifically mentions how TED is one way to bring “voices from the world” into the learning community (p.25). He uses these talks to supplement and reinforce other lessons; for example, he plans to use cyber magician, Marco Tempest’s (2012) talk on deception before reading Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*.

Related to education and the spreading of ideas is a pocket of publications and correspondence coming from the field of medicine and pharmaceutical studies. Romanelli, Cain, and McNamara (2014) wrote an editorial in the *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* about the communicative difference between traditional academic lectures and TED Talks, positing that, while both have their place, the effectiveness and ability to generate interest of the TED platform has lessons for the

traditional lecture based classroom about student engagement. In a Letter to the Editor about the above article, Craig Cocchio (2015) argued that arguing for or against the traditional academic lecture or TED Talk format is a moot point in relation to the underlying issue of student engagement and the message communicated in pharmacy classrooms. In a response to Cocchio, the authors of the original piece (2015) clarified that all too often “faculty members settle for lectures that provide little more than a ‘data dump,’ commonly with PowerPoint slide presentations as the sole medium” (p.1), but agree that the goal for educators should be to “creatively transform the topic into an educational experience that illustrates, challenges, and engages learners” (p.1).

In a similar interchange between commentary and correspondence in the *Canadian Family Physician*, Nicole, Britton, Janakiram, and Robichaud (2014) explained how TED Talks can be used to teach social determinants of health. Using TED Talks as a launching point for each lesson in a professional development workshop series, they watched these talks to “invigorate discussion and enhance the value of this subject matter for learners” (p.777). The authors planned to disseminate the workshop plan in hopes of gaining critical feedback about the effectiveness of this “innovative educational approach” (p.778), similar to Rubenstein’s (2012) leadership and professional development series for educators. In support of this idea, Masson (2014) wrote the kind of information disseminated about social determinates of health in some TED Talks is typically reserved for presentations and lectures reserved for physicians and other health care workers as “conferences in overprices symposiums” (p.1080). The professional, yet short and consumable nature of TED Talks makes them an accessible and affordable resource for this kind of content for both healthcare workers and the general population.

## **Education and World Literacy**

Banker and Gourmelos (2013) argue that TED Talks inspire learning beyond the classroom, contributing to a culture of informal learning. Today, social media sites and various technological resources are an important source of informal learning, helping students curate a Personal Learning Environment (PLE) that is created often with the intent to share with others, thus using one's curiosity about learning and sharing information in a more informal and organic way than the traditional classroom setting. Banker and Gourmelos provide an interesting comparison study. In order to examine the use of TED Talks as an educational resource, they do a two-part study that relies on a discourse analysis of twenty newspaper articles about TED Talks (based on top search engine results) and then on in-depth interviews with four high school teachers about how TED Talks are "perceived and actually used in the classroom" (2013, p.45). Many of the resources they examined found a balance between the negative aspects of TED Talks and the positives of their use, concluding: "Perhaps TED is filling an intellectual void, as 30 percent of the articles argue, thereby emphasizing a culture that values intellectual pursuits, creativity, and inspiration, thus providing a refreshing change from typical (both mainstream and DIY) media" (2013, p.48).

To understand how TED Talks actually work in classrooms, Banker and Gourmelos conducted interviews with four Florida high school teachers. The teachers believed overwhelmingly that TED Talks are relevant, can inspire students, broaden perspectives, and cultivate critical thinking (2013, p.49). In fact, teachers are using them outside of the classroom to cultivate their own Personal Learning Environments and passion for learning (p.49). The teachers did note that while the talks are interesting and

accessible to students, sometimes they lack a level of relatability; sometimes students lack the level of “education, maturity, and vocabulary” necessary to make the talk meaningful to the students (p.50). TED Talks are often viewed as a “reward” after tests; because of their reward-like status, the teachers were reluctant to incorporate formal guided reading resources. In addition, given the structure of the current educational system, rarely does it make sense for teachers to allow students to watch a 10-18 minute long video in a class that lasts 50 minutes; to assume that all students have access to these materials outside of class is to ignore the potential digital divide for students in lower income households. The authors conclude that TED Talks can be used both in and out of the classroom to spark curiosity and a desire to learn.

### **Commenting Behavior**

Tsou, Thelwall, Mongeon, and Sugimoto (2014) wrote a fascinating article analyzing how viewers interact, specifically through comments, with TED Talks online on different points of access. They analyzed the comments on specific TED Talks from both the TED website and the YouTube platform and found an alarming disparity of attitudes. The authors chose to view videos relevant to Science or Technology, and then collected three comments from each platform for each video at random; in order to address specific presenter characteristics, they identified four categories of presenters to compile a data set: female academic, female non-academic, male academic, and male non-academic. In all the data sample was 49 unique presenters from each of the four categories, totaling 196 videos.

Although the data selection, sample, and coding matrix was well-thought out, initial attempts at coding were unsuccessful: “Issues such as sarcasm, ambiguous

wording, Internet lingo, [...] and regional dialects/differences complicated the matters, particular as many of the coders were located in different countries and had different native tongues. Coders agreed less than 50% of the time on which codes to assign, although most pairs of coders were in agreement on which *categories* to assign approximately 70% of the time” (2014, p.5). Despite difficulties with coding, the writers identified some generalizable findings: (1) comments on the TED site were more likely to comment on the content of the video, while comments on YouTube were more likely to be in response to another commenter; (2) although both TED.com and YouTube require commenters to register before use, the people who go to the TED website in order to view videos are “already invested in the TED philosophy,” while “YouTube viewers can ‘stumble upon’ a talk without any previous knowledge of (or affection towards) TED”, thus leading to “commenters on the TED website engag[ing] with the talk content on a deeper level than simply agreeing or disagreeing with the presenter’s views (p.8); (3) contrary to previous findings, non-academic speakers received more positive sentiments both in terms of their appearance and presentation style as well as the presentation itself (p.9); (4) commenters tended to be more “emotional” towards female presenters providing more obviously positive or negative comments than neutral ones (p.10).

### **Conclusion**

While this literature review is not meant to be comprehensive, I believe that the included literature and resources add to the dissertation as a whole. Not only are readers able to see the effect of theory and methodology on of different products of writing, but

they are also able to follow other lines of flight that were not included in other pieces of writing. I hope this brief example makes the ultimate point that as researchers broaden their ability to think and use multiple methodologies and theoretical frameworks, academic work can be richer and more robust. Thinking subjects and concepts in multiple ways does not lead to a greater comprehension of a single topic—it leads to more connections, different assemblages, and new work to do.



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## ENACTMENT

### A LITERATURE REVIEW IN MOTION:

#### A DIFFRACTIVE LITERATURE REVIEW OF TED

Literature reviews are the cornerstone of doctoral study and dissertation research. Many scholars have worked diligently to prepare students for this specific endeavor (Boote & Beile, 2005; Cooper, 1985; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1999, 2004; Krathwohl & Smith, 2005<sup>9</sup>). Meant to be thorough and comprehensive (Cooper, 1985), they serve as the introductory context for the dissertation; literature reviews also “synthesize theoretical perspectives and investigations related to a particular area of inquiry and demonstrates the motivation for the study to be reported” (Kucan, 2011, p.230). However, some scholars such as Maxwell (2006) and Larramendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) have taken up the approach that literature reviews should be more strategic than comprehensive.

Strategically designed literature reviews are necessary for scholars who engage in post qualitative research<sup>10</sup>. Strategically designed literature reviews do not just serve as a “foundation” for the knowledge used in the dissertation. In fact, there is no such foundational knowledge for those using post qualitative research theories and methods. One cannot “go back to the beginning” and trace the path of knowledge—careful to identify the gaps! —to the specific knowledge that the dissertation is supposed to produce

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<sup>9</sup> There are many other scholars who have done pedagogical and instructional work on how to do literature reviews; these examples are ones I have chosen for this project.

<sup>10</sup> I want to use the term “literature review” under erasure here. In post qualitative inquiry, literature reviews, in the traditional sense, may not be necessary in all cases. However, I want to be clear that reading extensively about your topic, theories, and methodology is non-negotiable. In fact, post qualitative research demands an even more rigorous commitment to emersion in existing literature because they must use it in new ways. Post qualitative researchers have a responsibility to the research community to explain significant and ontological deviation from traditional research.

in order to fill those gaps or further the knowledge to some imaginary point of completion.

The subject of TED provided an opportunity for a bit of untangling in the form of a literature review; however, the untangling became a bit unorthodox when confronted with post qualitative theories. St. Pierre (2014) briefly addresses the incongruence of the separation of “our analysis of words ‘collected’ in existing documents into a section of the research report called the ‘literature review’ from our analysis of words ‘collected’ in interview transcripts and field notes in a section called ‘findings’” which becomes clearly misaligned when confronted with post qualitative theories (St. Pierre, 2014, p.12). This project addresses this arbitrary separation of epistemology, ontology, and methodology through the use of a strategic literature review. A strategic literature review is necessary for post qualitative theories because the interdisciplinary nature of the topics often cast too wide a net to incorporate any semblance of “complete” knowledge. Wisker (2015) wrote the construction and writing of the literature review “has been identified as a key moment for the development and achievement of voice, confidence, articulacy and dialogue in expression of the research journey and understanding of how new research contributes to an ongoing dialogue” (p.67). On the contrary, this literature review is not about establishing my citational authority for this dissertation as a whole; this literature review provides a strategic opportunity for me to engage the theories of post qualitative research by deconstructing the form and intent of a literature review to see how to think and do literature reviews differently to achieve a different result.

Each piece included in this dissertation provides a condensed literature review of sorts. The article engaging in diffractive ethnography in the form of bricolage includes

mini-literature reviews about ethnography, diffraction, and bricolage to provide a background for that piece. The article about experiential learning incorporates a short review of literature related to experiential learning and performance. I could have easily enough included a literature review dealing with post qualitative theories, but I choose to incorporate that information throughout rather than in one stand-alone piece. While in the other pieces I do not particularly address the topic of TED in detail, I have chosen the literature review to provide considerably more background about TED, so that readers understand more about it as they see the topic worked in different ways. I use the subject of TED more as boundary drawing device, purposely churning the topic, theory, and data in different ways to produce different products of inquiry. This churning could best be called method.

### **Method**

The term “method” is not a productive term to use when taking part in post qualitative inquiry. Post qualitative inquiry can generally be described as anti-method, or rather, resistant to the comforting way in which method has been naturalized in qualitative research. Law (2004) insists that the research produced now should be “after method”, valuing heterogeneity and variation, rather than consistent and replicable practices; “Method, as we usually imagine it, is a system for offering more or less bankable guarantees. It hopes to guide us more or less quickly and securely to our destination, a destination that is taken to be knowledge about the processes at work in a single world” (p.9). He writes, “Methods, their rules, and even more methods’ practices, not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality they understand” (emphasis in original, p.5). However in this particular modality of writing, it is hard to do without the

term, or perhaps it is difficult in general to let go of that linguistic safety net. Can you do “research” without “method”? Can you utilize practices of research without practicing those same behaviors and using the same language that takes one along well-worn paths to familiar places?

In the post qualitative tradition, the term “inquiry” offers a more productive environment than the term “research”. However in inquiry, the term “method” is additionally problematic—inquiry does not stipulate or require such rigid practices as research; it’s more open, but troublesome. How does one *do* inquiry? I’ll be the first to admit that I have had enormous trouble with the terms method and methodology. It is problematic because there is truly no “method” to post qualitative methods and little tradition to lean on for answers. In order to help others get to a term that suits their work without being prescriptive, I provide some basic tenants of post qualitative inquiry that make “method” an impossibility:

1. Researchers exist only in relation to an inquiry; researchers do not exist outside of the research or inquiry.
2. Firm beginnings, endings, and boundaries often do not exist with this kind of inquiry. Thus, post qualitative researchers often find themselves in the middle of inquiry before they even realize that is has begun.
3. Because it is impossible to point to a beginning, it’s impossible to plan elaborate and predictable research designs before engagement with the research subjects or environments.

4. In addition, post qualitative inquiry assumes the impossibility of the separation between researchers, subjects, and environments. All of these work together to form a research assemblage.

These tenants make it difficult to think method in the traditional sense. However, to set a term in its place to describe practices or the things one may do within inquiry or a research assemblage may be, in the same way, entrapped. This is perhaps the perfect opportunity for each researcher to determine what they should call whatever it is that they are doing within the assemblage of inquiry. I have called this “theory-method-living”. This may be a problematic term for some, as the combination of these common words may not clearly make an entirely new concept. However, for me, theory-method-living perfectly described the way I live and act in the world based on the concepts I employ in my life. Others have called this different things; plugging in (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), thinking with theory (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), or after method (Law, 2004).

Whatever one wants to call what one does in inquiry, the goal is not to repeat the same practices to get the same answers. Law (2004) writes, “The task is to imagine methods when they no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable. When they no longer assume that this is what they are after” (p.6). The trick is to leave behind the security methods provide and risk stepping into smooth space. In this dissertation, I have chosen to continue to use the term methodology, perhaps to my detriment, mainly because theory-method-living is not always a smooth replacement. Generally, I use it to mean practices within a research assemblage. In post qualitative inquiry, however, those practices are never working to reproduce “the same”. I encourage readers to read each use of the term in this dissertation as an opportunity for undoing.

## Concept as Theory and Method

Research methodology changes based on which questions one wishes to answer. For example, the questions posed by traditional literature reviews are often “What has been said?” and “What is missing?” These questions are based in epistemological practices of knowing. However, literature reviews in the post qualitative tradition have permission and theoretical obligation to turn away from knowledge projects and towards projects of being and function. So the question turns from “what is a literature review?” to “what can a literature review do?” or rather, how can it work as a tool of analysis and experimentation? Thus, a turn from epistemology to ontology, or to be more precise—from epistemology to onto-epistemology, is necessary in order to rethink methodology.

Viewing research as an assemblage rather than repository for knowledge allows for movement. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) write, “An assemblage isn’t a thing—it is the *process* of making and unmaking the thing. It is the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (p.1). Viewing research as an assemblage allows for the flexibility to pick up concepts and tools to try them out, see what they do with the data or subject at hand. However, this is not haphazard work. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe this as work as not merely an “intimacy with *both* the data and the theory, nor simply a keen attentiveness to the particularities and situatedness of each” (p.5). Following, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), they describe this work as “plugging in<sup>11</sup>”: “When one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, *must* be

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<sup>11</sup> Personally, I don’t prefer the term “plugging in,” however, I am using Jackson and Mazzei’s concept here. Briefly, it brings to mind that concepts or tools are active and data is passive (i.e in the example of a male and female electric plug; one is the active probe, while the other is the passive receiver).



plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.4). Jackson and Mazzei (2012) propose that plugging in has three maneuvers:

- putting philosophical concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how the *constitute or make one another*;
- being deliberate and transparent in what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept [...] and how the questions that are used to think with *emerged in the middle* of plugging in; and
- working with the same data chunks repeatedly to ‘deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest’ with an overabundance of meaning, which in turn not only creates new knowledge but shows the *suppleness of each when plugged in* (p.5).

These guides help make it possible for a project like a literature review to be plugged into an entirely different machine, one that helps “extend thinking at the limit<sup>12</sup>” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.5).

I have two goals for this literature review. One is to perform a diffractive literature review. A diffractive literature review looks for difference, for points of collision; it follows movement. A diffractive literature review wants to answer the question, “What’s happening here?” Diffractive literature reviews show not just how discourses function, but how they materialize, not just what they mean, but how they work (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.113). A diffractive reading of data “is not an insertion into the context in an autoethnographic sense, nor is it a reflection that takes our own researcher subjectivity into account, but it is an installing of ourselves that attempts to

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson and Mazzei (2012) use this language in reference to Caputo’s description of Heidegger’s thought.

make sense of the blurring and viscous interactions<sup>13</sup>...” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.131). Barad (2014) explains it this way: “There is no ‘I’ that exists outside of the diffraction pattern, observing it, telling its story. In an important sense, this story in its ongoing (re) patterning is (re) (con) figuring me. ‘I’ am neither outside nor inside; ‘I’ am *of* the diffraction pattern” (p.181). Data, subjects or objects of knowledge, and researchers are all caught up in the assemblage; the ontology of all involved is changed through the performative nature of intra-action. Thus, diffractive literature reviews work from within the entangled state of inquiry to mark differences.

The second purpose is to provide more information about TED as an organization and allow readers to see how TED moves within education, research, popular culture, and the media. Therefore, I envision the literature review as a rhizomatic assemblage, one that follows various lines of flight, sometimes breaking off and popping up in other areas, like crab grass. A diffractive literature review is careful to realize there is no single story or foundational knowledge; Trinh Minh-ha (1999) says in an interview with Gwendolyn Foster, “a story is told mainly to say that there is no story—only a complex, tightly knit tissues of activities and events that have no single explanation, as in life” (quoted in Barad, 2014, p.184). This is a literature review in motion, or rather, on the move. Since, diffraction is a tool used to see difference, a diffractive literature review is one written with this difference in mind.

### **Coding or Churning**

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<sup>13</sup> The quote continues... “interactions that Nancy Tuana names as a viscous porosity” (p.131). While this particular piece of information was not quite relevant to my use of the remaining quote, I wanted to pass on the attribution of this interesting term.

While we often apply the term *coding* as the action verb to address what we traditionally call *research data*, I think it is safe to assume that even the most traditional researchers would believe that prior knowledge and information are also data<sup>14</sup>. Thus, there is a strong desire to code that data, to make categories and organize it in a fashion that is “going somewhere.” Maxwell (2006) provides a succinct list of the essential tasks of a literature review from Krathwohl and Smith (2005, p.50):

- “Survey a select group of studies that provide a foundation for the proposed project,
- Discuss these studies in detail sufficient to provide an understanding of their relevance,
- Describe how they contribute to the study,
- Indicate how the study moves beyond them” (summarized in Maxwell, Literature Reviews of, and for, educational research, 2006, p.29).

These tasks essentially code the existing research on the topic. Existing literature is categorized and sorted, findings are identified, gaps analyzed. I must admit, this was the default mode for me as I begin working with this piece; I suspect this is the default mode of many researchers, as many doctorate level courses concern the teaching of these precise methods. I started some categories based on key words. I began to put research in categories of content analysis, rhetorical analysis, and pedagogical use. I initially had a strong desire to harness the textual data through coding; I could focus on positives and

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<sup>14</sup> Conventional qualitative research privileges textual, written, or countable data. Data can only “be data” once it is turned into language by coding. However, language is not stable in post qualitative theories. One cannot get to the bottom of meaning or language because there is no stable, innate meaning. Words cannot close off meaning and stand in for something that acts in the world. Thus, coding—the act of providing stability, consistency, and representation—is unthinkable.

negatives of TED and TED Talks or use “codeable” words like “cult-like,” “inspirational,” and “addictive”. But to what end? I realized these tasks would emphasize knowledge rather than function. Coding my data in a traditional way was undercutting where I needed thought to go as I abandoned my theories and fell into the well-worn path of the methods I was taught. I did not want to attempt to paint a particular picture of TED, produce a particular knowledge project about TED, nor did I think it possible to stand outside of the data, separate from my inquiry. So, if I couldn’t code data, what could I do?

Maxwell (2006) suggests an anti-foundational approach that was helpful for me as I wrestled with this task; he emphasizes the concept of relevance for his doctoral students to help them use prior research effectively. His strategies helped me get to a place outside of the traditional literature review, to break out of “just coding” existing research. While we do not work with the same theoretical frameworks, regardless, I found Maxwell’s advice helpful. Post qualitative concepts like Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome and Barad’s (2007) intra-action helped me read Maxwell’s *relevance* as *relationship*. As a result, I have paraphrased his advice to a great extent, infusing my own theoretical bend (for his direct advice, see Maxwell, 2006, p.30-31) with the intent to help others think about a post qualitative literature review:

- Emphasize the idea of a conceptual ~~framework~~<sup>15</sup>, making connections within<sup>16</sup> theory/method;

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<sup>15</sup> I use the term framework under erasure. Concepts are fluid and may be used in many ways. Thus, a post qualitative conceptual framework describes the work of making “agential cuts” and using those cuts to map the work of that concept.

<sup>16</sup> Maxwell uses the word “between;” I have chosen “within” and combined theory and method.

- Highlight ongoing intra-action<sup>17</sup> of the concepts with other resources, focusing on how these components inform and influence one another;
- Rather than simply analyzing, summarizing, and critiquing the literature, look constantly for things [to] *use* from the literature (emphasis in original), emphasizing the concept of nodules<sup>18</sup> that can be borrowed and employed;
- Use concept mapping<sup>19</sup> to make and show rhizomatic connections;
- Write pedagogically; explicitly state the points being made and the links between them (2006, p.30-31).

I want to be clear that Maxwell is not giving advice about how to perform a post qualitative literature review; he may not even appreciate the use of his work for this project. However, I appreciated his willingness to engage with a traditional product in a new way. Therefore, I have purposefully included my manipulation of his original advice to provide some ideas for post qualitative literature reviews because it helped me think into new space.

In post qualitative research, literature reviews can be used as a tool to perform certain exercises or experimentations, using the appropriate theories and methods. I decided this project required a literature review, if mainly for the purpose to intentionally wrestle with the concept of a literature review, to figure out how it can work and function within these theories. In this case, I continue to use the concept of diffraction as a method

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<sup>17</sup> Maxwell uses the word “interaction,” but I prefer the agential implications of Barad’s term intra-action.

<sup>18</sup> Maxwell uses the term “modules”; however, that term has the flavor of preexisting, self-contained ontology. I prefer the botanist term “nodule.” This term implies the concentration of nitrogen-containing cells on the roots of plants that can either help the plant grow or act as a fertilizer for other plants when the plant dies. The process of extensively reading for literature reviews feels like this natural process; some nodules fuel the resources that remain in the literature review and thrive; others die away in the final product, but release energy and provide sustenance for the ones who remain. Also, this description allows for the agency of the resources—some take power all on their own and demand to be included.

<sup>19</sup> Mapping here refers to the Deleuzian concept.

of inquiry for this literature review. Working in conjunction with the other pieces of this dissertation, I found that performing a strategic literature review would allow me to incorporate another angle of analysis that I was unable to incorporate in any of the other pieces.

In other words, this dissertation acts as a data churn. The data—not just what conventional humanist qualitative inquiry would call “gathered” data from interviews and surveys, experiential data from the “field”, and existing literature, but also material and immaterial data acknowledged by post qualitative theories<sup>20</sup>-- is turned, folded, and worked in different ways. This data churning is affirmative, productive, and on the move; it is constant, but not consistent<sup>21</sup>. Moving like a rhizome, certain data emerge and flourish in some parts and languish in others. Certain types of data are not privileged over others. Therefore, working with existing literature is just as important as the pieces that deal with interview and survey data. Therefore, in some ways, it is necessary to “do without” data as Brinkman (2014) suggests, or rather stop letting “data stand in the way of fruitful ideas” (p.720).

Therefore, if this literature review were judged by traditional standards, one may conclude that it is not comprehensive, nor does it account for all of the angles of research present in this dissertation. That criticism under that particular framework would be appropriate; however, the goal of this literature review is very different than the goal of traditional versions of literature reviews. This literature review is not a knowledge

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<sup>20</sup> St. Pierre (1997) acknowledged several types of transgressive data: emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data. In another plateau in this dissertation, I discuss sublime data.

<sup>21</sup> In a separate plateau in this dissertation, I have explored the concept of data churning using the image of the geological feature near my hometown called The Boils, located in Jackson County, Tennessee.

project; it is an experiment in the movement of history, fascination, and utility of existing literature and resources.

### **Diffraction as a workable concept**

Barad (2007) provides a simple definition of diffraction: “Simply stated, diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction” (p.74). She goes on to explain diffraction can occur with any kind of waves (water, sound, light) under the right conditions. As water waves are the most easily envisioned, imagining ripples on a pond has been a helpful image to describe how to think and write diffractively.

Imagine a pebble dropped<sup>22</sup> into a pond; ripples or waves form and are immediately in motion. They move out from the disturbance in multiples--a pebble *never* makes only one ripple. Ripples continue in decreasing intensity until the water settles. Imagine that two pebbles are dropped into the water, at the same time or one after another. Ripples radiate from both points of entry, colliding, changing direction, merging, interfering. Some are enhanced and others diminished, producing a diffraction pattern.

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<sup>22</sup> I purposefully use the term *dropped* here. Pebbles dropped into ponds are not always the result of human action. I purposely use the term dropped here. Pebbles dropped into ponds are not always the result of human action. Metaphorically, researchers often see it as a responsibility to throw the pebbles into the pond and sometimes we must. However, we need to provide room for the agency of the wind, animals, etc... While I don't plan to necessarily discuss the agential possibilities of all of these, this theory makes room for researchers to let go of the question of causality and just see what is happening in the middle of things.

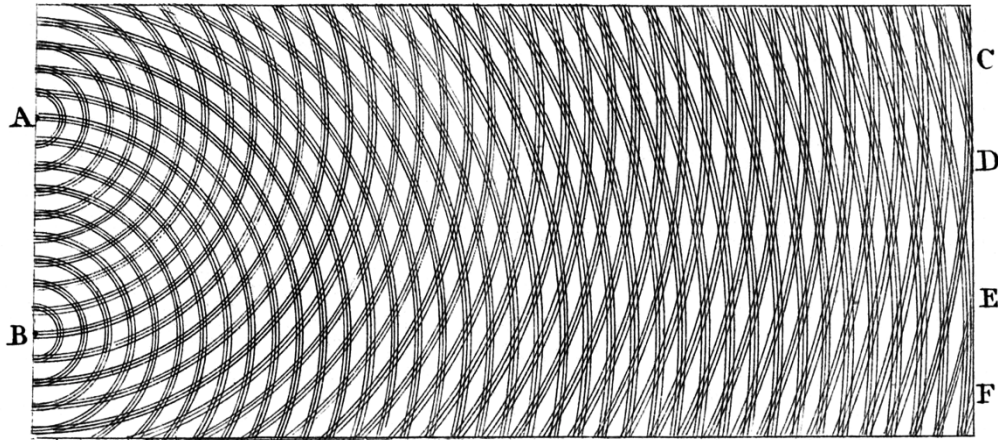


Figure 1. Thomas Young's sketch of two-slit diffraction of light. Narrow slits at A and B act as sources, and waves interfering in various phases are shown at C, D, E, and F. Young presented the results of this experiment to the Royal Society in 1803. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Young\\_Diffraction.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Young_Diffraction.png)

Through intra-action, the separation between the waves becomes ontologically indeterminate (Barad, 2007, p.268); this combination of waves is called superposition. The ripples can no longer be attributed to one pebble or another. The boundaries are compromised; the ripples cannot be separated from the undisturbed water. The waves lap the edges of the pond, reaching further and retreating in different patterns and intensity each time. The pebble may have started this disturbance, but now all that we see of the pebble is its effect. While it is helpful to study this wave behavior on a relatively smooth plane, the key idea of diffraction includes some sort of diffraction apparatus that serves as a channel or barrier. Barad (2007) uses the examples of light through the holes in a razorblade and the two-slit experiment to show the pattern of light and dark lines created by the diffraction pattern of waves around the inside and outside edges of the blade and through the two openings in the experiment.



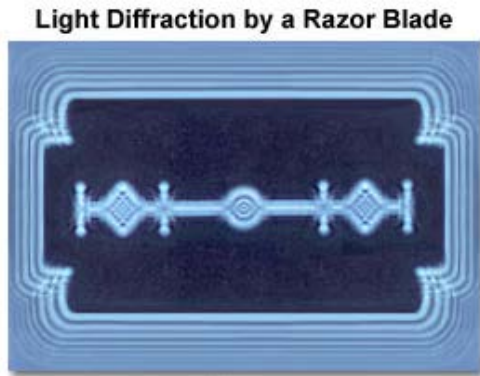


Figure 2. Light Diffraction by a Razor Blade.

<https://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/lightandcolor/diffractionintro.html>

Again, the most poignant image of diffraction is how ocean waves pass through an opening in a rock; the waves bend as they pass through the opening and spread out on the other side of the obstruction. The water, the ripples, the obstructions or openings, and the edges of the pond are all caught up in this diffractive assemblage.



Figure 3. Diffraction pattern of ocean waves. Photo © Exploratorium.

<http://physics.highpoint.edu/~jregester/potl/Waves/DiffractionInterference/Diffraction.html>

For a diffractive literature review, each resource could be viewed as a pebble dropped into a pond. Successive pebbles can create quite turbulent waters, making it

impossible to identify the waves separately. Similarly, “waves pass through an opening or obstruction and are spread differently than they would be otherwise” (Jackson & Mazzei, p.114). Thus, it’s the role of the researcher, especially in a diffractive literature review, to be responsible to the existing literature; I mean *responsible* at the very basic level of meaning, having the ability to respond<sup>23</sup>. The role of the researcher is to perform this ability to respond to existing literature. The intent is not to disrupt the reader with overly obvious or distracting methods; I respond to the existing literature in a diffractive pattern, allowing the reader to engage with the motion, moving through openings naturally, but moving in a different pattern on the other side. A diffractive literature review looks for these openings or obstructions to experience the differential patterns.

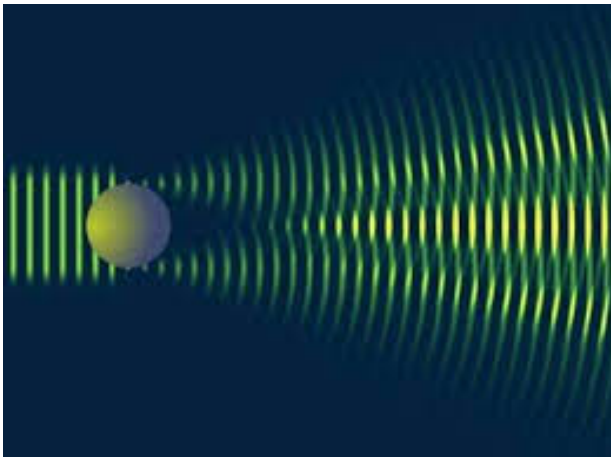


Figure 4. Light waves bending around a sphere, producing a diffraction pattern.

<https://www.quora.com/Diffraction-is-observable-when-the-size-of-the-obstacle-aperture-is-comparable-to-the-wavelength-of-the-light-used-Why-is-this-so>

For this literature review, I have chosen to use mainly discursive resources, such as journal articles, published books, media resources, blogs, and other publically

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<sup>23</sup> Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, p.20

available media. However, a diffractive literature review should not be limited to these resources. Employing this concept as method offers the opportunity to explore other intra-actions of existing and related resources. Dissertations are, by nature, discursive; however, post qualitative research recognizes language itself as material, noting that both material and non-material agents are part of the assemblage of inquiry<sup>24</sup>. For this particular exercise, I have chosen to shift the ontology of a literature review, but keep it somewhat recognizable as its namesake. This is an entirely different ontology for a literature review; this is an intentional turn away from knowledge production and a turn towards experimentation of inquiry.

### **Diffractive apparatus**

As briefly mentioned above, a diffractive apparatus enables a change of ontology. For example, in the two-slit diffraction grating, the atoms behave like waves rather than particles: “But atoms everywhere show themselves as particles. And proper particles don’t go through multiple slits at once!” (Barad, 2014, *Diffracting Diffraction*, p.180). The two-slit experiment, therefore, enables atoms—which normally perform as particles—to behave as waves. Therefore, this change is brought about through performativity, not essentialism. Are atoms waves or particles? The answer depends on how they perform when encountered by a distinct apparatus. Barad (2014, *Diffracting Diffraction*) writes, “This is direct evidence of Bohrian complementarity: wave and particle are not inherent attributes of objects, but rather the atoms perform wave or particle in their intra-action with the apparatus. The apparatus is an inseparable part of the observed phenomenon” (p. 180).

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<sup>24</sup> Heckman (2010) wrote, “We have learned much from the linguistic turn. Language *does* construct our reality” (p.6).

More simply, the pieces of the assemblage cannot be disassembled and viewed separately without losing the unique properties of the assemblage. Take the example of waves passing through an opening in the rock—the waves, the rock, the landscape, the force of motion create the changing pattern of waves as they pass through the opening. Elizabeth de Freitas and Margaret Walshaw (2016) have applied this assemblage principle to mathematics education research. They use diffraction as a “political technology<sup>25</sup>”; they write, “As a political technology, it is an *interference* of some kind, a dynamic interference and rearrangement of the world” (italics in original, 2016, p.155). As a result, they posit that if an experiment involves a diffractive device, “the experiment becomes a means of mutating concepts and reassembling the world. Such an experiment has consequential meaning and cannot be described as simply a means to test hypothesis” (2016, p.157).

As the world is reassembled after an interference, often one can observe patterns of repetition; these patterns are typically fuzzy and indeterminate. Over time, we see waves repeat within a medium. De Freitas and Walshaw (2016) explain, “waves propagate out and collide and form repeated images of varying intensity” (p.168). As Barad (2007) notes, “[waves] are disturbances that propagate in a medium” (Universe, p.76). Therefore, what may at first seem fixed are actually the “combined resonance of component waves in a medium” (de Freitas & Walshaw, 2016, p.168).

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<sup>25</sup> This terminology originates with Haraway (1996): “Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffraction do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of metaphysics...Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings” (p.276).

A literature review is the most fixed component of a traditional dissertation. Data can be conveyed many different ways, multiple theories can be applied, and analysis and discussion can be dynamic. However, the literature review is often a *reflection* of existing literature. To make a comparison, I borrow a quote from Haraway (1997), “Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to industries of metaphysics...Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings” (p.276). Therefore, by using a diffractive apparatus in this post qualitative literature review, rather than provide a reflection of existing literature—essentially presenting the same elsewhere<sup>26</sup>—I am able to present existing literature as part of the experiment: the subject of TED and existing literature, passing through the diffractive apparatus of humor and satire, to observe the diffractive pattern of discussion.

### **Humor and satire as diffractive apparatus**

*Admiring Friend: “My, that is a beautiful baby you have there.”*

*Mother: “Oh, really this is nothing. You should see his picture.”*

*--Boorstin, 1961*

Aristotle wrote that comedy makes men seem worse than they are and tragedy makes them seem better; “Comedy is...an imitation of characters of a lower type—not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly” (1449a). He also wrote that comedy consists of some “defect or ugliness, which is not painful or destructive” (1449a). Thus, comedy is the perfect spark for postmodern

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<sup>26</sup> For comparison, please see the plateau in this dissertation that serves as a traditional literature review.

thought. It exposes the cracks in the surface, which at first seem harmless. However, the cracks are caused by a flimsy foundation of humanity and society based on nothing but human ideas, the realization of which can be both painful and destructive. Yet, I argue that this pain and destruction is productive and affirmative.

Humor and satire have long been academic research fodder in nearly every field of social science—education, psychology, sociology, rhetoric and communication, business and marketing, history and anthropology, literature, political science, etc... The academic interest in humor is often tied to a preoccupation with the “real” or societal norms. Often, social norms are viewed as the stabilizing “real,” not realizing that the real may actually be an *idea* of the real. Like the mother in the introductory joke, often we prefer the predictability and perfection of the picture or reflection rather than the messiness and irregularity of the “real.”

Giuseppina Scotto di Carlo (2014), a scholar with several academic publications about TED Talks, wrote an analysis of humor-related laughter in TED Talks. While her thesis is that humor is “an endemic feature of this genre of popularizing texts” (p.81), I found her analysis enlightening as I realized that humor is a catalyst for making something different. One text can rise above another in popularity just due to its enjoyable delivery—the content may take a back seat to something people actually want to watch for pleasure. Humor is a tool that allows one to pull the rug out from under what is normal, turning what we expect to happen into impossibility, opening the door to infinite and unexpected possibility and incongruity. Thus, humor is often used as a tool of resistance, deconstruction, and subversion. Used in this way, humor and satire act as a diffractive apparatus.

## Experiments

I have chosen two TED related performances or resources that include humor and/or satire to act as the diffractive apparatus for this literature review. The first is a TEDxDrexel talk given by Sam Hyde in 2013, which exhibits an opportunity for satire. The second is an example of humor as we explore Sarah Silverman's invited TED Talk from 2010. As tools of difference, I have used differing fonts, text styles, and indentations as tools to assist readers in distinguishing the resulting wave patterns that result from the experiment<sup>27</sup>. Now, we have the components of our "experiment." We have the subject of TED and the existing literature surrounding our topic; we have the diffractive apparatus—TED related instances of humor and satire. This experiment provides an opportunity to offer a strategic rethinking of a post qualitative literature review using the concept of diffraction as the methodology, or rather it is the theory driving theory-method-living.

### **TEDxDrexel gets trolled**

"For anyone seeking knowledge and glimpses of possibilities beyond oneself, the nonprofit electronic democracy of TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) shines forth like the lantern of Diogenes" (Fletcher, p.1).

*Sam Hyde's introduction at TEDxDrexel says that his work "spans every continent and has been featured on television and in print." He has just returned from the world's most dangerous city—Mogadishu—where he followed women on their "quest to clean*

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<sup>27</sup> Several resources for this dissertation used the same tools to communicate shifts in thinking or resources. To see examples of this in existing literature, please see Barad (2014), Caputo (2015), and Lather (1997).

*up the streets and to restore humanity to their war torn country.” His talk is entitled “2070 Paradigm shift”.*

*Hyde enters the stage wearing a maroon jumpsuit, stocking hat, tennis shoes, and a plastic, roman-style, bronze-colored breastplate. Exhaling loudly, he takes a bottle of water from the stage asking if it’s “anbody’s” and if not, he’s “claiming it.” He walks up the stairs of the stage of the presentation hall, through the large TEDxDrexel letters, and sits down, leans back, legs spread wide apart. He fidgets with his microphone pack, fumbles with his notes, and exhales loudly, as if from exertion from his trek up the stairs. Loudly gulping his water, he asks the audience to give him “like, 25 seconds here.” After choking on the water, he asks for ten more seconds. Then he asks for his microphone to be turned up; after a few microphone tests and compliments to the technical staff, he gulps more water. One can hear light nervous laughter from the audience. After several more distractions, two minutes into his time, Hyde is ready to give his talk.*

“Diffraction is not a singular event that happens in space and time; rather, it is a dynamism that is integral to spacetime mattering (Barad, 2014, p.169).

This moment in TEDx is bigger than just the 16 minutes of this talk given in 2013. This moment is thick; it is a very material manifestation of fear, anxiety, validity, authority, expertise, and performance. Some who reported on the event jumped to the logical conclusion that Hyde had “snuck” into the event to deliver his incomprehensible speech (Weisman, 2013, para. 3). However, he was actually *invited* to present alongside Drexel professors and astronauts about his adventures in Africa. Was this a planned performance? Were the organizers in on the joke?



“The notions of congruity and incongruity refer to the relationship between the components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth. When the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous” (McGhee, 1979, 6-7, as cited in Scotto di Carlo, 2014, p.85-86).

It seemed as though Drexel had simply failed to vet the speakers for their event; a simple Google search would have determined that Hyde was no journalist, but rather a comedian with a specialty in improvisation. Hyde's talk was received with glee from those who agreed that TED took itself too seriously and deserved the ridicule. Hyde reported to Andrew Thompson (2013) of *Philadelphia Magazine* that he planned this performance because he didn't think TED talks were “cool.” He went on to say, “I don't want it to sound too sanctimonious, but I think [TED talks are] really self-congratulatory” (2013, para.6).

“Let us live not merely for today but for tomorrow!”

“Go beyond the cutting edge!”

“The more books we read, the earlier the country prospers; the less books we read, the later the country prospers.”<sup>28</sup>

“North Korea released a list of 310 slogans, trying to rouse patriotic fervor for everything from the bureaucracy (‘Carry out the tasks given by the Party within the time it has set’) to edible fungi (‘Let us turn our country into a country

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<sup>28</sup> All three of these are North Korean slogans.

of mushrooms’). The slogans also urge North Koreans to embrace science and technology and adopt a spirit of can-do optimism—messages that might not be too out of place in a TED Talk” (Gilson, p.14, 2015).

What is it that makes it hard to differentiate TED like statements, from the slogans of an isolated communist regime? Is there really that little space between the two? Is this comparison humorous or strangely telling about the idol of inspirational language?

In the digital realm, anyone can be an expert, claiming experience, giving advice, and popularizing products. Chafetz (1996) details how this messy realm of consumers/producers can cause problems: “Awash in prescriptions and proscriptions but lacking a means of judging the validity of what they hear, people soon find themselves ruled by the tyranny of experts” (p.xiii). The curated nature of TED allows for consumers of the video content to pass the buck on validity; “Surely this person is an expert, or else they wouldn’t be on stage.” Robbins (2012) wryly notes that the genius of the online format of short talks is that “nobody really watches them.” He says, “...we play them on iPods or we run them in our browsers while working on other things, but it’s rare that people put one on the television and sit down and really focus on them.”

Clearly, we are viewing. As of 2015, TED videos touted over 1 billion views. But are we *watching*? We are watching close enough to get the TED formula. Hundreds of books and blogs have been written about how to give TED Talks. Then there is another step beyond just giving TED Talks—giving a successful TED Talk.

This is one of the most prolific arenas for the media's interest TED. In many articles like, "How to give a great TED talk" (Helm, 2010), "How to give a TED-worthy talk" (Clark, 2014), "10 steps to create a standing ovation worthy TED talk" (Knapp, 2014) and "How to give a killer presentation" (Anderson, 2013), and even TED talks like "The secret structure of great talks" (Duarte, 2011), authors and speakers discuss the key elements of a performance that will connect with the audience, communicate the idea, and provoke action or inspiration.

"In March 2012, civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson delivered a talk to 1,000 people attending the annual TED conference in Long Beach, California. He received the longest standing ovation in TED history, and his presentation has been viewed nearly two million times online.[...] Stevenson told me that the attendees that day donated a combined \$1 million to his nonprofit, the Equal Justice Initiative. That is over \$55,000 for each minute he spoke (Gallo, 2014, p.2).

Success is measured in views, and often results in book deals and endorsements. Often these speakers receive multiple invitations to speak on the TED stage or receive TED book deals, reifying TED's role in their success<sup>29</sup>. In many ways, just giving a TED talk deems one an "expert." However, this expert status gets pretty messy. Is the speaker an expert in the field or an expert speaker? This muddy landscape of rhetorical skill can reward an excellent speaker with lesser credentials many more "views" than someone who is a

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<sup>29</sup> Most notably, Brene Brown has given two TED Talks and one TEDx Talk.

leading researcher in the field. Web 2.0 tools and content, like TED talks, have opened doors to new types of experts.

“Time is out of joint; it is diffracted, broken apart in different directions, non-contemporaneous with itself. Each moment is an infinite multiplicity. ‘Now’ is not an infinitesimal slice but an infinitely rich condensed node in a changing field diffracted across spacetime in its ongoing iterative repatterning” (Barad, 2014, p.169).

“TED’s slogan is this: ‘Ideas worth spreading.’ Apparently TED has some ideas, and we should spread them. What ideas? Ideas that TED in its infinite wisdom has picked out for us, ideas which are therefore implied to be true and good and right. What should we do with these ideas? We should build a message around them—slick presentations by charismatic faces captured in high definition—and we should spread that message far and wide. If this doesn’t yet sound familiar, try replacing ‘TED’ with ‘GOD’. ‘Ideas worth spreading’ sounds more like the slogan of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (Robbins, p.1, 2012).

These performances are captured and viewed again and again. TED and the TED community is dedicated to sharing information all over the world. Talks are translated into up to 113 different languages<sup>30</sup>; the most popular ones are translated into the most languages, stretching the idea across space and time.

“With all the time and dedication that the Dekkers give to the Open Translation Project, the question pops to mind: Do they sometimes need to take a break from

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<sup>30</sup> It is necessary to note that the TED community volunteers to translate these videos. One family, the Dekkers, have translated more than 2,000 TED Talks into the Hebrew language since 2009 (Bast, 2014).

translating? Tal says that, on the contrary, especially living in Israel—where the political situation this summer [2014] was all-consuming for many—translating TED Talks is a welcome reprieve. *‘The translating thing is a bit like a pause in our real-life situation,’* she says. *‘It is like a break. We like doing this.’*” (Bast, 2014).

*5:51 of Hyde’s Talk: “Great ideas don’t come in all shapes and sizes. 9/11—September 11<sup>th</sup>. We’re going to use reverence here and not be silly about it. But look at what they accomplished with no weapons and just 11 guys who didn’t even speak English! And that proves that sometimes great ideas are actually horrible ideas.” This is met with silence.*

Anya Kamenetz (2010) wrote that TED is “creating a new Harvard—the first new top-prestige education brand in more than 100 years.” This was taken literally by many other writers, such as Dan Coleman from [Openculture.com](http://Openculture.com) (2010), prompting Kamenetz to clarify that she meant that participating in TED (through attending an event) “confers a lot of the benefits of attending Harvard” and goes further to ask whether Harvard and other universities could follow TED’s lead and open up knowledge to more people (in comments to Coleman, 2010). In short, TED’s digital content production model has much in common with net neutrality, while traditionally, university content and knowledge has been hidden behind Ivy League walls and big price tags.

Robbins (2012) feels the popularity of TED relies on this created cloud of expertise; he writes, “TED Talks are designed to make people feel good about themselves; to flatter them and make them feel clever and knowledgeable; to

give them the impression that they're a part of an elite group making the world a better place. People join for much the same reason they join societies like Mensa: it gives them a chance to label themselves part of an intellectual elite" (2012).

*13:56 of Hyde's talk: "Guys, what's the main problem right now that won't be around in 2070? The elderly and the disabled. Cause we're just gonna kill 'em!" (Making the motion like a baseball pitcher throwing a ball). Silence. He does the motion again, repeating. "We're just gonna kill 'em!" in the other direction. Silence, until he chuckles. Then the audience laughs.*

"Diffraction is not only a lively affair, but one that troubles dichotomies, including some of the most sedimented and stabilized/stabilizing binaries[...]  
Diffraction is not a set pattern, but rather an iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling" (Barad, 2014, p.168).

Many believe that Hyde's talk, among others, challenged this intellectual elite, demolished the cloud of expertise in America. However, Hyde's talk was not translated into any other languages. It does not appear on the main TED site, a requirement for all TEDx Talks. Moreover, the talk and any mention of Sam Hyde has been removed from Drexel's TEDx page. There are no pictures of Hyde or his talk in the photo feed on Facebook; there are no official statements from TEDxDrexelU's organizers about the incident. It only exists on YouTube and in the media and social media surrounding that 2013 event coverage.



Figure 5. James Shah. 2013, October 10. Tweet.

At least eight “rogue” video accounts have posted the Sam Hyde video on YouTube; the video has been watched well over a million times from these three sources, hundreds of thousands more times than any other TEDxDrexel talk. An internet search for TEDxDrexel is quickly connected to Hyde’s talk.

*3:58: Hyde mispronounces “Drexel” numerous times, then climbs back through the TEDxDrexel letters to walk around the stage.*

Hyde’s talk was watched in horror from those involved with TEDx organizations across the nation. On the TEDx Facebook page, people reached out to and posted support for the Drexel organizers. The TEDx community and even many who doubted the sovereignty of TED as a whole, rallied behind Drexel and chastised Hyde for his misdirected animosity. B.J. Mendelson (2013), a writer for *SocialTimes.com*, confessed that he had been mocking the TED conference since 2011, but agreed that Hyde had gone too far. He wrote immediately after the incident at Drexel, “Even though the main TED conference is much deserving of ridicule, the same shouldn’t be said of TEDx. They’re totally separate from the (elitist snobs) who run TED.... As easy as it is for us to sit here and laugh about the video, you gotta remember how much work actually goes

into putting on a TEDx event, and the simple fact that, again, TEDx is not TED” (para.1, 3).

*15:47 One final demand for a pat on the back, then “2070 Israel ripped off the map. BYE! BYEBYE!” Then he asks the audience what their predictions are for 2070. The moderator steps in to say, “I think it will be better than what we have right now!” Hyde exclaims, “It can’t be any worse than what we have right now!”*

*17:04 The moderator shakes his hand steps back out on the stage and blows air, rubs his face and launches into the final Q&A for the event. Other speakers join Hyde on stage. The first question is for Hyde.*

“We like where your heart is, TED Talks. We really do. But even the most devoted fan of your brand, which produces lectures that mix scientific and philosophical ideas to help Make You A Better You, can get tiresome.” (Luippold, 2013).

“Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of difference appear” (Haraway, 1992, p.300 quoted in Barad, 2014, p.172).

### **Sarah Silverman gets “Silvermanned”**

“Everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into sets and cliques, into antagonistic sects and factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life.”

-John Dewey, Creative Democracy, 1939



*“Our next speaker is definitely playful, she’s also mischievous, curious, a little crass, very cool, and very smart. She is breaking taboos and barriers with her eponymous very successful TV show on Comedy Central and she has a new book coming out in April called *The Bedwetter: Stories of Courage, Redemption, and Pee*. Prepare for a very, very serious 18 minutes with Sarah Silverman!”*

*Applause.*

Well-known for her provocative bits and shocking language, comedienne Sarah Silverman was invited to be a speaker at a 2010 TED main conference. In an interview with Bill Maher (Silverman, 2010b), she said, “None of my friends knew what TED is, but I knew what TED is and I was excited when they asked me. [...] I had my manager double check that they knew who I was and this wasn’t a mistake or anything...and they were like, ‘Oh this is about the exchange of ideas’, you know, whatever. [...] It went very well; I was super happy.”

Sarah’s talk was more of a performance—she did bits and songs on a variety of topics. It is entitled “A New Perspective on the Number 3000”. Her performance was exactly what one would expect from Sarah Silverman—a comedy routine that covered a myriad of inappropriate and somewhat shocking topics. Below is a basic outline of the topics covered in her 18-minute talk. The primary bullets represent the visual cue on the slides she used; the indented bullets provide examples of the topics covered in that section.

- What the world needs now
- Appreciate the little things!
- Honest Communication

- Telling her mother, “I’m sleeping with a man that spans me.”
  - Showering with her mother as a child
  - Sang a perky song about the elderly to her nana, here’s the chorus:  
 “You’re gonna die soon, you’re gonna die soon! It’s not cold in here,  
 you’re just dying.”
- I’m *what*-ish???
- Growing up Jewish in Bedford, New Hampshire
- Religion is real! Religion is our friend!
  - Ethiopian Jews
  - Religion is a way to deal with existence
- “Let’s be insecure together!”
  - Insecurity comes in different forms
  - Insecurity can protect us, like a survival skill: “You get the feeling that some people, if they were maybe one to two degrees more on to themselves, they’d kill themselves.”
  - Misbehavior masked as being a Diva: “‘I’m a diva. I can cut in line. I’m a diva. I can be selfish and thoughtless. I’m a diva.’ Ummm. I’m pretty sure you’re a cunt.” (Voracious laughter and applause)
- “Think about our planet!”
  - We live in a world of excess and we have to stop if we want to keep on living.
- Population growth:
 

“It’s hard to think how it’s not total vanity to give birth when there are so many

- children out there to adopt. And I know one day I would like to adopt. I'm going to take it a step further and I am going to adopt a mentally challenged child (one person claps). It's three fold. 1. It's harder for them to get adopted. 2. I have oodles of love to give. 3. I just really enjoy the company of the mentally challenged (Silence). There is one caveat in my plan. They don't leave the nest at 18. You die, god willing of old age at 80, and you worry about who will take care of your 60 year old retarded child. That is where I came up with this brilliant solution. I am going to adopt a retard child who is terminally ill. (Laughter) I know, I know what you are thinking. Who looks to adopt a retarded child who is terminally ill? An amazing person. (Laughter)."
- TED is fancy!
    - 3000: Turn it sideways, you see a butt pooping.
  - Everyone deserves to have a song
    - She sings a song for the porn stars in the audience. The chorus is "Do you ever take drugs so that you can have sex without crying? Yeah, Yeah."

A list of topics and examples is necessary here in order to show all of depth and breadth of her humor; she directly made fun of many groups of people—Jews, porn stars, women, men, the elderly, the mentally challenged, and others. However, making fun of one of these groups apparently went too far.

The TEDx Manual warns organizers that the ideas presented should be "realistic" and to be wary of "bad science" (TEDx Manual, p.60). In fact, TED issued a notice to the TEDx community warning that the presentation of "bad

science” is grounds for license revocation (Copeland, 2013, para.2). An early talk made infamous via web comments is Randy Powell’s “Vortex-Based Mathematics” (2010). Viewers of the talk, like Stanford physics professor Jay Wacker, challenged his theory and concepts, calling Powell’s presentation “sweet merciful crap” and accusing Powell himself of being either insane or a huckster. TED staffers asked Powell to send research backing up his claims, to which he never responded (Merchant, 2013, para.4).

Likewise, Rupert Sheldrake’s talk, “The Science Delusion,” and Graham Hancock’s talk, “The War on Consciousness” were touted as pseudoscience<sup>31</sup>, and were exiled to a TED blog post rather than the main website. **TEDx Director Lara Stein explained TED’s position on this as contextual: “If something is being presented as art or as an entertaining interlude that is fine, but if it is being presented as some sort of science that is not fine” (Copeland, 2013, para. 13).**

While Sarah’s ideas can in no way be defined as “science,” clearly her act could be described as art or an entertaining interlude, at the very least. Is there now an off-limits category for “pseudo-art”?

“And I didn’t realize that the next day, the curator, Chris Anderson, like apologized for having me and he tweeted ‘I shouldn’t say this about one of my own speakers, but that Sarah Silverman was god-awful’ to a million and a half

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<sup>31</sup> Sheldrake and Hancock did provide information to back up their claims (TEDstaff, 2013).

followers on twitter. [...] I wasn't going to say anything back, but I just felt like these two grown-ups [Chris Anderson and Steve Case, co-creator and former CEO of AOL] were attacking me. And I know I am a grown up too, but you know that feeling when you're a comic. It just feels that way. And I tweeted, 'Kudos to Chris Anderson for making TED an unsafe haven for all. You are a barnacle of mediocrity on Bill Gates' asshole.' [...] When you think about somebody...who is this person? He put together TED, which is a very interesting, cool conference, but who is he who needs to detach from someone whose shit might stink? His whole identity is who he is connecting himself to, but who are you?" (Silverman, interview with Bill Maher, 2010b).

Speakers sometimes bristle at the control TED exerts over content. At last year's conference in Long Beach, Calif., the sex researcher Christopher Ryan shared some provocative theories about the challenges of human monogamy. During a rehearsal the day before his talk, he was told to remove a slide with a joke about primate genitalia. "As I walked offstage, a tech guy said, 'You're getting Silvermaned,' " Mr. Ryan said.

He was referring to the 2010 TED Talk by Sarah Silverman, in which the comedian jokingly referred to adopting a "retarded" child. That quip prompted a Twitter feud between Ms. Silverman and Mr. Anderson, who called her talk "god-awful" and vowed never to put the video on TED.com (it's on YouTube). "TED is many things, and humorless is generally one of them," Mr. Ryan said. (Hochman, 2014).

*Applause as she runs off the stage. The announcer comes back on laughing. "I'm very rarely at a loss for words. [Someone from the audience says something inaudible]. You know, Robert, I was just thinking—imagine the conversations we're going to be having about this. 'Well, I mean, what did you think about the doodie?' Can we use that word on the internet?" [Someone in the audience yells, "Encore!"] Several people applaud]. "Sarah, come back out here for them to applaud you! They need to applaud you a little more." Sarah comes out and says, "This can't be right." Standing ovation by about half of the audience. Announcer says, "If we had time, I would ask you for an encore, but it would also terrify me. So instead I will just thank you. You are a total, total delight. They demanded you back." Sarah says, "Thank you so much!" and jaunts off stage again.*

"This is a bit that comes from something very real for me. When you make it into comedy, you let the ugly things come out" (Silverman, in an interview with Bill Maher, 2010b).

Benjamin Bratton gave a TEDxSanDiego talk in 2013 entitled "What's Wrong with TED Talks" and cites the format that encourages oversimplification as the first reason TED talks "don't work." He believes the format of the talks leads to quality work being ignored or dismissed in favor of a more popular or inspiring presenter. He also disagrees with the common practice of a *simple take away*. He started the conclusion of his talk with this: "As for one simple take away...I don't have one simple take away, one magic idea. That's kind of the point" (Bratton, 2013).

Chris Anderson (2014), the curator of TED, agrees that TED talks are often a practice in oversimplification. However, he remarked “If TED talks were the only way that ideas could be shared, they [critics] might have a point. But there are countless communication forms out there in the world[...]We certainly don’t think any TED talk offers all there is to know about any topic. Of course not. But you can learn enough about knowing more” (para. 6, 11). In summation, talks communicate an idea as simply and powerfully as possible; thus, the presentation can very well overshadow the idea, and the idea can be too simple to implement responsibly.

“Perhaps TEDsters should just stick to the simple stuff. Slavery sucks<sup>32</sup>, for example. Glad we finally got that controversial topic on the table for discussion” (Arrington, 2010).

The aforementioned oversimplification combined with several instances of “questionable” content helped push Evgeny Morozov, a writer for *The New Republic*, into the limelight as the most notorious and articulate TED critic. In 2012, he stated:

TED is no longer a responsible curator of ideas “worth spreading.” Instead it has become something ludicrous, and a little sinister. Today TED is an insatiable kingpin of international meme laundering—a place where ideas, regardless of their quality, go to seek celebrity, to live in the form of videos, tweets, and now e-books...Richard Dawkins, the father of memetics, should be very proud. Perhaps he can explain how “ideas worth spreading” become

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<sup>32</sup> This refers to a tweet from Gabe Rivera in 2010 that stated, “Learning today that many of my friends at #TED are anti-slavery. I’m proud of them and admire their outspokenness.”

“ideas no footnotes can support” (Morozov, 2012, Section II, para.2).

Like Morozov, other critics attack TED for its “annoying do-goodism, its loopy optimism about science, and its relentless pursuit of ‘wonder’” (Levy, 2013, para. 5). This sanguine passion and lack of peer review for the content presented leads many to question the legitimacy of the ideas delivered.

“These people who are so angry that I said the word ‘retarded’ –and I didn’t say ‘retard’ which I don’t like either. It doesn’t make me feel comfortable. When I say retarded, I’m talking about the retarded. People who *are* retarded [audience laughter]. People would rather it not exist; people would rather that the mentally handicapped are not represented in art or expression in anyway than take the chance of being expressed and offending—not the mentally handicapped—but their advocates. And I don’t give a fuck about their advocates.” (Silverman, Interview with Bill Maher, May 10, 2010b).

“If I spoke of discourse, it was not to show that the mechanisms or processes of the language (*langue*) were entirely preserved in it; but rather to reveal in the density of verbal performances, the diversity of the possible levels of analysis” (Foucault, 1972, p.200).

The main goal for TED is the dissemination of ideas and they are masters of achieving this goal. Since 2006, the website has offered an ever- growing, free collection of now over 1,600 talks which have been viewed nearly two billion times (Hochman, 2014, para. 6). Not only are these videos available to anyone with access to the internet, they are also translated into more than 104 languages (Hochman,



2014, para.6). Curator, Chris Anderson, calls this *radical openness*, one of the main tenets of Web 2.0 technologies.

The ironic flipside to the radical openness is censorship. Some TED and TEDx videos with questionable content seem to slip off into the night only to be found in the darkest corners of the internet, especially talks that the curator deems as “god-awful<sup>33</sup>” or “too political<sup>34</sup>.” One of the most serious critiques aimed at TED, that it “reproduces a narrow, Silicon Valley view of the world, with precious little room for dissenting voices” (Geoghehan, 2012, para.10). The absence of a video or topic is an indication of the limits of the discourse in this community.

Silverman’s “talk” received quite a bit of attention as a “censored” TED Talk. TED is a curated event; as the curator, Chris Anderson has total control of who and what goes on stage and the website. But he does not control the internet as a whole. Separating himself from Silverman’s talk may have been a protective and political move for the organization; however, one must suspect that inviting Sarah Silverman, a “very cool” comedienne at the height of her popularity, was also a political move, a marketing move that buys TED relevance with a different population.

In rhetoric and communication studies, humor often serves as a double-edged sword. It can serve to make a speaker more relatable and relevant to the audience, but it can also cause friction and conflict. In a study of Hertzler’s theories about humor, Scotto di Carlo (2013) notes that humor has great influence on a

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<sup>33</sup> Sarah Silverman’s 2010 talk.

<sup>34</sup> Nick Hanauer’s 2012 TEDSalon talk, which was posted to TED’s website in 2014.

group's status system, "because it can function as a social equalizer or it can serve to reinforce and maintain status differences" (p.82).

Status differences are never as obvious as on social media. Social media platforms provide an outlet for conflict and disagreement, within a single community and also with "outsiders" or "haters". A single hashtag allows anyone to join the conversation.

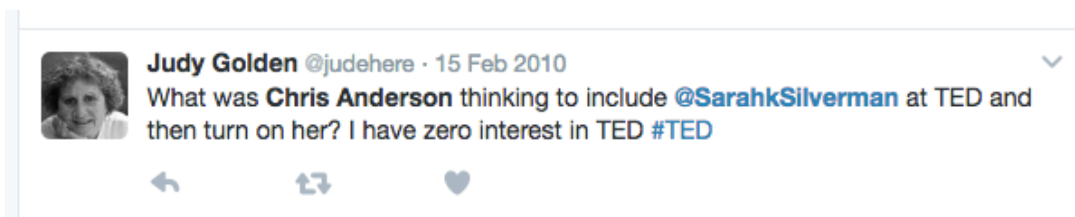


Figure 6. Judy Golden. 2010, February 15. Tweet.

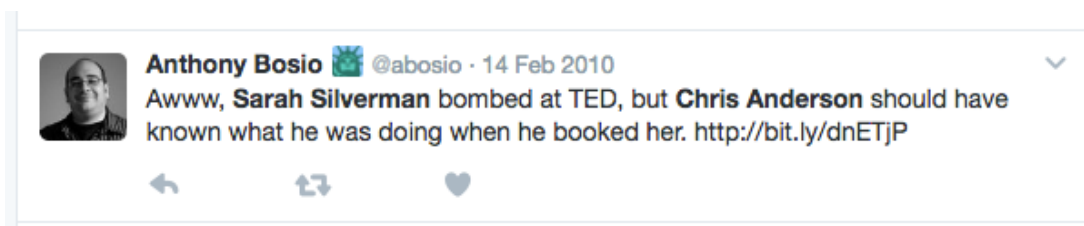


Figure 7. Anthony Bosio. 2010, February 14. Tweet.

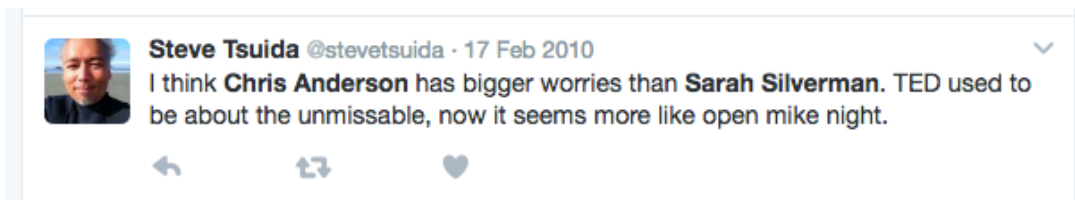


Figure 8. Steve Tsuida. 2010, February 17. Tweet.

The conversation continued in a different way inside TED circles—as a cautionary tale. Chris Anderson hosted a webinar for TEDx organizers and addressed his decision to invite Silverman to perform. TEDx does as TED does, so Silverman's talk

was a lesson to all organizers—sometimes what you intend is not always what you get when you go for a big name speaker.

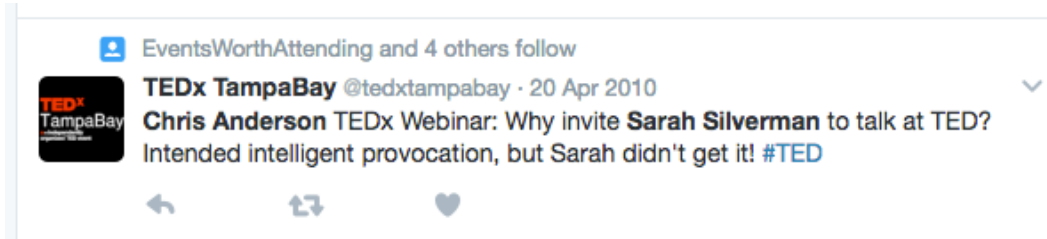


Figure 9. TEDxTampaBay. 2010, April 20. Tweet.

One must consider “...what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts...” (St. Pierre, 2013b, p.648).

Community matters. In a 2014 study, Tsou, Thewall, Mongeon, and Sugimoto analyzed commenting behavior on 300 TED Talk videos across two different platforms—the TED website and YouTube. The two platforms allow for different types of communities to interact with these videos<sup>35</sup>. Here are their findings:

- Different degrees of encouraged interaction: “YouTube comments were statistically more likely to engage in discussion with previous commenters (24%) than TED comments (12.3%). Personal insults were significantly more prevalent on the YouTube platform (5.7%) than the TED platform (less than 1%)” (p.6).
- Type of interaction: “TED tended to provoke more discussion about the speaker or talk content, where YouTube tended to encourage interaction

<sup>35</sup> Both platforms require users to register before posting comments.

between commenters. In all three cases, TED received more positive codes than YouTube; this was significant when commenters were discussing the speaker or the talk, or if commenters were interacting with each other” (p.6).

The authors acknowledge that the community has quite a bit to do with these findings. Overall, the TED videos had fewer negative comments about the content or the speaker; one possible explanation of that is that people who go on the TED website in order to view videos, rather than YouTube, “are already invested in the TED philosophy (and thus receptive to the themes, talks, presenters evidenced in the videos), whereas YouTube viewers can ‘stumble upon’ a talk without any previous knowledge of (or affection towards) TED” (p.8). In other words, it is a safe assumption that people on the TED website have “drank the Kool-Aid<sup>36</sup>” to a greater extent than those on YouTube. When a censored talk is removed from the TED website, the insider perspective of the talk, post-talk, is limited to social media platforms. The videos show us often how the audience was feeling about the talk at the time.

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<sup>36</sup> “Drink the kool-aid” is a common phrase in our TED community. It’s a short hand way to communicate that some understands what TEDx is and what we are trying to do in the community. The phrasing itself harkens unto cult-like behavior, like at Jonestown in 1978. Regardless of the negative connotation, the phrase is still used as short-hand to help us determine who is “in” and who doesn’t get it.



Figure 10. Half-standing ovation. Screen shot from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ci5p1OdVLAc>.

These opportunities for tension and difference within a community that is usually seen from the outside as one-dimensional, “self-congratulatory,” and altruistic are important moments. They create space for critical analysis, dialogue, and resistance; they illuminate the boundaries of the TED discourse.

“Diffraction does not produce ‘the same’ displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear” (Haraway, 1992, p.300).

## Conclusion

Traditional dissertation literature reviews often exist to establish the breadth and depth of knowledge and resources probed, thus establishing citational authority for the writer. They show whom, how much, and how well one has read. Traditional literature reviews allow opportunities for the writer to critique and find gaps in knowledge that they believe can be filled by their own research in the chapters to follow. In contrast, diffractive literature reviews help to create a reading of a subject that “*produces* rather than *protects*” (Spivak, 1974, p.lxxv).

My deep and ongoing involvement with the TED brand and the local TEDx organization on campus made writing about TED a complex ethical matter. I recognized a strong desire at times to protect or trash the brand. In my review of the existing literature, I found that TED is both celebrated and dismissed with a noble or gleeful ferocity. I realized my responsibility to the literature was not to present a case about or opinions of TED, nor just reflect what others have said. My responsibility was to produce something that showed the tension and movement within the community and how those moments create new conditions and opportunities to engage on the other side of that moment.

I identified points of humor and satire as fertile times of tension. Those moments are portrayed as diffractive apparatus that serve to promote a new kind of becoming on the other side. Both examples, Hyde's TEDxDrexel talk and Silverman's TED talk, served to show areas of vulnerability in the TED organization and brand. Areas of vulnerability are ripe for discussion and multiple discourses. For some, these talks served as learning opportunities within the community of many TEDx organizers to learn from mistakes, to tighten the reigns on vetting speakers and presenter preparation. Others from within and outside the TEDx community found moments of reflection about the authority of TED, its speakers, and events; the tension between the values of "radical openness" and the act of censorship is challenged in light of a curated event. This diffractive presentation of these ideas allows space for thought and movement between the resources. The diffractive apparatus allowed for discussion about topics that I would have included in a traditional literature review in a new way; this format allowed for the topics

I began to code—authority, discourse, censorship, audience—to emerge in new and unexpected ways without traditional coding and analysis.

In conclusion, a diffractive literature review provides opportunity to review existing literature, but with the insistence of movement. A diffractive literature review offers opportunity for a strategic use of both theory and method to produce a text that highlights intra-action and difference. It is not about finding and reflecting existing resources, but working those resources as tools of analysis. Looking for movement and difference opens the literature review up to unconventional resources like popular and media sources, as well as scholarly publications. This radical openness demonstrates the fluidity of discourse and community, reinforcing the interdisciplinary nature of inquiry.

In short, a post qualitative literature review must be created with different commitments than a traditional literature review. Theory, method, and the resulting product of inquiry must align. Using theoretical concepts as a method of inquiry can produce a project that does not merely address epistemology or knowledge about a subject, but allows the intra-action between topic, method, concept, and researcher to emerge and become something else entirely. Instead of starting with the epistemological call to find out what has been said and what is missing from existing research, post qualitative literature reviews ask how the existing literature functions in the existing discourses and what is possible? Using post qualitative theories and methods makes this ontological shift both possible and absolutely necessary as the question turns from the past to possibility.

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## PLATEAU

### Sublime Inquiry: A Look into a Post Qualitative Dissertation in Progress

The intent of this plateau is to illuminate the moments of movement that make visible the process of becoming post qualitative. At this point in my career, those moments consist of stutters, shadows, and specters of what might come. As Davies (2011) writes, "...it is not always possible to see, except in retrospect, what events or emergent knowledges one is caught up in" (p.228). So all I can do is provide a sideways glance at those mo(ve)ments that I am still very much wrestling with as I write my dissertation that inquires into the work of TED Talks and the organization of TED in the curriculum. I want to describe two of those mo(ve)ments that will assist readers in their engagement with this dissertation.

### **Mo(ve)ment #1: The Dissertation as a Plane of Immanence**

Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) describe a plane of immanence as "like a section of chaos" that "acts like a sieve" (p.42). It's open, it envelops infinite movement; it's elastic and fluid; it consists of tribes of concepts. Johansson (2015) notes that the plane of immanence is "constituted by assemblages, flows, and affects; components with the ability to plug into one another" (p.457). Coleman and Ringrose (2013) suggest that the plane of immanence is the place where connections "are made and re-made horizontally, immanently, rather than (only) as a result of vertical hierarchies" (p.125). The assemblages in the plane are diverse, multiple, and machinic—meaning connections are made between human and non-human things (p.125).



When I began thinking about the structure of my dissertation, the plane of immanence was not a tool I immediately took hold of as an organizational possibility. However, as my research began to become more and more seemingly chaotic and conventional qualitative organizational structures unthinkable, I realized the need to think of my research as a plane of immanence, so that I could begin to make cuts.

Johansson (2015) remarks that the plane of immanence provides a stark contrast to the transcendent and stable. This is the difference between mapping and tracing, according to Deleuze and Guattari. Martin and Kamberelis (2013) explain that tracings are “based on phenomenological experience that is assumed to be essential, stable, and universal” (p.670). In contrast, “The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.12). In short, “a map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always ‘comes back to the same.’ The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence’” (p.12-13). You can see the distinction between the two if you think of arborescent and rhizomatic structures. The rhizome is a popular Deleuzo-Guattarian concept that moves and functions like a tuber, like crabgrass, shooting off in any direction. It is used in contrast to an arborescent structure, like a tree, firm, consistent.

To be direct, conventional qualitative research dissertations are designed to be arborescent; the structure is predictable, repeatable, and logical. Post qualitative dissertations must travel within a plane of immanence, performing as a rhizome, and should function as a map, not a tracing. I want to be especially careful here to note that comparing these two methods should not be reduced to dualism. Deleuze and Guattari

(1987) ask, “Is it not the essence of the map to be traceable? Is it not of the essence of the rhizome to intersect roots and sometimes merge with them? Does not a map contain phenomena of redundancy that are already like tracings of its own?” (p.13). Getting distracted by dualism here would be unproductive. The point is that it is necessary to rethink and challenge traditional dissertation formats if you plan to use post theories, especially if you want to refuse traditional humanist subjectivities and methodologies. And we don’t know what that may look like.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) use the plane of immanence as a methodological movement. Taking up different concepts, they think with those concepts and theories, producing something new through each analysis, thus creating a reading that “opens up and diffracts, rather than crystalizes, representation” (p.ix). Applying the methodology of mapping to the plane of immanence changes the possibilities for the structure of a dissertation and the possibilities for a post qualitative dissertation to emerge. Martin and Kamberelis (2013) write, “Ultimately, mapping discloses potential organizations of reality rather than reproducing some prior organization of it” (p.671).

In a conventional qualitative dissertation, one must attempt some “alleged competence”. In fact, there are multiple resources for creating a competent, qualitative dissertation, for example one even provides “A Roadmap from Beginning to End” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). But the point here is not to pit post qualitative against qualitative products. Both necessarily operate on planes of immanence; however, one acts as a tracing and one a mapping. Deleuze and Guattari argue that tracings should not be given up, but always placed back on the map. Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) ask, “Can we say that one plane is ‘better’ than another or, at least, that it does or does not

answer to the requirements of the age?” (p.58). So the question is what does the age require? I would argue that the age requires scholars who choose to take up these concepts to refuse and rethink traditional formats of dissertations to whatever level thinkable and necessary. However, graduate students are often in a vulnerable position when it comes to doing something new. That means that some of us need to be mentors, professors, department heads, and graduate school deans who hold positions of power to create the possibilities for new scholarly products to be produced.

For the second movement/moment, I want to shift from opening the possibilities for organizational structures, to a more personal moment related to my own inquiry.

### **Mo(ve)ment 2: Sublime Inquiry/Data**

The first chapter of the book *Completing your Qualitative Dissertation: A Roadmap from Beginning to End* begins with a chapter on “Taking charge of yourself and your work.” If this is the first step for conventional qualitative research, it is clear that those thinking with post analyses must start elsewhere. St. Pierre (2014) argues “post analyses require a different approach from the beginning” and expresses doubt that one “can think those analyses *with* conventional humanist qualitative methodology because their epistemological and ontological commitments don’t align” (p.3). Unlike a qualitative research study, a post qualitative study does not have the same luxury of firm and intentional beginnings or a handbook (I am in no way advocating for a “How to” handbook for post qualitative research).

For me, I never intentionally planned my study; I just realized at some point I was already in the middle of it. I was living my study, and honestly, that is quite terrifying. I wasn’t sure I wanted to look deeply into my involvement in the organization of TED

through a local TEDx event. It was fun, productive, and lucrative (I was being paid to teach the TED class and to curate the event as part of my assistantship); it would produce *real* consequences for me if I could no longer think or do these related activities. But as Haraway (1997) wrote about scientific inquiry, “The point is to make a difference in the world, to cast our lot for some ways of life and not others. To do that, one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean. Knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical interpretations” (p.36), I knew it was my responsibility to engage critically. But what was this kind of inquiry and what was this type of inquiry producing?

St. Pierre (1997) already troubled the concept of data in the post tradition, identifying new types of transgressive data (emotional, dream, sensual, and response data), saying that there is likely other types of unidentified data at work in her study. Because I was already thinking with these theories and conceptualizations of data, I was able to identify the material and immaterial affects of this inquiry on me. The continual pull to inquire into what I was already engaged with produced a specific physical and emotional feeling of desire and dread. It was an event of sorts, as Rajchman (1991) explains Foucault’s concept of an event, a “moment of erosion, collapse, questioning, or problematization of the very assumptions of the setting within which a drama may take place, occasioning the chance or possibility of another, different setting” (p. viii). I couldn’t help but believe that this feeling was “data”.

I knew exactly what I wanted to call this type of inquiry, what term I wanted to use to describe this type of data. However, I felt, briefly, I had little “right” to just make

up concepts. But post qualitative frameworks allow for such play, so I felt like I might as well do it. St. Pierre (1997) wrote, “Searching for those data is one of the seductive aspects of poststructural work. Redescribing the work, is, after all, a playful and joyful activity” (p.179). Based on an encounter with Edmund Burke’s concept of the sublime (published in 1757), I decided to call it “subliminal inquiry” and “subliminal data”. So I tried out this concept on some friends and mentors, and I couldn’t escape the ghost of psychoanalysis; there were serious limits to the language that I couldn’t shake loose. So at the suggestion of Bettie St. Pierre, I decided to simply call it sublime inquiry and data.

I became familiar with the concept of the sublime in my Gothic Literature class in my master’s program. Dr. Michael Burduck, an Edgar Allan Poe scholar, taught that Burke’s theory of fear and a person’s desire to experience fear was part of what led Poe to create some of his tales of horror (1992, p.15). Burke explored the difference between the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful is what is “well-formed and aesthetically pleasing,” whereas the sublime is “what has the power to compel and destroy us”. These are not diametrically opposed; they often exist side by side and simultaneously, even flow in and out of one another. Burke (1757) wrote that the sublime is “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (p.39). Burduck elaborates on this link between emotion and attraction, “For Burke, then, the sublime elevates one’s mind to the point where a person becomes attracted to the source of such stimulation” (p.15). Consequently, whatever object or event is considered to be sublime forces the mind to grapple between the “paradoxical responses of dread and desire” (Burduck, 1992, p.16). This is how I began to feel about my involvement with TED; I loved my work and the community that I believed was being created among the students in relation to this

organization. However, I dreaded what I may have to say or do in that discourse. It pushed me to involve myself more and more so that I could try things and perform in new ways, stretching the boundaries of the discourse and my comfort level.

This explanation of the sublime allowed for the existence of physical, spectral, and immaterial data and its affect on the researcher. Personally, the concept allowed me to express the continual folding, unfolding, and refolding of the assemblage of research. As I worked with TEDx presenters, I felt this intense physical and emotional feeling of the sublime, as I navigated the uncomfortable and unwelcome feeling of wielding the authority invoked under the banner of TED. I noticed students disciplining each other according to “TED rules”; we talked about “Big TED” so much that I felt its presence as a panoptic reality, watching our every move (which it often was). Sublime data is gone in a flash. It’s easy to ignore, to push down, to pass through. This data moves, crawls, sneaks up on us, leaves no evidence other than the simultaneous affects of revulsion and attraction.

Burke accurately described this kind of inquiry, “The pain resulting from such action provides delight because it relieves the boredom of inactivity” (Burke, pp.134-135). Perhaps this type of engagement is akin to scholarly cutting--finding a way to feel again, when I have become numb to the data reports and studies that my profession demands. I believe that sublime inquiry both describes and offers an opportunity to expose the boundaries of thought.

### **Conclusion**

Taking time to describe these two mo(ve)ments will hopefully allow for some clarity into the process of writing this dissertation. Perhaps, the real purpose of this

plateau is to ensure something that Law (2004) indicates happens to inscription devices, doesn't happen to my inquiry-- that the "materiality of this process" does not get "deleted" by the, hopefully one day finished, product (p.20). Post qualitative research enables researchers to experience new ways of thinking, being, and doing. If I can be honest here, this is the hardest thing I have ever done because I have to continually make sure that I am not slipping back into a humanist, essentializing framework. It works contrary to ways that I have always thought. Using these theories makes me do things I wouldn't have done, stop doing things I am currently doing, and do everything differently. This has produced a sense of freedom that has helped me create and do things in new ways made possible through these theories.

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EMBODIMENT  
RE-ARRANGING THE SPACE OF KNOWLEDGE:  
A DIFFRACTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TED

**Prelude**

In 2012, I registered for a class called “TED and the Power of Storytelling”. As the only Ph.D. student in a class with mostly undergraduates and a few master’s students, I was skeptical that the level of *content* would meet my doctoral sensibilities. I was correct on that account. However, the *experience* that followed was the catalyst for the transformation of the rest of my doctoral career. The following product of research loosely began (if one can even conjure the thought of beginnings) in this space—the space of a skeptical outsider, learning, doing, and performing.

In the years since that class, I have had the opportunity to experience the structure of TED at the organizational and local levels in various ways. Therefore, I am specially situated to tell this story; the story of TED in academia. However, the main problem is that this is not a singular story. This is a story of multiplicities; it’s one of humans, materials, ideas, and digital connections. It’s one of students, speakers, teachers, rugs, t-shirts, and passports. A story of relations, community, contradictions, and performance. It’s one of many; it’s many in one. How does one tell that kind of story?

**Introduction**

In the following product of research, I begin by detailing the theories that enable me to see this as a story of multiplicities and the methods that enable me to tell the stories

in a way that re-arranges our “space of knowledge” and disrupts the positive unconscious surrounding ethnography (Foucault, 1966/1989, p.xi). Post qualitative inquiry provides a framework for conceptual tools such as diffraction and bricolage to be used to guide readers through an emergent product of inquiry.

### **Becoming-Researcher**

Post qualitative inquiry is part of an ontological turn in research design and methodology, which emerged as a critique of conventional humanist qualitative research. St. Pierre (2014) uses the term *post qualitative* to mark what she sees as “the impossibility of an intersection between conventional humanist qualitative methodology and ‘the posts’” (p.3). In order to explore how the process and products of post qualitative research is decidedly different from traditional forms of qualitative research, it is important to understand the onto-epistemological commitments of both traditions.

The ontological and epistemological commitments about both objects of inquiry and one’s role as a researcher affect one’s approach to work. For example, is the researcher one who uncovers data that proves or disproves a certain truth? Is the researcher’s objective to provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p.6) of an experience or a participant so it can be accurately represented to an audience? Consider this question: what if a researcher was one who only emerged through the work of inquiry, and that inquiry was used as a tool for “no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (Foucault, 1984, p.46)? What would research methodology look like in this space? What would be the possible products of inquiry?

Each of these questions implies different ontological commitments towards research, the self, and the objects of inquiry. Here I use the examples of conventional

qualitative research and post qualitative research--not as oppositional, but as differential--to show how ontology changes-- not just what is studied, the methods used, or the conclusions made, but the nature of inquiry itself.

Conventional qualitative research is necessarily situated in the humanist paradigm. A human researcher is endowed with the proper agency to seek to *understand* a subject; the subject may be human or nonhuman, individual or collective. The researcher seeks to *know* this subject through various linguistic and physical means, mainly observation and interviews of various types. Observation and field notes are essential for the researcher to *fully describe* to the readers what it was like to be “there,” and interview transcripts are carefully created to provide the exact words, phrasing, and delivery of interview data; data is only usable once it is translated into language. Once the *data is gathered* from the field, it is harvested in the form of coding. Coding is the process that organizes the data into usable, understandable bits that can then be sorted and categorized. The more data one has, the closer one can get to *truly understanding the subject*. It is possible for a researcher to spend his or her entire career *accumulating knowledge* about the subject, so that it may be more fully known, or perhaps emancipated, if found to be oppressed.

Conventional qualitative research relies upon several assumptions that must be closely examined. These assumptions indicate that the limits of conventional humanist qualitative research have been identified. A new grid of intelligibility is needed if researchers want to ask different questions. First is the assumption of separation between the knower (the researcher, self) and the known (the subject, other). Second is the assumption that knowledge accumulates in a possible, (but unlikely) knowable whole.

The third assumption is that language is transparent and stable. And finally, conventional qualitative research depends on the assumption that the researcher is not only separate from the subject, but separate from the research itself.

Conversely, post qualitative research operates under different assumptions. First, rather than operate hierarchically where the self is placed in opposition to the other, its operations can be described as flattened; the boundaries between self, other, doing, language, method, and material are blurred. It is not that there are no boundaries at all, quite the opposite in fact; the boundaries are acknowledged as discursive constructions that are drawn and redrawn many times. Second, post qualitative research assumes that knowledge is not found, but rather produced and productive. According to Lyotard (1979/1984), postmodern science changes the meaning of the word knowledge; knowledge in the postmodern sense is concerned with producing, not the known, but the unknown (p.60). He wrote, “Knowledge [savoir] in general cannot be reduced to science, nor even to learning [connaissance]” (p.18). In the postmodern tradition, knowledge is multiple and productive. Nietzsche (1886/1995) states this concept another way: “Their ‘knowing’ is creating” (p.135, no.211). Third, post qualitative research states that there is nothing stable or essential beyond the actions, language, or mindset of the researcher; as Nietzsche (1897/2003) wrote, “there is no ‘being’ behind the doing, working, becoming; ‘the doer’ is a mere appanage to the action” (p.26); another translation explains, “There is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is simply fabricated into the doing-- the doing is everything (1887/1998, p.25). More simply, there is no doer before the deed. Finally, post qualitative research assumes that the researcher is not separate from the doing of the research. Methodology is the “doing” in this equation. Therefore,

there is no researcher before the researching; the researcher becomes and emerges through the inquiry. While conventional qualitative research typically calls for a *subjectivity statement*, used to let the readers know of the researcher's level of involvement so they can be alerted to any "bias," this type of statement is an impossibility in post qualitative research. The researcher and research emerge in relation to each other. Because of the impossibility of this separation, I call this section "Becoming-researcher" to show that I only become a researcher once I engage in the research. Post qualitative research does not assume any separation between the research and researcher as they become in relation to each other.

Poststructural theories expose the fact that neither knowledge nor methodology is innocent. Knowledge is situated and selective, and methodology guides according to research paradigms based on particular claims of the nature of knowledge and inquiry. In the same way, post qualitative research methods do not claim innocence, but perhaps, they are the most open about their commitments and trappings. For instance, the goal of post qualitative methodologies is to tear at the divide between theory and method. Deleuze (2001) explained, "...theory is an inquiry, which is to say, a practice: a practice of the seemingly fictive world that empiricism describes; a study of the conditions of legitimacy of practices in this empirical world that is in fact our own. The result is a great conversion of theory to practice" (p.36). Therefore, in the post qualitative tradition, theory does not just inspire, but actually forms research practice. Invention and creation are its highest priorities, which is in sharp contrast to the goals of conventional qualitative research methods, which are discovery and explanation.

It is not as though discovery and explanation are useless endeavors. All post theories and methods “come after” and in response or critique of what has come before. New and Post theories are forever “implicated in the problematic” that they address, and yet must continue to “persistently refuse [...] and find points of exit from its ubiquitous dominance” (St. Pierre, 2000, p.479). Therefore, post qualitative research methods may use much of the same language and concepts as qualitative research, but are reinvented and reimagined in order to be used to create new products of inquiry. Law (2004) describes the main goal of social science in the wake of these theories, “The task is to imagine methods when they no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable. When they no longer assume that this is what they are after” (p.6).

It matters what research story is told and which stories are retold. Just as qualitative research emerged as a new way to tell stories that researchers could not tell with numerical and statistical data, the multiplicity and complexity of the social, natural, and digital world makes it necessary to tell even more stories, to re-draw boundaries again and again. Law (2004) explained, “While standard methods are often extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular” (p.4). Therefore, post quantitative research works in conjunction with other forms of research to “open space for the indefinite” (p.6). This particular article works in this space--the space of abandoning the security of conventional methods, a “particular version of rigor” (p.9), in the hopes of becoming-researcher, producing new stories, new places to stand among the mess.

## **Organization**

When attempting to introduce something new, it is helpful to provide a familiar context for understanding. While this product of inquiry may look and operate quite differently than conventional qualitative research, I have used traditional scientific and qualitative organization for this particular article to explain its significance. Therefore, in the following sections, the reader is provided a Methods section which details the post qualitative methodology used for this particular product of inquiry. Next, I have provided the actual Product of Inquiry, which could be loosely called *Results*, if one so chooses to use that language. The Discussion section follows which explains my rationale for the creation of the product of inquiry and how I believe it can function. Finally, the conclusion will provide a basis for how this work contributes to the overall field of study.

## **Methods**

### **Post Qualitative Research Methods (if there can be such a thing)**

Since the goal of post qualitative research is to break down the divide between theory and practice, what would inquiry look like if we started with theory, rather than ready-made methods? One way, according to Jackson and Mazzei (2012), is to begin with a problem rather than a question. Thus, the problem statement for this article is how does one tell a story of multiplicities, the story of TED, in a way that focuses on creation and invention, rather than meaning? How can a product of research interrogate practices and ways of knowing? Jackson and Mazzei (2012) explain the need to decenter some of the traps in humanistic qualitative inquiry, “It is such rethinking of an interpretive methodology that gets us out of the representational trap of trying to figure out what the participants in our study ‘mean,’ and helps us avoid being seduced by the desire to create a coherent and interesting narrative that is bound by themes and patterns” (p.viii). Thus,



the questions of inquiry move away from meaning and towards an emphasis on what is or can be produced. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) produce new forms of research by plugging in different concepts with data, to be able to find the points of difference. Indeed, “The only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.4). Concepts act as machines to power different modes of thought.

Starting with theoretical concepts is one way to engage in this type of post qualitative inquiry. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) show that concepts are not stable, but rather relational; they make new language and repurpose old language as new concepts to weave a borderless text in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Keller (2015) describes, “In the Deleuzian work concepts themselves are multiplied and mobilized. They do not reflect, mirror, or subserve the real; they participate in its becoming” (p.174). Two concepts that allowed me to venture into concept as method is assemblage (used primarily from Deleuze and Guattari, but is a concept picked up and used by many others who have shaped my understanding of research as assemblage) and plane of immanence.

### **Research as Assemblage**

While humanist subjects and objects are separate; posthuman subjects and objects are immersed and constituted within the assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, “An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously...there is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (p.23). Clearly, an assemblage is not an assignable or

containable “unit” of measure. Assemblage is a concept that attempts to describe the living and breathing constellation of data involved in post qualitative inquiry.

Law (2004) expands the ontology of the term “research assemblage” to describe both action and artifact: “If ‘assemblage’ is to do the work that is needed then it needs to be understood as a tentative and hesitant unfolding, that is at most only very partially under any form of deliberate control. It needs to be understood as a verb as well as a noun” (p.41-42). Jackson and Mazzei (2012) write, “An assemblage isn’t a thing-- it is the *process* of making and unmaking the thing. It is the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together” (p.1). As per this description, assemblage is a term large enough to encompass the necessary movement of the researcher between creator and created. Helen Watson-Verran and David Turnbull (1995, p. 117) write, “An assemblage is like an episteme with technologies added but that connotes the ad hoc contingency of a collage in its capacity to embrace a wide variety of incompatible components. It also has the virtue of connoting active and evolving practices rather than a passive and static structure.” Within a research assemblage, a researcher may acknowledge the agency of the material of research; some pieces of data “glow” (MacLure, 2013) and demand engagement.

This product of research is an assemblage of different sources, experiences, materials, and resources, hemmed in by the boundary of ways that TED is used in higher education, mainly through TEDx university events. While the assemblage as a noun is vast and unmanageable, assemblage as a verb functions on a plane of immanence, serving as a way to draw provisional boundaries with the ever present possibility of redrawing them.

### **Putting Post Qualitative Concepts to Work**

This article takes seriously the call to attempt to use concepts to enable thought. Colebrook (2002) writes “thinking is not something ‘we’ do; thinking happens to us, from without. There is a necessity to thinking, for the event of thought lies beyond the autonomy of choice. Thinking happens” (p.38). Therefore, to produce an “analysis” of this study, I did choose to plug in certain machines to see where thought may go. As I lived, read, and wrote with the ghosts of the words of Deleuze, Barad, and many others haunting my thoughts, I found that thinking with the concept of diffraction helped me think about ethnography differently. As I explored ways to communicate that multitude of stories and experiences, I was inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s depiction of quilting in their discussion of smooth and striated space (1987, p.476). There is something so unassuming, material, and powerful about quilts and quilting. Quilting is very much a form of bricolage; that connection provided a pathway to a product of research, but also new avenues into thought about how post qualitative products of inquiry are produced and who the researcher becomes through the process.

#### **Diffraction**

*“It is a commitment to understanding which differences matter, how they matter,  
and for whom.”*

*- Karen Barad, 2007, Meeting the Universe Halfway, p.90*

Diffraction is a scientific phenomenon that is unique to wave behavior (Barad, 2007, p.28). Light waves, water waves, and sound waves all exhibit this type of conduct. Barad illustrates this concept in great detail in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*

(2007). Briefly, Barad describes that waves are not “things,” but rather disturbances. These waves come in contact with other waves (or other objects) and either enact constructive (amplifying) or destructive (diminishing) interference when combined (like ripples of water). This is called superposition (Barad, 2007, p.76). Quantum physics proposes that *matter* can act as a wave in the way that it produces diffractive patterns. Diffractive patterns are evidence of superpositions (p.83), which, in short, is a map of intra-action of the entanglement.

In more simple terms, matter acts upon and is acted upon by other forces “outside” of its being. A result of this intra-action is change or rather mutual constitution. Barad (2007) states, “The neologism ‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad, 2007, p.33). Therefore, diffraction makes evident the changes that occur.

The practice of reading diffractively is reading for “patterns of differences that make a difference” (Dolphin & Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 49). Barad goes on to explain this diffractive methodology in an interview with Dolphin & Van der Tuin (2012):

[Diffractive methodology is] a method of diffractively reading insights through one another, building new insights, and attentively and carefully reading for differences that matter in their fine details, together with the recognition that there intrinsic to this analysis is an ethics that is not predicated on externality but rather entanglement. Diffractive readings bring inventive provocations; they are

good to think with. They are respectful, detailed, ethical engagements (p. 50).

What does it mean to attend to the “ethics of entanglement”? Researchers tell stories that have significant ethical, political, and personal impact. Telling those stories in a diffractive manner allows for the differences that matter. Diffractive analysis makes it impossible to tell a story that is “predicated on externality,” meaning researchers don’t enter the “field” to find and tell a story. The researcher is not just obligated to engage, but is always already engaging with the entanglement of research. It would be accurate to say, “We have never not been entangled” (with a nod to Latour’s “we have never been modern”). Barad (2007) says it this way: “To the extent that humans participate in scientific or other practices of knowing, they do so as a part of the larger material configuration of the world and it’s ongoing open-ended articulation” (p.379). Therefore, there is true danger in the telling of a story as if it is singular (Ngozi, 2009); Lyotard (1979) refers to this as meta-narrative. The ethics of entanglement is this: “Knowing requires differential accountability to what matters and what is excluded from mattering [...] what is required is differential responsiveness that is accountable to marks on bodies as part of a topographically dynamic complex of performances” (Barad, 2007, p.380). Diffractive methodology is the performance of movement in research; in other words, research is the mapping of the ripples on the water, how those ripples intra-act with each other, how far they reach, how they change, and the materials they lap up against.

From this description, one can see that diffraction is about seeing the *affect* of the intra-action of entities and looking for differences that inspire connections and commitments rather than separation and alienation. Diffraction is a productive and inclusive methodology. Diffraction “marks the limits of the determinacy and permanency

Barad (2007) notes: “Diffraction is a material-discursive phenomenon that challenges the presumed inherent separateness of subject and object, nature and culture, fact and value, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, epistemology and ontology, and material and discursive” (p.381). The positions of boundaries (between subject and object, material and immaterial, or researcher and researched) are not absolute. They do not exist a priori as a determinate feature of reality, space, or time. However, they do emerge through intra-action. Boundaries are questioned, redrawn, and rendered sometimes arbitrary, but always important.

For contrast, I would like to discuss two other optic metaphors often used in qualitative research: *Reflection* and *reflexivity*. While diffraction is unconcerned with the original model, *reflection* tries to provide an accurate image of the original, like a mirror. Reflection lacks any sort of uniqueness or pattern; it rejects difference. *Reflexivity* is the practice of attempting to turn the mirror back on oneself. Reflexivity assumes the possibility of the reflection of something “real”. Barad (2007) says that reflexivity, like reflection, “still holds the world at a distance” (p.87). Davies (2016) provides a summary of reflection and reflexivity in qualitative research:

Reflection is the strategy those liberal humanist individuals use to make visible to themselves their own subjectivities (or identities, or essential selves). Early qualitative research took up reflection and reflexivity as one of its major anti-positivist tools for acquiring insight into the human condition. Then, following poststructuralism’s demolishing of such a thing as an essential self, qualitative researchers continued, in the absence of alternative strategies, to rely on reflection as a primary tool for generating and analysing data (p.2).

In the absence of established methodologies, old concepts and practices can fill that void, although they may be incommensurable in new theoretical frameworks.

Reflection and reflexivity are based in the belief in *representationalism*. One could read the term just as easily as “re-presentation”—a presenting again of some reality. Representationalism is “the belief that words, concepts, ideas, and the like accurately reflect or mirror the things to which they refer” (Barad, 2007, p.86). In another source, Barad states, “Representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent; in particular, that which is represented is held to be independent of all practices of representing. That is, there are assumed to be two distinct and independent kinds of entities—representations, and entities to be represented” (2008a, p.123). Attempts to represent are not inductive or productive. They merely try to *show* what *is* there. This methodology crumbles when “being” is questioned. What if there is no *there there*? (adapted from Bennett, 2010, p.18). What if what we perceive as *there* is a product of intra-actions of millions of different actants, emerging in unexpected places in a rhizomatic formation?

Manning and Massumi (2014) use diffraction as a metaphor in their description about how to write up research, often in conjunction with others: “A stone dropped into a pond produces a ripple pattern. Two stones dropped into the same pond produce two ripple patterns. Where the ripples intersect, a new and complex pattern emerges, reducible to neither one nor the other” (p.viii). Post qualitative research can draw on diffractive models to take advantage of those complex patterns that emerge when you erase the lines between data and data collection, researcher and subject, living and research. When a researcher looks for and values difference, the anxiety about symmetry

and control dissipates; the world seems more fluid and open to the continuous shifting of relations, allowing room to account how those differences in movement matter. For this reason, diffraction, rather than the traditional modes of reflection, is a methodology used to inquire into the subject at hand.

### **Diffractional Ethnography**

Ethnography is one of the cornerstones of qualitative research; it is a method of cultural study, often including some level of immersion in the culture, originating from the field of anthropology. Striving to become more scientific, the field of qualitative research has worked to reduce ethnography to basic formulas and methods. The reality of ethnography is that it is messy work; cultures are not easily observed in their entirety or reduced to their common interests. Economic, political, and ethical issues often are too complicated and connected to thoroughly explain.

Thus, the methods and products of ethnography change in post qualitative inquiry. No longer can the researcher stand apart from the study; researcher and researched are entangled in the assemblage of inquiry. New Materialism is another set of theories that help post qualitative researchers engage in the risky business of inquiring into the complicated entanglement of human and machine, animate and inanimate agents of research. Haraway (1997) describes the risk involved in this endeavor in this lengthy quotation:

To study technoscience requires an immersion in worldly material-semiotic practices, where the analysts, as well as the humans and nonhumans studies, are all at risk—morally, politically, technically, and epistemologically.



“Ethnography,” in this extended sense, is not so much a scientific procedure in anthropology as it is a method of being at risk in the face of practices and discourses into which one inquires...An “ethnographic attitude” can be adopted within any kind of inquiry, including textual analysis. Not limited to a specific discipline, an ethnographic attitude is a mode of practical and theoretical attention, a way of remaining mindful and accountable. Such a method is not about “taking sides” in a predetermined way. But it is about risks, purposes, and hopes—one’s own and others’—embedded in knowledge projects (Haraway, 1997, pp.190-191).

Haraway describes how an ethnographic attitude can be adopted for any type of research. Thinking about ethnography as an attitude rather than a product is the key to engaging in a diffractive ethnography. A diffractive ethnography does not attempt to represent an object of inquiry in its entirety; diffractive ethnography, in a sense, rides the risk of inquiry like a wave. Boundaries between subject and object are ever changing, often causing ripples in the landscape of inquiry. Diffractive ethnography is looking for difference patterns, which occur at the intersection of production and action, rather than description or reflection. Schneider (2002) writes, “To start down these roads, one must be able to see contradiction as a friend, or at least a helping hand” (p.474). He goes on to describe how we often see contradiction as a dualism, a situation in which we must choose one over another. However, diffraction is a model or metaphor that allows for movement and change. It is an environment of Deleuze and Guattari’s “and, and, and.” In summary, a diffractive ethnography is a product of research in which the researcher is engaged in the “risks, purposes, and hopes” (Haraway, 1997) embedded in the practice of

research; a diffractive ethnography is a map of difference, formed from immersion and intra-action.

### **Bricolage as a Method of Post Qualitative Inquiry**

Bricolage is a familiar term that has been commonly used for the multiple methodologies of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) use the term often in their introduction to the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. This term derives from the French expression that “denotes crafts-people who creatively use materials left over from other projects to construct new artifacts” (Rogers, 2012, p.1). Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) described a bricoleur as a “Jack of all trades or kind of professional do-it-yourself person” (p.17), a tinkerer who used materials “at-hand”. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) embrace the idea of researcher-as-bricoleur, one who works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms. They describe the bricoleur below:

The bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting. The bricoleur knows that science is power, for all research findings have political implications [...] The bricoleur also knows that researchers tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (1994, p.3).

They only briefly describe the “product of the bricoleur’s labor”, the bricolage, as a “complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images,

understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis” (p.3).

They suggest that the bricolage connects the parts to a whole, stressing the meaningful connections and relations; Denzin (1994) writes a bricoleur “fashions meaning and interpretation out of ongoing experience” (p.501). A little over ten years later, the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005) provides a bit more critical look at the researcher-as-bricoleur. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) write that some connotations of the term involve “trickery and cunning” in the same slippery and ambiguous vein as Hermes. However, their criticism implicates all scientific research in this memorable statement:

Bricolage can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research. Indeed, as cultural studies of science have indicated, all scientific research is jerry-rigged to a degree; science, as we all know by now, is not nearly as clean, simple, and procedural as scientists would have us believe. Maybe this is an admission that many in our field would wish to keep in the closet (p.316).

Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) acknowledge the complex and diverse onto-epistemological commitments of the researcher. They write, “Bricoleurs maintain that this object of inquiry is ontologically complex in that it can’t be described as an encapsulated entity [...] the object of inquiry is always a part of many contexts and processes; it is culturally inscribed and historically situated” (p.319).

In these two examples surrounding the discussion of bricolage, one can clearly see the effect of poststructural theories on critical social science. Scientific processes and

the independence of the researcher is more suspect and less innocent in 2005 than in the early 1990's. A little over ten more years later in 2016, the effects of postmodernism and posthumanism can be seen through the effect of post qualitative research theories on the concept of bricolage: "By postmodern style is meant a flat replication of mixing of previous styles [...] It says no medium is pure. It is the art that demonstrated this proposition -- the art of the impurity of the arts, of the mixing of media, the art of bricolage of throwing disparate things together. It asserts that there can no longer be the isolated work of originality or genius that extends the possibilities of a medium. There can be no such originality; one cannot initiate one's work from oneself" (Rajchman, 1987, 50-51). Moving forward, I would like to assert that bricolage is a suitable methodology for post qualitative theory. However, in this tradition, we must give up the lofty idea of researcher-as-bricoleur-- the intentional, conscious subject who carefully selects the parts from the whole of research to concoct a unique version of reality. Post qualitative theories, in a critique of humanism, take the agency of both human and non-human actors. Kincheloe goes as far as to address the complex ontology of the object of inquiry (2005), but post qualitative theories thrust the stable ontology of the researcher and the process of inquiry into question.

Therefore as a research tool, I provide some guidelines for using bricolage as a methodological possibility for post qualitative methodology. The following list is not meant as a prescriptive tool, but rather as an inscriptive guide to help others planning to use this tool decide if this could be useful for their product of inquiry. I have listed some authors and resources who have helped me come to these ideas, usually in conjunction

with concepts from Deleuze and Guattari; these are offered as touch-points for thought rather than direct sources.

Bricolage in the post qualitative tradition:

- Allows for interdisciplinarity of subjects and the multimodality of data (Braidotti, 2010).
- Emphasizes the emergent nature of knowledge (with agency given to the entire research assemblage) (Barad, 1996; Bennett, 2010; Delanda, 2006).
- Cultivates difference (Bennett, 2010) and embraces multivocality (Mitchell, 2005).
- Subverts the system of monological knowledge and grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979/1984).
- Promotes the flexibility of the use of concepts, methods, and data (Massumi, 1987, translators forward of 1000 Plateaus).
- Avoids reductionism and superficiality using a flat ontology (Delanda, 2006, p.28).
- Rejects the role of bricoleur as an intentionally conscious subject; the emphasis is on the product of knowledge produced within the research assemblage by all agential actors (Bennett, 2010).
- Acknowledges agency of physical objects, including tools of inquiry (Barad, 1996; Butler, 1992).
- Should not be used to develop mere understanding of a subject, but rather to illustrate complex relationships (Bennett, 2010).

Using bricolage to express a diffractive ethnography is one possibility for post qualitative products of inquiry.

### **Product of Inquiry**

As previously mentioned, one main image guided my theoretical and methodological thinking when considering how to “write up” my research. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use this textural image of weaving, fabric, and especially the piecing of quilts as an activity of thought; “There is no center; its basic motif (‘block’) is composed of a single element; the recurrence of this element frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery (in particular, in ‘crazy’ patchwork, which fits together pieces of varying sizes, shape, and color, and plays on the texture of the fabrics)” (p.476). Quilting has always been special to me; both of my grandmothers made many beautiful quilts for me and they are some of my most treasured possessions.

My grandmothers learned how to sew as young girls, and worked in the local shirt factory, one of the only careers available for women in their small town in middle Tennessee in the 1940’s and 1950’s.



*Figure 11. Byrdstown, Tennessee shirt factory employees, circa 1950's. Picture posted by Carolyn Smith on Facebook 8/2/17*

However, one of my grandmothers went on to become a professional seamstress. She crafted hand-made draperies and other pieces for business and personal clients. Her immaculate works won awards in county fairs and beyond—her hand quilted items looked machine sewn in their uniformity and perfection. Her details were personal and color palette deliberate.



*Figure 12. Grandma Holt's Double Wedding Ring Quilt (2004)*

She planned, patterned, and prototyped until the product was perfect. When she taught me to sew, the first thing she would do is turn the piece inside out to evaluate my seams (which embarrassingly resembled Frankenstein's monster).

My other grandmother functioned as a true bricoleur; she fashioned quilts made from whatever scraps she had available; old table cloths, night gowns, my grandpa's old shirts, denim jeans, and ribbons were all fair game.



*Figure 13. Grandma Riley's Scrappy Wedding Quilt (2004)*

Availability trumped look, feel, or even function. With eight children and seventeen grandchildren, she was a quilting machine. She excelled at quantities and quick turnaround, sometimes producing several quilts a year for Christmas, wedding, or baby gifts. At 90 years old, she still cranks out quilts and other folk art with ferocity.

One author, Ainsley Yardley, makes the connection between the expression of quilting and research methods. Yardley (2008) describes bricolage as not just a product of inquiry, but a research methodology, one that can help researchers work with multi-layered, multi-modal, and complex data. Yardley used the AIDS quilt project as the basis for a visual meta-text that layers video within the digital images displayed in a part of an AIDS quilt, produced in Australia (Hawkes, Yardley, and Langley, 1994). Her work with bricolage as a method of inquiry helped me think about how to use this methodology in conjunction with post qualitative theories. Quilting is time and labor-intensive, personal, and routine. The quilt is shaped by the quilter, as well as the pieces available. It's not a reflection of memories or an event, but rather something completely new that enables new things, such as gift giving or warmth.





Figure 14. Not Yardley's work, but this is [the digitization of the US AIDS Quilt](#).

While quilts resonate with me personally and methodologically, I am no quilter. I began a quilt nearly six years ago and all I have a stack of squares. I have not touched this stack since my seamstress grandmother died four years ago. But this idea resonated with me and I ruminated on it for nearly a year as I worked on this dissertation—mainly as I dreamed of all the things I would finish once I completed my dissertation, daily passing by my stack of ninety-nine 10x10in fabric squares collecting dust in my closet. I wondered how to create a product of inquiry as personal as a quilt, but still express the complexity of inquiry.

I initially began a digital piece that combined text, images, and links in various colors and fonts, weaving together sources in different directions. However, these attempts fell short at conveying the mobility and motion of data. It was not simple or easy

to plop different pictures and text into place. I was limited by space on the page and the shape of digital documents. Given the restrictions of dissertation formatting, the fonts I could use were too much alike to convey the difference required with a diffractive methodology. So I changed from a basic text document embedded with images and text to an interactive multimedia application (i.e. Prezi) to express motion and multiplicity. With my limited graphic design experience, the product fell short of what I wanted and needed to be able to do with this data. While I loved the ability to hyperlink multimedia resources and add motion, the richness it added was not as important as my need to physically interact with this data. I tapped into my memories of my bricoleur grandmother as I began to near the end of my inquiry. I looked around at the tools of my trade and realized I had the materials available to communicate exactly what I needed to convey.

Post-it notes have functioned for me as thinking tools for many years. This is one wall in the library carrel where I have written the bulk of this dissertation:

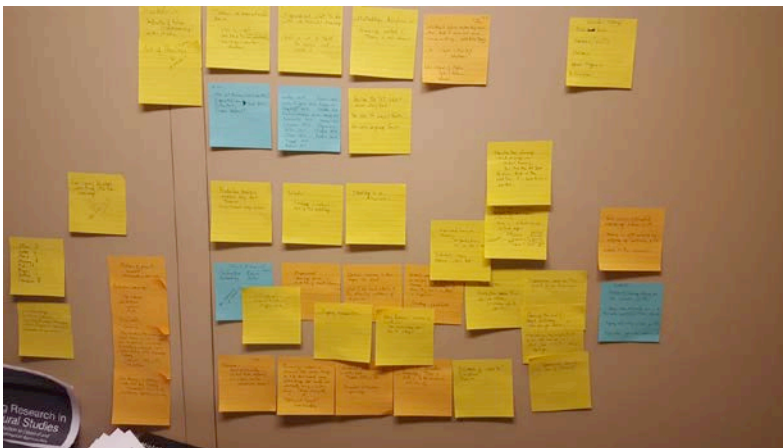


Figure 15. The inside of carrel 423A. (2017)

As I thought back over my involvement with TED, I realized that we have planned every event on post-it notes to some extent. We made both physical and conceptual maps, we communicated with each other in passing, we brainstormed, and we also used them as tools of interaction. We hosted a TEDx salon a few years ago and passed out post-it notes for participants to write and hide “love notes” to strangers, inspired by a TED Talk by Hannah Brencher (2012). For a few weeks after the salon, I found post-it “love notes” in bathroom stalls and stairwells all over Grady College. Post-it notes offered the opportunity to send messages, or in this case, use data in a flexible, mobile way. I began to envision how the various sources of data and my experience can work together as an ever-changeable research assemblage. I began to think about post-it notes as tools of a bricoleur. I found enough variety in color and size to be able to express some sort of organization—a form of general data coding, I suppose; I found the combination of post-its, pictures, and other images allowed me to move and customize these tangible pieces. I found that through this medium, I could physically “quilt” together a unique tapestry of inquiry. In this quilt, the misshapen, uneven seams allow for sites of creativity and difference, allowing the material to pull and pucker in a way that is generative, rather than indicative of quick or unskilled work.

The nature of post-it notes is temporary. They are meant to be used and thrown away. I have to admit I was attracted by the temporality of this medium. The main planning team at my university always says, “TED’s not forever”; we know that inevitably our events or the TED brand will eventually stop being “cool” and students will want to stop doing it. I wanted my medium to express this temporary nature of the event. In addition, I felt as though I needed to perform my product of inquiry. The TEDx

team works all year to plan an event that is over in a day; we have nothing to show from these events other than pictures and other digital media. However each year, I find myself fundamentally changed by the experience. Because of my performance in this context, I find my relationships, professional experience, and sometimes even my physical body imprinted with the intra-actions of people, organizations, and materials. The idea that I would work to create an elaborate installation, just to tear it down again, seemed fitting.

As far as the location, I decided there was really only one appropriate location—the fourth floor of Grady College in the New Media Institute in the Emerging Media Design Lab.



Figure 16. Emerging Media Lab, inside and outside.

I spent 2014-2015 as the graduate assistant in charge of teaching the TED course and curating the TEDxUGA event. I spent long days and nights on the fourth floor planning events, preparing for class, and writing my comprehensive exam essays. The huge windows in this space offered opportunities to communicate several different methodological concepts. For instance, these windows seem tinted and darkened during the day, but during the evening, allow people outside to see inside when the lights are on. Not only was “illuminate” one of our TEDx event themes, but the concept of diffraction comes from the behavior of light; diffraction allows the ability to see difference. I wanted to explore the concept of “inside” and “outside”; I wanted to create different experiences from both inside and outside, where the two sides were not portrayed as binaries or opposites, but the multiplicity of experience. From the inside, the letters TEDx seemed backwards. This was to illustrate how most of our activities are created for the outside audience.



Figure 17. Bricolage beginnings. 2017, August.



Figure 18. Bricolage mid-point. 2017, August.



Figure 19. Bricolage complete with letters. 2017, August.

From the inside, people in that space could come by and look at the bricolage created from data I experienced and created. They could feel free to add, move, or rearrange any of the pieces. The focus on the inside was on the experience of *interacting* with the data. I removed the structured TEDx letters in order to better portray the illumination of the letters from the outside. This removal was an interesting act. It made it much harder to see the structure around which the pieces formed from the inside and it caused others to question why I did it backwards.





Figure 20. Bricolage without the letters. 2017, August.

However from the outside, people could only see the illuminated letters “TEDx.” This could act as an identifier—we do TED here—or even work as a marketing and promotional tool for our upcoming events. This in many ways performed the “front of house” and “behind the scenes” experience that I had with TEDx events.



Figure 21. Outside illumination of the bricolage piece. 2017, August.

Post qualitative theories demand an even greater layer of complexity for research

data. The data must be able to be on the move, popping up like crabgrass, to momentarily or permanently connect with other pieces of data to form new assemblages. One cannot fully describe such a product of inquiry in static written text, nor should that be a plausible goal. The goal of post qualitative research is to trouble any assumption of simplicity or essentialism of data or research. Thus, the following description of the product of research created by this researcher with this data is, in many ways, an act of performance. While what is provided here is a static piece, it should be read as a patchwork, with no beginning and no end. Connections between pieces are sometimes sewn together; some seams are more visible than others. The pieces are moveable and can be added to or taken away to tell multiple stories.

### **“Data”**

This product of research contains many traditional pieces of “data”: theoretical and conceptual resources (yellow and orange hued post its); interviews of and surveys from TED affiliates (teal post its); field notes of TED and TEDx experiences (pink post its); and social media and textual resources from the media about TED (white paper). In addition to these traditional types of data, I include images—both photographs from personal observations and experiences and illustrations or images that convey theoretical concepts.



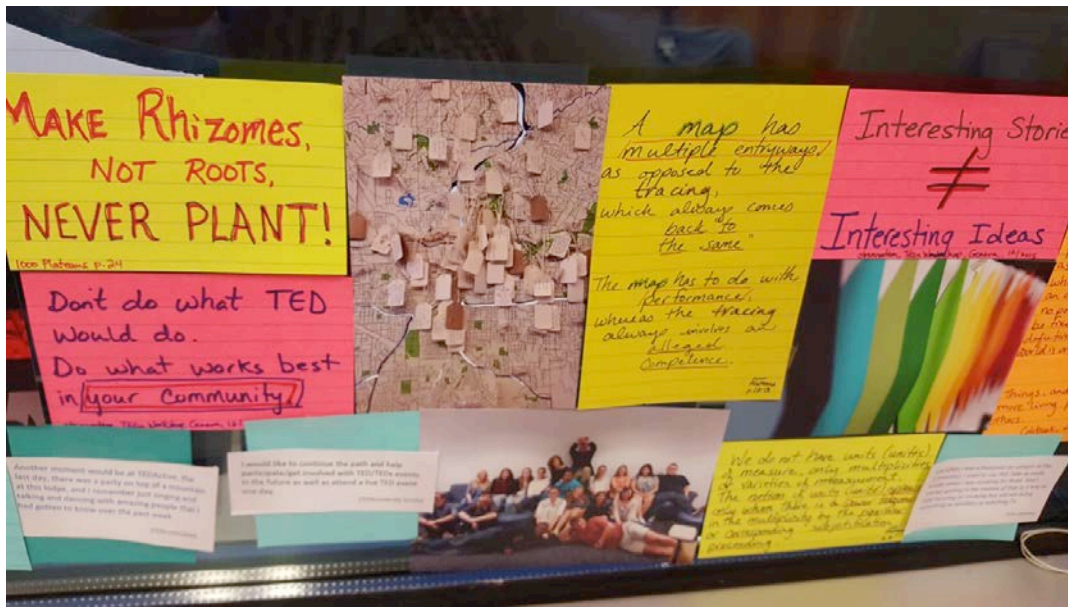


Figure 22. Yellow and pink post-it note data.

The format of this project is unconventional and perhaps even unproductive in the strictest sense of the word; this product of inquiry will be dismantled, removed, and thrown away. But regardless of the temporality of the product itself, this is a research story I need to tell, to perform. Post qualitative traditions remind me that I am not trying to tell a comprehensive story; I do not need to hold on to a stable artifact upon which to reflect as I pull it tight around my neck for comfort, like a quilt. I need to follow the ripples of intra-action, tell multiple stories and keep telling them in light of new concepts. I need to take the pieces I collect and create and stitch them together for a season, dismantling them eventually to make room for something else.

This piece should be read interactively. This patchwork form of bricolage allows freedom from linearity in the creation and consumption of this research. Following the New Materialists in their fascination with the movement of electrons, I envision this organization as a “cloud” of energy and power. Electrons have the ability to inexplicably

move from one place to another, even to show up in two places at once; the cause behind this behavior is often because of their relations to other particles. Once particles come in contact with others, they remain connected in mysterious ways.

When two particles originally linked and then experimentally separated fly off in opposite directions, they remain *immediately* responsive to one another-- *no matter what the distance*. They remain 'entangled.' The EPR experiments that Bell had set out to verify presumed that "an object over there does not care about what you do to an object over here" (113). What Bell found instead, by carrying through the very logic of EPR, is that, to the contrary, "the experiments lead us to conclude that an object over there does care about what you do to another object over here" (113). (John Bell, *Speakable and Unspeakable in Quantum Mechanics*, as cited in Keller, p.147).

Keeping this movement in mind, this product of inquiry illustrates some nodes of power and collections of energy. When I actually assembled the piece, I found myself drawn to different pieces at different times. The different data would “glow” for me in different ways.

For example, the first year I worked with presenters there was one talk that was particularly difficult to curate. The speaker had an amazing idea, but there was a competing story she wanted to tell; the two stories were conflicting and stealing power from each other. We encouraged her to pick one idea and convey it completely instead of trying to make two interesting ideas compete for the same space. However, she would not kill her “darling”, so we say in the TED world. So the talk lost its power in delivery

because it turned toward the other idea at the end; it turned from a powerful story of growing up in the foster care system to a story of climbing Mount Everest. Thinking about this experience, this nodule of data began to emerge as a part of the piece:

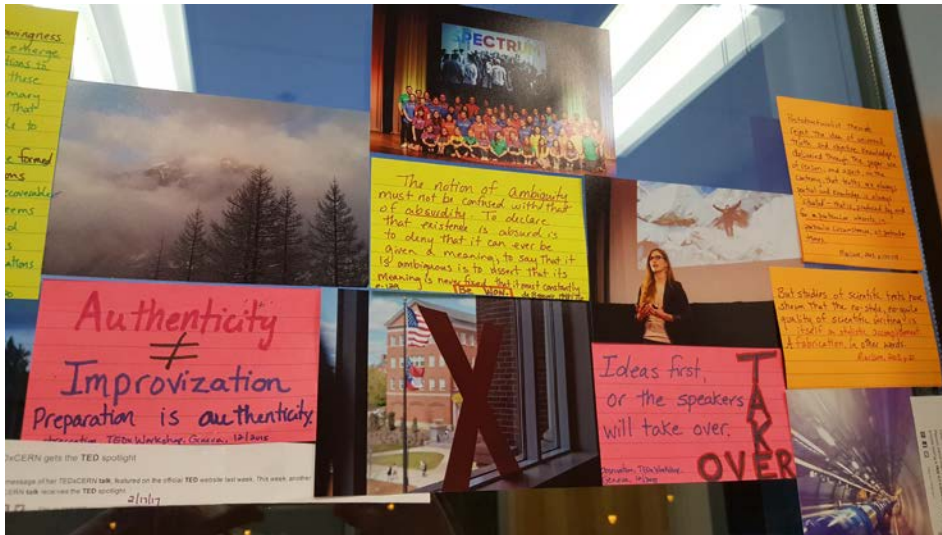


Figure 23. Mount Everest rhizome/nodule.

The image of the speaker on Mount Everest worked in conjunction with the complexity of the issue of authenticity and how speakers will take over if the ideas do not. That led to the image I took on the train in France as we descended from the foggy, snow-capped mountain-top of the French Alps while I was visiting Europe for TEDGlobal. This image led me to incorporate the image of the pipeline for the atoms of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN, then the Google Alert notification about TEDxCERN. These images led me to the notion of ambiguity for Simone de Beauvoir (1948/1976) and scientific fabrication from MacLure (2003). This collection of data seemed to glow for me, making connections in my mind as I physically moved the pieces of data into place.

Once the piece was “done”, it felt necessary to invite others into the assemblage to see how it would change or what discussion or ideas it would generate. So I asked the

TEDxUGA advisory council to participate in this installation after our summer planning meeting for 2018. I asked them to look at the piece and contribute, if they felt moved to do so, on purple post-it notes. I left the content up to them, but in case they needed a boost of creativity, I posed the question, “Why do you TEDxUGA?” This simple question is used at many TEDx events (i.e. TED Global, TEDxRiga, TEDxBirmingham, TEDxLIUBeirut) to create video content, get participant feedback, and create intentional community. I noticed that as people interacted with the piece, different pieces would glow for them. Some felt comfortable moving pieces I placed and others did not. All maintained the outline of the TEDx letters without being asked (in fact, I encouraged them to move pieces wherever they felt appropriate).



Figure 24. Steering committee interaction.

The multiplicity of smiles, stories, and reactions to this piece as a product of inquiry have been fascinating. A few members of the steering committee commented that this piece was like a scrapbook of their lives. I felt the same way. This methodology allowed me to “gather” or generate immediate, interactive, and localized content, something that I

would not have been able to incorporate if I had designed and carried out a traditional qualitative research project.

## **Discussion**

### **Post Qualitative and Conventional Qualitative Research Products**

A traditional qualitative research piece is typically written and not performed; performance is always involved, but the ontology of the pieces are different. In the case of a conventional qualitative research project, the emphasis and value is placed on the product; that final product is stable and complete. In addition, a conventional qualitative research product is a closed system—the product is designed and controlled by the researcher.

However, with a post qualitative inquiry, the emphasis is on the interaction with the data and the connections made between resources and theories that so strongly affect methodology. The product of inquiry for post qualitative theories can allow interaction; since it focuses on relationships and functions as an assemblage, collaboration and co-creation is encouraged. The product of inquiry is less emphasized than the performance of the inquiry.

### **Post Qualitative Data Management and Coding**

While working on this piece, I wondered if it is possible to “not code”. Coding is essentially making meaning, or organizing knowledge. I must admit this was my initial *modus operandi*. I thought about categories, modality, themes, and subjects. But all of my initial approaches were antithetic to my theory. My training in qualitative research shaped

the only things I knew how to do with data, so how does one—must one?—sort through data while thinking with these theories?

Sorting in any formal way didn't work; I had to think of something else to do. For this particular product of inquiry, I found it helpful to focus on two images to guide my practices: 1) Diffraction pattern of waves and 2) Patchwork quilting. This made “data sorting” or “coding” for this project entirely different than for a conventional qualitative research product. I was not trying to get under my data, find underlying themes or meanings. I focused on the surface of the data. On the surface, I thought it may be helpful to quickly see the “type” of data used. Therefore, I decided on a color-coded scheme of conveying what kind of resource was used.

Yellow and orange hued post-its were used for the words of others—researchers, philosophers, theorists—that helped me think, generate, and create connections. These quotes have no actual relation to TED or TEDx. These resources represent the cacophony of voices in my mind as I lived out this experience with TED; they helped me construct this product of inquiry and shaped how I thought about the assemblage of research.

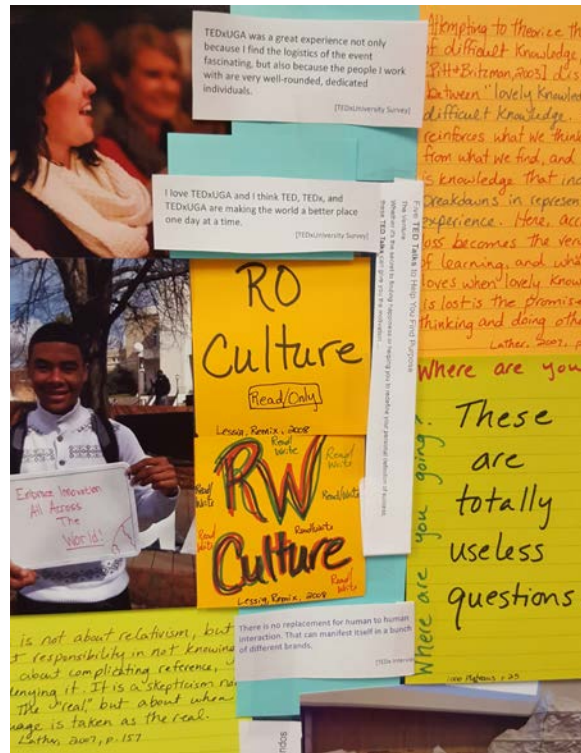


Figure 25. Folding of data.

Pink post-its were used for the observational data I experienced in TED and TEDx related events. These quotes and musings came from observation notes, event write-ups, notes scribbled during events, etc....



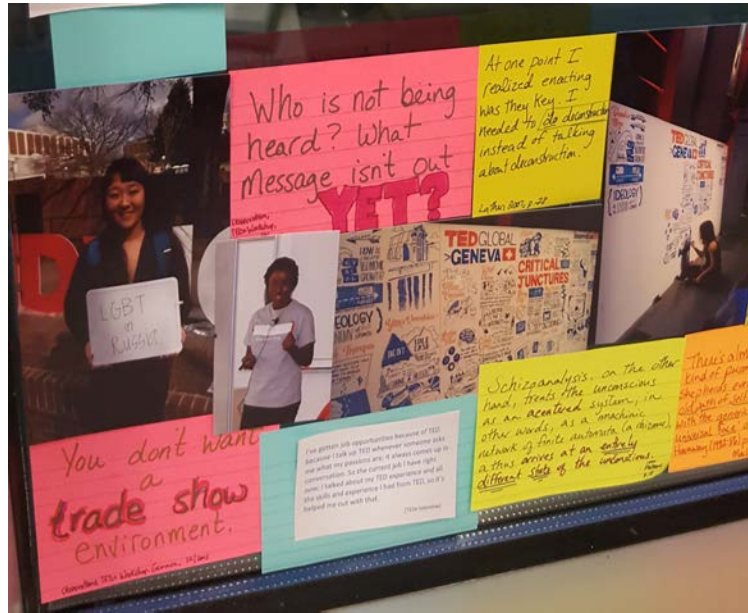


Figure 26. Handwritten data.

Yellow, orange, and pink post-its are hand written in my own handwriting. The nature of these sources of data felt to me most pliable. I felt completely free to use these words as my own in many ways, adding illustrations, emphasis, color, and style.

Teal hued post-it notes are used to communicate interview and survey data. These words were collected for this project from various research participants. Thus, I felt in some ways, these words were not entirely “mine.” They were generated in conjunction or in response to prompts about involvement in TED and TEDx. They are the product of intra-actions between me—performing as researcher in a contrived research environment—and the interviewee or survey participant. Perhaps because of my training in conventional qualitative research or maybe because of personal relationships with these participants, I felt as though their words should be portrayed differently. I felt handwriting them would make them more “mine” and I felt uncomfortable with conveying that sentiment; while I believe that this data is “mine” to use, I wanted to convey the ethical considerations behind using traditional research methods of data



collection. They create distance, and inside and outside, an automatic separation between researcher and subject. Thus, these quotes are printed in digital text, cut out, and pasted on these teal colored post-its.

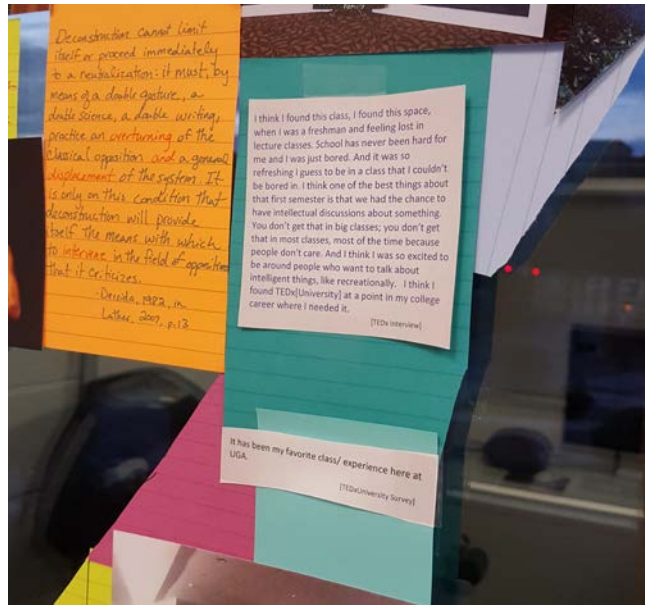


Figure 27. Interview and survey data.

I also used photos as pieces of data in this diffractive bricolage. The photos break up the dependence on language and incorporate the material. These images add interest and illustrate relationships that are important to me. These selected images are a mixture of photos I have personally taken and the professional photographs taken at our own TEDx university events. I have also used images from social media and the web to illustrate relationships between concepts and data or highlight other relationships.

To fill in gaps and create interest, I used headlines from Google alerts that I received daily for four years. I created a Google alert to email me a daily alert about TED related news. Some weeks, this alert became cumbersome to the extent that so many

news resources were being listed each day, I had to scale back the alerts to once per week. I also needed to help the search engine understand what I was really looking for.

My alerts (1)

TED Talks, -Cruz, -bear, -sarandos

Figure 28. Google Alerts.

Strangely enough, this Google alert allowed for new data in totally different areas of interest to rhizomatically appear. Ted Sarandos, the CCO of Netflix, was in the news quite a bit in 2014 and beyond. In 2015, I began to receive alerts about the movie *Ted*, which depicts a child's wish of his favorite toy coming to life, which occurs during his adulthood and threatens to hilariously disrupt his life. During the election of 2016, I began to get multiple alerts for Ted Cruz. Thus, at various times over the last three years, I had interact with the alert to help it understand that I wanted news specific to TED and TED Talks. As these headlines and alerts filled gaps in my day for the past three years, sometimes sparking more in depth research to the news headline, I use these to fill gaps and make connections in this product of inquiry.

Along these lines, I looked for pieces that “fit” with other pieces. I rearranged for impact and difference, rather than meaning. Thus, while I found traditional coding as a practice that was incommensurable with my theory and data for this particular project. I did piece together, make cuts, rearrange, and intra-act with data. During this time, I found that the concept of coding as I learned it in conventional qualitative inquiry lost quite a bit of its power over me. I no longer fetishized it as something I had to do or could no

longer do, but a tool I used to convey difference in my piece. I felt that intra-acting with these physical pieces of paper, multicolored markers, scissors, tape measures, poster boards, and literal quilting tools, like cutting pads and X-acto knives; that performing the cutting out of pieces, the taping and sticking of those pieces, the hand-printing of language, the design my words and the words of others on paper, the looking, rearranging, and selecting of the pieces of data; the interacting with the Google alert to help weed out and specify what I wanted to receive in my inbox, didn't make the data more "real", it just put it in motion.

I also had to make difficult decisions that are not uncommon to researchers. The letters of TEDx were very easy to fit work around until I got to the "D" and the "x". These curved and complicated letters were difficult to fit my mostly square and rectangle data pieces around. When confronted with a piece of data that did not fit or gaps that would alter the final product as I envisioned it, I had to decide whether to keep it, alter it, or leave it out. While the ethical implications in these decisions were inconsequential for this particular piece, the weight of this predicament was not lost on me as I moved through this process. I felt the freedom in this particular space to bend and fold data to fit and to create pieces that would fill gaps. However, the implications of these decisions in other forums of research have very real consequences for very real subjects of research.

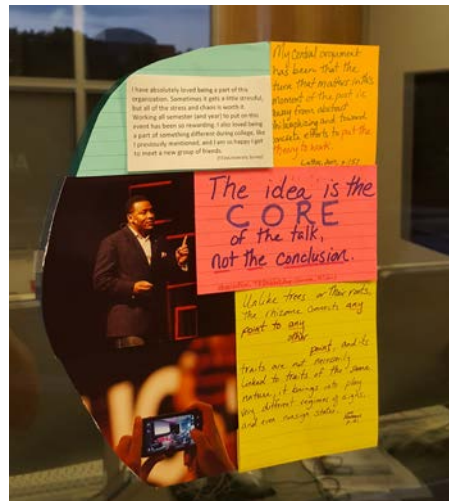


Figure 29. Shaping data, 1.

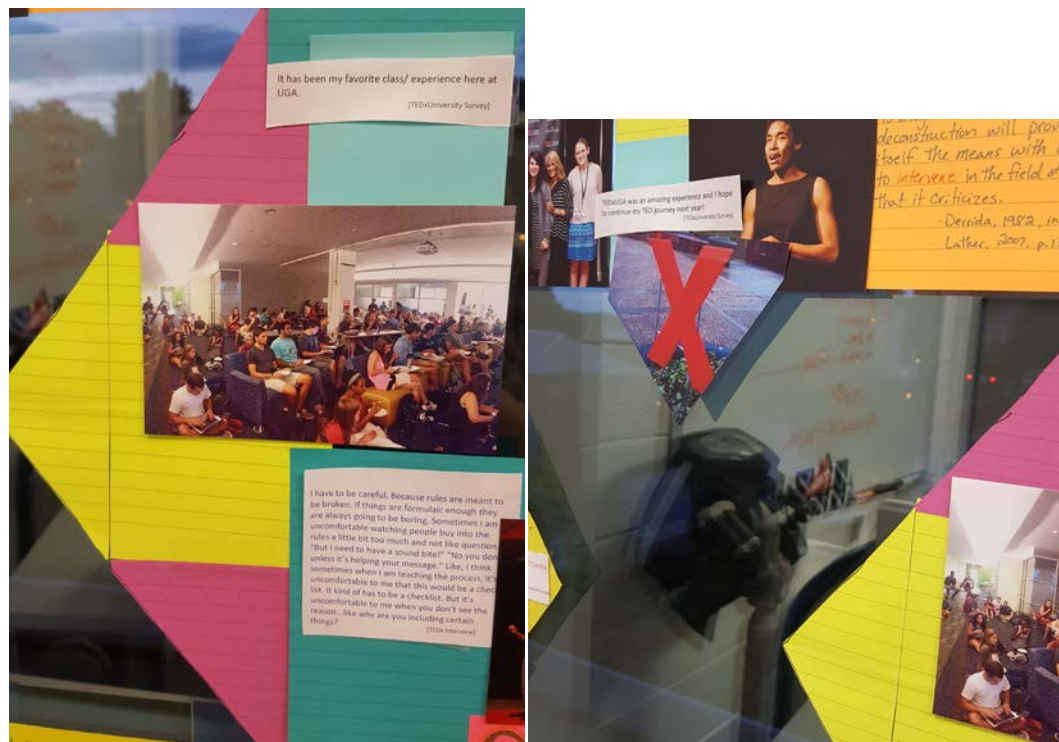


Figure 30. Shaping data, 2.

This is the ontological difference of data and coding in post qualitative research.

Embracing my ability to intra-act with the data, rather than hold it at arm's length,

allowed me the freedom to move forward to create my methodology, rather than allow

the methods to determine what I used, what I did, and how I wrote up my research; this is what I call theory-method-living. However, these theories, methods, and products made sense with my object of inquiry, involvement with TED and TEDx; not all research questions can or should be answered or explored within this conceptual framework.

### **Alignment of Post Qualitative Theories and Methods**

This product makes sense because of the performative nature of the creation; the privilege of intra-action and relation over deep meaning; the temporality of the product itself; the ad-hoc nature of materials; the tension between intentional planning and curating and functionality of proximity, shape, and aesthetics; the ability of this product to convey difference in many ways; the physical depiction of the research assemblage; the ability for others to intra-act, add, and change the product; the physicality of the product of inquiry; and the multivocality of the piece. All of these unique traits come directly from post qualitative theories. These theories made traditional products of inquiry impossible and forced the creation of something new.

### **The Role of the Subject/Object of Inquiry**

TED is a fantastic entanglement; the material and immaterial components, human and inhuman agents, the digital and technological reach, the structure and rules, the communities and language all engage with each other in complex ways. As I began to configure this particular research project, I knew there was no way I could tell “the” story of TED in higher education; I knew I could not even tell the story of TED in “my life”. I wanted to curate a project that would encompass the complexity of this entanglement and invite others into the assemblage. The complexity was more important to me than

“findings” or analysis or even a how-to manual of doing post qualitative research.

Because of this complexity, I was able to map my own course through the experience, then trace interactions, laying them back on top of the map so that it could be redrawn again and again (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.12-15).

### **Conclusion**

As I conclude this traditional telling of a non-traditional product of inquiry, I must conclude with the contributions of this work to the existing body of research, extending it into a “what now” so that one may pick up this idea and extend it into the “next step.” In the poststructural tradition however, I want to emphasize that the “next” step is not a step in the direction towards a more complete knowledge of a topic. I encourage readers at this point to understand that the important question is: what is possible/thinkable/doable in the space of inquiry within post qualitative research? In this space, the “next step” is just indicative of movement, generation, and emergence.

### **Contribution to Research**

Following these post qualitative theories, I am wholly unconcerned about the “body of research”. Conceptualizing something as emergent as a singular entity of knowledge is oppositional to these theories. Post qualitative theories resonate with many graduate students because of the freedom and possibilities, but there is real fear when it comes to trying to figure out what to do with them. Yet, the fear does not come from trying or thinking something new; the fear comes from leaving the practicality of security. There is no post qualitative research handbook providing a step-by-step process of “how to” do this kind of research. Anyone who has read these theories extensively

would be suspect of the motives of anyone attempting a how-to methodology manual.

Without a map, researchers are left to their own thoughts and ideas, working and thinking with the ideas of others, about how to work these ideas into something that often may not look like traditional research products; this creation, re-creation, and invention is valued in this framework.

Not only are graduate students unsure about what to “do” with post qualitative theories, they are also unsure if what they do “do” in this framework is quality. What’s the standard of excellence? What qualifies as something superb? The lack of rubric in this tradition is unsettling to many. Perhaps because of this void of quality and rankings, there is little incentive to engage. In this current rage for data and findings, can graduate students who engage with these theories finish dissertations? Find a job? Get grants? Get published? Get tenure? These are questions regarding the structure of academia that will continue in the existing framework. Therefore, the contribution of this article is to propose a forceful crack in the foundation—to try to create research that shuns the question of “Is this research? How do we know?” and embrace the question of “What does this inquiry do? What does it allow me to do next?”

### **New Engagements**

As attitudes shift and change, the way that inquiry is performed and the resulting products are affected. For instance, I often reconsider my hesitancy for a post qualitative research handbook. In fact, I would like to write one hundred different versions of a post qualitative handbook, all with completely different approaches. I would like to encourage others to do the same. In the same way a void of “how to’s” make one think and consider their approach to research, a market overrun with products creates productive confusion,

conflict, and derision. Maybe we end the privilege of “hand” books and write books for the head, the heart, and other parts of the body. Maybe we stop privileging the body and write books for the worlds we live in. Maybe we stop privileging language and stop writing books and start doing something entirely different. But the problem is that the standard across each methodological approach is given value within a system or power structure bound by certain rules, regulations, and practices. Therefore in each overrun market, certain products rise to the top based on consensus, bargain, perceived value, or quality. The more we explore the limitations and boundaries of the discourses of inquiry, the more we can push them. Using Despret (1996), Latour describes this complex relationship between what we speak about and what we allow to speak:

Our involvement with the things we speak about is at once *more intimate* and much *less direct* than that of the traditional picture: we are allowed to say new, original things when we enter well-articulated settings like good laboratories. Articulation between propositions goes much deeper than speech. We speak *because* the propositions of the world are themselves articulated, not the other way around. More exactly, *we are allowed to speak interestingly by what we allow to speak interestingly* (as cited in Latour, 1999, p.144).

I believe in new research methods, the repurposing of language, the usage of interdisciplinary concepts, and the embrace of the voice and agency of both humans and things to make new connections, relations, and nodes of power within an ever-changing assemblage of what is called research.



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## PLATEAU

### The Boils: Dealing with Data

Near my childhood home in Tennessee, lies an intriguing geological feature called The Boils. A popular local swimming hole, the draw to this particular location is fascination with the strange areas of constantly “boiling” water. The boiling does not refer to temperature, but rather the behavior of the water in those areas.



Figure 31. The Boils, still image taken from video by Chuck Sutherland. 2015. Still image taken from video by Chuck Sutherland. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/chucksutherland/6750200893/in/photolist-jM7F8t-wRcxSh-bhuxy2>

Gardener, Hart, and Sutherland (2016) investigated this rare geological phenomena and determined that the cause of the churning water was a system of sinking streams and conduit networks that populate the Highland Rim of the Cumberland Plateau in Middle

Tennessee. The Boils is a helpful tool for understanding the relationship between qualitative and post qualitative inquiry and data.

Many forms of conventional humanist qualitative inquiry, while informed by interpretive and critical theories, still rely heavily on positivist scientific methods to guarantee veracity. St. Pierre (2013) explains, “Even now, some qualitative researchers continue to use concepts and practices like bias, objectivity, subjectivity statements, triangulation, audit trails, and interrater reliability that signal they are bound to logical positivism/empiricism, objectivism, and realism” (p.224). What occurs in this kind of qualitative research is that data, or more specifically language, is treated as brute data; “words become quasi-numbers” (St. Pierre, 2013, p.224) that can be counted, coded, and confirmed. The ontology of this type of data and inquiry is one of essentialism; what was created is now treated as stable and real. The words of interview participants are locked in time and space, always interpretable, but never changing. In fact, in this type of inquiry, many researchers operate as if data is collected and gathered in the best ways, it can speak for itself and clarify its position in the study— or rather, its *real* meaning in the world. In short, like in quantitative research, qualitative research produces data that is brute and unchanging; it is what it is. If methods of data collection and analysis are done correctly, our findings will be provable, valid, repeatable, and provide a clear explanation of what the world is like. And if a researcher is lucky, she will *discover* “findings” that *prove* that a phenomena is different enough to be interesting, yet the same enough to reinforce scientific approaches and methods.

The ontology of post qualitative inquiry and data is very different. Post qualitative inquiry struggles against formulaic methods and the separation between subject and

researcher and between researcher and inquiry. Data is not “collected” and does not “speak”. If one can even use the term “data” in this framework (which many scholars believe is an incompatible term, see St. Pierre, 2013) it cannot be used as “evidence” to prove solvable problems. Bergson reminds us that solvable problems are never really problems. He suggests the “best problem is the one that opens up an intuitive process, not the one that already carries within itself its fix” (Manning, 2016, p.10). Thus, what is valued in post qualitative research is connections, relations, and assemblages. This framework provides opportunity to inquire into forces, boundaries, events, affects, and processes.

Thus in both of these traditions, theories about the world are entirely different. Looking at the processes of these two types of inquiry, we can see major differences in how the researcher interacts with the world. Conventional qualitative researchers seek to *know* through their inquiry because *knowing* is how one operates in the world; post qualitative researchers seek to *become* alongside their inquiry because thinking and doing is how one *is* in the world. These statements are not oppositional or even contradictory.

It is critical to address the fact that one type of inquiry is not better than another, or that one should be embraced and the other rejected. That kind of thinking creates a false binary of one against the other; this arbitrary pitting of one type of research against another has already happened between quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative research acknowledges that multiple and different interpretations of data were necessary, yet longs for the “stability” offered in positivist inquiry. In other words, during the interpretive and critical turn, theories about knowledge shifted and allowed movement.



But that movement was limited by the fetishization of a privileged scientific metanarrative and has heavily influenced and impaired qualitative research.

In response to the postmodern turn, the emergence of post qualitative inquiry once again provides an opportunity for movement. However, unlike the critical and interpretive turn this movement is not entirely about knowledge. This is an ontological shift; researchers in this tradition are less interested in describing what we know about the world and more concerned with what is possible within the world. This does include knowledge, but the ontology of knowledge is one that accepts that new knowledges can be produced and are ever-shifting. Therefore, the questions asked, methodology employed, and product of inquiry change in light of these theories.

Using the Boils as a descriptive image for how data can be used in post qualitative research may seem counter intuitive. For many, the obvious first question is what's happening beneath the surface? What's the underlying cause of this? However, post qualitative research asks different questions, which causes one to see this mysterious and fascinating phenomenon in a new way. Below, I have used the geological feature of the Boils to help explore differences in how to engage with qualitative and post qualitative inquiry.

### **Qualitative Inquiry**

#### ***Qualitative Research Questions: What's underneath? What is the root cause?***

Various types of limestone make up the bedrock in this particular region; limestone is a sedimentary rock, formed mainly by skeletal fragments of organisms like coral, shell, and algae. Formed by various crystal forms of calcium, limestone is porous

and ultimately soluble, providing a complex system of conduits and caves, which serve as channels for water sources like underground springs.

Imagine the limestone, conduits, and caves are the research subjects. We interpret the water flow in light of these unchanging features. We explain what is happening to the water as it is being carried along via underground channels. The water is the passive subject of our inquiry; we are interested in what's happening that causes the water to end up in one area. We know the water is there; we want to know how it gets there. This is a solvable problem.

***Qualitative Methodology: How do we know?***

In 2015, researchers at Tennessee Tech University performed a series of dye tests on various swallets in the region thought to be sources of water to the Boils (Gardner, Hart, and Sutherland, 2016). Putting dye in the water at the source of the swallet where it goes underground (at base flow) allows measurement of that same dye at The Boils. If the dye shows up, then that swallet is a conduit for this water source. Dye, in this case, is very similar to the method of interviewing in qualitative research; the dye asks questions of the conduit—where did the water go? How fast can it get water there? Is there any diffusion of the dye as it travels? Just as dye particles in the water answer these questions, interview responses provide data. Words from interviews act as dye counts providing units of data ready for analysis.

***Qualitative Findings: Why it matters?***

The answer to this solvable problem matters because knowing where the sources of water are coming from can help determine if there is a danger of contamination and establish groundwater quality in the area. If one understands that a contaminant in a

region several miles away (not just upstream) can affect water quality, it could literally save lives. In the same way, qualitative data provides knowledge about and answers to important questions. However, the advantage of qualitative inquiry over quantitative research is that qualitative inquiry opens the possibility to multiple answers to important questions.

Nevertheless, conventional qualitative inquiry works primarily in the realm of knowing. There are other questions to be asked and other work to be done in addition to qualitative research. Research frameworks cannot be wholly rejected; essentializing research or forcing it reproduce the same rather than encourage difference, traps us in the “given, the myth of Science” (St. Pierre, 2013, p.226).

### **Post Qualitative Inquiry**

#### ***What’s happening? What’s on the surface?***

The Boils is named for the behavior of water in this certain region—the name itself describes exactly what is happening on the surface of the water. The flow of water is what activates the behavior or action of this geological formation. However, one cannot put too much emphasis on any one part of the assemblage. The Boils exist in relation; even the name is multiplicitous action. The action and flow of the water at the surface and beneath, the friction of the water against the soft limestone displacing sediment from miles away, the bubbling of the water at the surface in contrast to the rest of the calm swimming hole, even the attraction of animal and human intra-action in proximity of this special phenomena is part of complex assemblage of forces that act on each other. One cannot separate the water, the underground channels, or the humans enjoying the cool water on a hot summer day from each other. In the same way, post

qualitative inquiry focuses on the relations between entities and forces. Subject and object, inquiry and analysis, researcher and researched cannot be isolated and observed separate from one another.

One reason for this is because what seems stable in qualitative research is allowed freedom of movement in post qualitative inquiry. For example, the boils do not retain water very long; the behavior of the water in this can illustrate the fleeting nature of what could be called data in post qualitative inquiry. The maximum residence time of water in the conduit at base flow is two days (Gardener, Hart, & Sutherland, 2016). Therefore, the boils act as a churn; researchers cannot put too much emphasis on the water itself. In the same way, an interview questions may produce data today that would be entirely different two days later. Yet, qualitative inquiry usually uses that data captured at a moment in time as representative data. Interviews may also be performed in post qualitative inquiry; however, that response data is used in relation and seen as a place to make connections rather than a place of consistency. Research methods in post qualitative inquiry, like the underground springs create channels, or established lines of flight, feeding the flow of water seen bubbling at surface.

If we want to venture beneath the surface, as previously mentioned, even something that seems the most stable—the “bedrock” in the area—is formed mainly of limestone is a sedimentary rock, comprised of skeletal fragments of formerly living organisms like coral and algae and their fecal matter. Limestone is porous and ultimately soluble. Here lies a complex system of conduits and caves that are living, moving, and changing because of its relation to water. They work on each other, providing resistance, intensity, and flow. Thus the relation between the water, the limestone, weather which

creates intensities and pressure, and debris and sediment in the water, all create a research assemblage that functions together to create an affect on the surface of the water at The Boils. Here, what seems stable in conventional humanist qualitative research is living and moving within post qualitative inquiry.

***How does it function?***

In contrast to the question of “how do we know,” post qualitative inquiry asks the question “how does it function?” As mentioned above, this invokes action, engagement, and movement rather than stable observation. Thus, this framework is resistant to pre-imposed methodology. Post qualitative inquiry provides an affirmative opportunities for interaction. This is an example of Deleuzian rather than Cartesian ontology, “it does not allow the subject/object and human/material oppositions to be thought or lived” (St. Pierre, 2013, p.226). Being is entangled alongside knowledge—lived, breathed, and encountered.

Thus this kind of inquiry is one of movement, not categorization. It is an entirely different posture of inquiry. Conditions in this area are new, strange, multiplicitous. Therefore, in order to see how something functions, one whom performs inquiry in this framework joins the assemblage. What does one do in the assemblage? Many things; anything--dance, write, talk, create, map, arrange, love, touch, walk, think, smell, dream. The goal is to work at the edge of the unthinkable and the way to do this is to reinvent the forms of inquiry that are ever changing in the assemblage of research. As Manning (2016) writes, “Each step will be a renewal of how this event, this time, this problem, proposed this mode of inquiry, in this voice, in these materials, this way. At times, in retrospect, the process developed might seem like a method. But repeating it will never

bring the process back. For techniques must be reinvented at every turn and thought must always leap” (p.45). In this way, post qualitative research is *becoming* within a complex tangle of material and immaterial forces.

The Boils provides an experience for becoming. People are drawn to this area because of the unique behavior of the water. Animals are drawn to the area because of the trash and food left by humans. Water quality suffers in the area due increased disturbance. Paths are worn through the woods. Yet, it’s not just about the physical environment. What kinds of memories are made in the space? What role does this place play in the local culture? How do water quality, animal activity, and weather affect these intra-actions? Relations are mapped, connections are made, and the inquiry is performed.

***Why does it matter?***

“What if knowledge were not assumed to have a form already? What if we didn’t yet know what needed to be taught, let alone questioned?” (Manning, 2016, p.9). These questions get to the impetus of post qualitative inquiry; what new knowledges may be created by asking new and different questions? What would it look like to do inquiry if we shrugged off the trappings of conventional humanist qualitative research? Inevitably, this change would change the whole assemblage of research, including the researcher.

Post qualitative inquiry is a kind of becoming. Inquiry becomes by producing rather than discovering knowledge. Exploring lines of flight within the assemblage of research produce new knowledges. Thus, this is an ultimately creative process. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use a term for this kind of mutual evolution between heterogeneous terms: *involution*. They make it clear that this term does not denote that this evolution is not regressive. This mutual becoming within the assemblage of research is productive; it

does not diminish the roles to merely subjects and objects. It allows for mutual becoming in relation. Deleuze and Guattari explain, “Becoming is involuntary, involution is creative. To regress is to move in the direction of something less differentiated. But to involve is to form a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play and beneath assignable relations” (1987, p.238-239). The poststructural turn has allowed this new type of inquiry to emerge in this moment in time to ask and answer different questions.

Whitehead explained this opportunity for new forms of inquiry as early as 1929: “When any methodology of life has exhausted the novelties within its scope and played upon them up to the incoming of fatigue, one final decision determines the fate of a species. It can stabilize itself, and relapse so as to live; or it can shake itself free, and enter upon the adventure of living better” (Whitehead, 1929, p.18-19). Post qualitative inquiry offers an opportunity to enter into a new adventure. This is not prescriptive; it is experimental and performative. Therefore in this explanation, the metaphor of The Boils fades away. When inquiry happens at the surface, when lines of flight are followed, when inquiry is performed in relation, when methods are established through living and intra-acting, the original subject may fade into the background. The mosaic of inquiry emerges larger than any prescribed research methods that set out to explain solutions to solvable problems.

### **Conclusion**

The Boils offer an opportunity to explore the differences between qualitative and post qualitative research and show that they are not in opposition. Both types of inquiry produce knowledge and solve important problems. However, inquiry is performed and produced in different ways. In fact, post qualitative inquiry is large enough to swallow

these very different research traditions and view them as lines of flight. To be clear, both quantitative and qualitative research traditions would object to being linked to post qualitative inquiry; yet, its tradition is inclusive and productive enough to acknowledge the multiplicity of research. This is an ontological difference in the different research traditions. Since quantitative and qualitative research focus on knowledge, the ontology of each is essentialized and viewed in opposition to each other. The ontology of post qualitative research is multiple, inclusive, and productive. Other forms of research need not intimidate it since it views each line of flight as possibility for new knowledge. Therefore, post qualitative inquiry now has its moment to affirm, renew, and produce many types of research, while opening the door to new forms of inquiry that answers questions we never knew to ask.



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## PLATEAU

### Being “There”: “Live” at TEDLive

On Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, I went with a group of 15 students in the NMIX 4200 class and/or in the TEDxUGA student organization to a movie theater in Gainesville, Georgia to watch the opening session of TED 2016 from Vancouver, Canada. This was the first time that TED has ever streamed their event live to local theaters (TEDcinema.com).

We embarked on a very cold afternoon to get there early for pizza at a local restaurant. I am an outsider to some extent to this group. As I have not been very involved with the class for the last year and a half, I only know some of the students who have been in the student organization for a couple of years. It’s clear that all of the students know each other, but are at various levels of familiarity. The far end of the table closest to the kitchen seemed to be new students. On the end closest to me, sat the seasoned TED students. Among the seasoned students were four TEDxUGA student directors. Student directors take on a very large responsibility for part of the event, like stage design, communications, attendance, etc... These students are the most invested and passionate about TED, the class, the student group, really anything related to TEDxUGA. For many, this event/class is where they have found their “home”; THIS is the thing they do. Many other students are involved in many different groups, clubs, or organizations. But for some, this is where they have found community. One student tweeted, “I don’t know what college would be like without my #TEDfam #TED2016 ted

@TEDxUGA @Atlas Pizza,” along with an Instagram picture of us at the restaurant.



Figure 32. Jay Horton. 2016, February 16. Tweet.

Leaving the pizza place as a convoy of cars, we drove through the driving rain to the theater. The small multiplex was not at all crowded on this Monday night. We had bought our tickets in advance. Tickets were \$24; compared to the cost of attending the TED conference, this was a reasonable price. We entered the theater and shortly realized we had it all to ourselves. Students spread out and stretched out in three main groups, mostly related to their car assignments. I said towards the back of the theater, in the middle, next to our license holder and her girlfriend and directly in front of our most seasoned TEDxUGA students.

The live stream began fifteen minutes prior to the simulcast with a countdown and clips of talks and performances at previous TED conferences. There was energy in the air; the students chatted excitedly about the talks they were looking forward to, mainly Shonda Rhimes, the creator and director of many popular television series, like *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*. They took selfies, posted tweets, ran to talk to their friends in other seats, laughed loudly, and enjoyed our own personal theater. As the countdown ended and the live feed began from Vancouver, the students settled down, but excitedly. Watching social media, the #TED2016 was exciting. People from all over were in theaters like us tweeting their experience. Some of them were with a huge group, some were alone. The hashtag served to bring us all together. One person tweeted, “I would

totally say hi to the people near me...but the theater is nearly empty. ☹️ #TED2016.” I tweeted back to him, writing “You have more #TEDfamily than you know! #TED2016 #TEDxUGA. ”



Figure 33. Jessie Daniels. 2016, February 16. Tweet.

He also received responses from many different people, following the hashtag from places like, Mesa, Arizona, Chicago, and of course, those in Vancouver at the actual event. I saw our TEDxUGA tweets being liked and retweeted all over the world. I, in turn, liked and retweeted their tweets from just one row up. Occasionally, following the feed, I saw Ted Cruz’s followers attempting to spread their support for their presidential candidate. Ted Cruz’s campaign has been using the #Ted2016 since September 2015. So really, the hashtag may really belong to him. Regardless, the clash of “Ted v. TED” has been humorous to watch.

The host, Chris Anderson, a shifty, stuttering, British genius in charge of all things TED, awkwardly got the evening started. First in the line-up was Ishita Katyal (2016), a writer and organizer of a TEDxYouth event in the Asia-Pacific region is also a ten year-old from India. She was lovely and adorable. Her main idea was to stop asking kids what they want to do when they grow up, and rather, ask them what they want to do right now. The overall idea and message was appropriate for her, however, the delivery was too adult. Her talk was too well written, the themes too big, the speech patterns too

adult, for this lovely child to have written this from her own perspective. After the talk, the students murmured to each other, how it felt “fake”, but she was very cute. I found myself being a bit angry. I felt the speaker had been a pawn in and “idea” game, where some designer had determined that that particular idea had more power coming from a child. I will never know the preparation process for that talk, but it left me feeling uncomfortable and distrustful of the message.

Next was Astro Teller (2016), an entrepreneur and inventor. His talk enlightened audiences about some secret projects that could reshape the future. His main idea was that vision is messy and failure is the key to uncovering something that DOES work. One main example is a project in the works right now about wi-fi transmitting balloons. Riccardo Sabatini (2016), a data scientist, followed Teller, keeping viewers thinking along the lines of technology and innovation. He works with genomics and DNA to discover how we can use technology to find and isolate information and how machines can learn. However, innovations like this open the door to increased ethical concerns. During a question and answer session, Chris Anderson asked if parents will be able to choose what their child looks like or their DNA. This conversation is important, but really TED talks are not about covering all of the possibilities or consequences. It’s about spreading ideas. Mission accomplished.

Next, we watched a performance by AR Rahman, a composer and musician. A Grammy winner for his score of Slumdog Millionaire, Rahman and his team played and sang hauntingly beautiful traditional Indian music. Later, this video couldn’t be found online.

Dan Pallotta (2016), a TED veteran, called for compassion for others. This talk was the ultimate TED talk in my opinion: Inspirational, polished, authentic, but a bit fluffy. Instantly, this was a quotation generating talk. Here are some of the social media favorites: “Our ability to talk to one another has gone vertical. Our ability to listen and understand one another has flatlined.”; “Human. Kind. Be both.”; “We need more of the courage of Drag Queens and Astronauts.” Many times, I heard a gleeful acknowledgement of his talk from the students in the theater. Immediately after the talk, one student proclaimed, “That was fuckin’ awesome. A classic. That will be a classic talk.”

Next was the talk the students had all been waiting for: Shonda Rhimes (2016). However, we could see that she was using two transparent Teleprompters. The students were a bit disappointed, as we do not allow our speakers to use notes or Teleprompters. Her talk was about identifying the “hum” that drives us—the underlying thing that makes us long to do more. For her, it was work. But what happens when the hum goes silent and you don’t know who you are anymore. She determined that the real source of the hum is love. Her talk was fluid, polished, and inspiring, until she hit a snag in the talk and the Teleprompters had a technical glitch. She stopped and had a long pause. Then she noted that there was a technical issue. She stood there, quiet, expectant, smiling, seemingly unflappable, if just a little sweaty. I thought she seemed unflappable. A writer from *Wired* said she “cried”. I disagree and so do the people who were watching live with me (Hempel, 2016).

The audience awkwardly laughed and clapped in support, a couple of different times. However, it was quite a long minute. Hempel noticed this as well: “We did not rustle, nor reach for our devices in those pregnant minutes during which we waited for the technical logistics to be sorted out. Instead, we trained our attention on her, willing her to understand that we were all in this performance together, that it was fine, that we would wait with her for as long as it took.” (Hempel, 2016). We all waited in silence until someone noted out loud, “They will cut that out in post.” And, in fact, they did. Her video shows no evidence at all of the glitch. Once the glitch was cleared, she backed up a few sentences and began again, giving them an easy cut for the video. She finished powerfully and flawlessly. The students in the theater stood up and clapped, one shouting, “My life just got changed!”

Finally, the last act was a performer, 64 year-old Bill T. Jones (2016), a famous choreographer/dancer. His performance was strange, very modern and interpretive, and very hard to understand. It seemed as though he moved around, doing 20 moves that seemingly had little to do with each other, breathing hard into his microphone, and telling rambling stories about a mentor who died, telling his parents he was gay, and his birthday. Perhaps a performance of this sort was lost on me. It was long, strange, meandering. I felt validated in my discomfort when I heard the chatter of the students. It seemed we all thought it was strange. Looking back, I could see the confused grimaces on several faces. Social media may have gotten a bit more out of it than we did. One person tweeted,

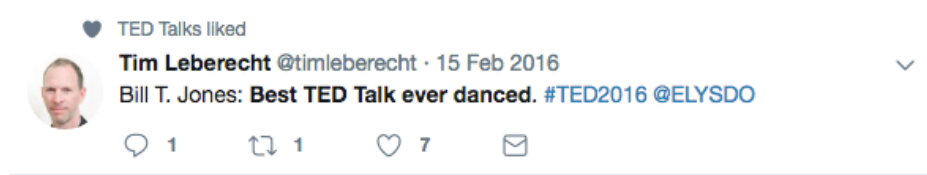


Figure 34. Tim Leberecht. 2016, February 15. Tweet.

One student pronounced after the performance that he felt “like he just took acid.” I found myself looking forward to the comments on the talk once it posted: what did others think of it? Was I missing something? Are they crazy? We left the theater in the pouring, but freezing rain, running to our cars, yelling goodbye through the wet. Another TED Family field trip under our belts.



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ENCOUNTER  
 THINKING AND DOING WITH TEDx: A CRITICAL DIFFRACTIVE ANALYSIS  
 OF MODERN METHODS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Since the neo-positivist turn (Mertens, 1998; Demetrian, 2005; Lather, 2006;) in education, many educators have lamented the loss of emphasis—or more importantly, funding—of the arts and social sciences in favor of STEM or “hard” sciences and subjects that provide quantifiable measures of success. These attempts to control not only content but also teaching methods has left little room for more experimental or experiential learning methods in elementary and secondary education. Within the confines of the Common Core Curriculum Standards and other similar protocols, there is little space, hope, or funding for more interactive teaching methods in primary or secondary schools. In this framework, content and teaching methods are valued for their ability to be infinitely *reproducible*: reproducible in classrooms across the nation, reproducible online and face-to-face, reproducible from year to year. Education in this form is immune to time, space, and effectively “teacher proof” (Fischman, 2000, p.13). Functionally, pre-appointed content and prescribed methods and resources are student-proof as well; students are viewed as a collective whole rather than individuals receiving an individualized education. In this way, modern legislation for education communicates learning should look the same everywhere for everyone and be infinitely reproducible.

Education today is subject to a legal regime of standardization and economy of reproduction where standardized “knowledge” is produced in the same way for all.

As primary and secondary institutions turn towards standardization, experiential learning opportunities to customize education and apply knowledge fade away. There is a considerable difference between experience and knowledge; how this difference is perceived effects trends in education. In the 1980’s, shortly before the return to positivism, many interactive and experiential learning theories were proposed and proved to be a gateway to learning because knowledge and experience were not artificially bifurcated. Now it seems, experience, or rather personal interaction with what is being studied is functionally perceived as, at best, supplemental, and at worst, oppositional to “knowledge,” especially at the primary and secondary levels. Knowledge is thought to be measurable, while experience, which often escapes quantification on high school transcripts, is often confined to explanation in the college admission essay (McGinty, 2013). Now, only alternative, non-traditional, or higher education institutions offer a less restrictive environment for the engagement of alternative methods of teaching and learning.

Institutions of higher education prove to be a more hospitable site for experiential learning, yet they are still susceptible to an economy of *reproduction* and the quantification of products with value-- namely, students. Unlike the measures of “knowledge” produced by the Common Core Standards, these particular institutions measure “learning” in new ways. Student retention, seat occupancy, and graduation rates control many curriculum offerings and departmental operations at the college level. Matriculation and post-graduation employment are the benchmarks of success in this

economy of reproduction (Yorke & Longden, 2004). This is not to say that institutions of higher education do not value knowledge or learning; the question at hand is what types of knowledge are valued in this system? The obvious answer is any type of knowledge that can be measured: “Measurable outcomes become more important as institutions across the globe reassess funding for innovative teaching” (Huddleston, 2017, p.2).

Due to the increasing economic pressures created by rising under-employment rates (Nunley, et.al., 2017) and rising student loan debt, universities now find it necessary to embrace a new benchmark of learning to give their graduates an edge in the work force—experience. Experiential learning opportunities, such as service learning and community engagement, offer proven opportunities for students to “develop employable skills that enhance their future employment prospects while accomplishing their civic duties as citizens, as well as strengthening the community-university connection” (Huddleston, 2017, p.6).

In 2016, the University of Georgia was one of the largest public institutions to implement a university-wide experiential learning requirement, requiring all undergraduate students to participate in approved types of program related experience, such as study abroad programs, internships, leadership opportunities, faculty-mentored research, and service learning. This requirement was implemented with the purpose of making connections outside the classroom to ensure success of graduates when they leave the university. Simply put, experiential learning is “learning by doing,” according to UGA Provost Pamela Whitten. Director of experiential learning, Linda Bachman, notes:

Experiential learning helps students make purposeful connections between their academic foundations and the impact they would like to make in their

professional lives and communities. Students who engage in hands-on learning return to the classroom with deepened commitment to their studies and enter graduate school or the workforce with firsthand experiences in their fields.

(Fahmy, 2015).

UGA even plans to implement experiential learning transcripts, which will document and verify the approved experiences in which students participate.

These new initiatives are excellent opportunities for affirmative, productive critique and deep exploration to investigate the sources of power within the structure; in other words, into which power machines are students being plugged? Does adding an experiential learning component foster a setting ripe for original scholarship and basic and applied research in new environments, or does it merely provide another line on a resume? Is it generative of new knowledges or is it merely reproduction in another disguise?

An opening exists in higher education to move towards learning models that do not worship at the altar of knowledge or experience reproduction, but rather value knowledge creation, invention, and engagement through experience. While experiential learning theory offers unique learning opportunities not readily available in typical university classrooms, I argue that what is currently being implemented as experiential learning is heavily influenced by neo-liberal, positivist definitions of experience. Combining experiential learning theory with post qualitative feminist theories produces a new type of experiential learning; this type of experiential learning resists replication through performance and creates new discourses about experience that can lead to more

emergent knowledge. This type reshapes the ontology of learning rather than merely focusing on knowledge outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

This argument is laden with many questions. First, some basic questions to establish the current utility of this trend: What is experiential learning? How is it being deployed at universities? How is it being measured? Why does this learning theory intrigue institutions of higher education?

Next, I want to inquire into new space. How does experiential learning change when confronted and combined with post qualitative feminist theories? How does viewing experiential learning as a mixture of performance and event create significant ontological differences in student learning? Finally, I will engage with the inquiry I performed alongside many others involved in TEDxUniversity events to show significant ontological shifts in student learning and engagement.

These questions will be answered through the means of mapping relations within the educational machines employed within higher education. These machines—connections between human and non-human things—are powered by desire. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them” (1987, p.399). In other words, universities are desiring machines; the passions of an institution lead to connections, relations with other entities to form an assemblage, essentially, a

“composition of desire” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.399). What kind of product (student) is produced by these kinds of desiring machines?

### **Experiential Learning Theories**

Educational theory and practice has a rich history of interactive engagement with students and knowledge. Often learning models come from similar traditions and bleed into each other so much so that is hard to differentiate the distinctive features of each. Below, I have briefly teased out some key differences in three popular learning theories in order to later show ontological differences between these theories using the incorporation of the concept of performance. I have focused my analysis on three theoretical methods of experiential learning that overtly involve performance: active learning theory (or activity theory), engaged learning theory, and finally, experiential learning theory. In order to see how the ontology of performance changes in each learning theory, it is essential to define what makes these theories different from each other.

#### **Activity Learning Theory**

The social turn in the late 1980’s that gave birth to activity theory can be traced most famously to two schools of thought based in psychoanalysis and behaviorism, a Soviet school spurred by the ideas of Vygotsky, and a Scandinavian school championed by Engestrom. According to both, activity is a concept that “denotes the basic unit of concrete human life” (Sannino, et. al., 2009, p.2). This quote is important as it highlights important aspects of activity theory in a concise manner; activity is a *unit of measure* and thus is physically observable (concrete). “Activity theory addresses the foundational theoretical issue of activity as the primary unit of analysis and, thus, provides both a

theory of human activity and a productive method for its study” (Sannino, et al., 2009, p.2). One may inquire as to what is measured and how is it measured. Minnis and John-Steiner (2001) note that the most productive offering of activity theory is that it requires a “systematic examination of change” (as cited in Sannino, et al., 2009, p.2). Change is measured via concrete observable activity; the move from one place to another can be physically observed or tested.

### **Engaged Learning Theory**

Engaged learning theory is less theory than a conceptual framework. *Engagement* is admittedly vague. Engagement is a potentially powerful concept that has been watered down significantly in education. What counts as engaged learning and what does not? Fields (2017) describes engagement as the development of “personal responsibility, a positive attitude towards, learning, and a learner-centered approach to student and making connections with the local and academic communities” (p.56). Blumer (2017) uses engagement to describe support and participation, especially within the community (p.113). Simply, in many educational resources, engagement has been reduced to mere willing participation. I want to explore a bolder explanation of engagement that provides contrast with activity theory and experiential learning, as well as gives power back to the overused concept of engagement.

An important concept that is used to describe engaged learning is *flow*. Flow is described as the “most complete and all-encompassing state of engagement” (VanDeWeghe, 2009, p. 2). One of the foremost theorists of flow is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Csikszentmihalyi asks the question in his TED talk from 2004, where in everyday life do people feel happiest and feel their lives have most meaning? His answer



is humans are most fully alive when they experience flow. Yet there exists a paradox in this living. When one experiences flow, they often feel as if they have disappeared. It is an ecstatic state. Csikszentmihalyi (2004) explains that in Greek, *ecstasy* means to stand beside something, or “stepping into an alternative reality”. He says because the human mind is only capable of taking in so much information, when one experiences flow, other practices of the mind disappear. A person who experiences complete engagement or creation:

doesn't have enough attention left over to monitor how his body feels, or his problems at home. He can't feel even that he's hungry or tired; the body disappears, his identity disappears from his consciousness, because he doesn't have enough attention, none of us do, to really do well something that requires a lot of concentration, and at the same time to feel that he exists. So existence is temporarily suspended” (Csikszentmihalyi 2004, TED).

When this concept is an active force, it can describe what happens to artists, writers, athletes, or world-renowned scientists. In order to experience flow or participate in engaged learning, the learner must lose one's preoccupation with other aspects of life in order to fully participate in the learning experience—body, mind, and spirit. Many Montessori schools, high adventure camps, and unschools use this concept in learner centered ways, allowing students to plan curriculums that conform to their interests. The difference here between engaged participation and flow is passion, concentration, and movement. In short, engaged learning is a conceptual framework that relies on the learner's ability to experience flow.

## **Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential learning has a rich tradition soundly based in social psychology, philosophy, and cognitive psychology (Kolb, 1984, p.3). The work of John Dewey has been influential in the formation of this theory. In 1938, Dewey explained his rationale for the engagement of this type of learning: “I take it that the fundamental unity of the new philosophy is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (as cited in Kolb, 1984, p.5). So what makes certain types of learning experiential?

Learning is experiential when “the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied...It involves direct encounter with the phenomenon being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it” (Keeton and Tate, 1978, as cited in Kolb, 1984, p.5). Arthur Chickering says it another way:

Experiential learning leads us to question the assumptions and conventions underlying many of our practices. It turns us away from credit hours and calendar time toward competence, working knowledge, and information pertinent to jobs, family relationships, community responsibilities, and broad social concerns. It reminds us that higher education can do more than develop verbal skills and deposit information in those storage banks between the ears. It can contribute to more complex kinds of intellectual development and to more pervasive dimensions of human development required for effective citizenship. It can help students cope with shifting developmental tasks imposed by the life cycle and rapid social change (Chickering, 1977, as cited in Kolb, 1984, p.7).

Like Chickering, the work of Piaget, Bruner, and Lewin basically describes how intelligence is shaped by experience (Kolb, 1984, p.12). However, in the current educational system, intelligence is equated with the reproduction of knowledge. As Chickering reminds us, institutions of higher education have a greater responsibility than knowledge reproduction; the aim of higher education should be the creation, invention, and engagement of knowledge. Experiential learning theory offers a suitable framework for such tasks.

### **Learning Theories Summary**

In conclusion, the ways experiential learning is deployed at institutions of higher education today come from these varied backgrounds. *Activity learning theory* focuses on the unit of change; how many activities were complete? What has been done and how can we count it? *Engaged learning theory* focuses on deep engagement and flow, privileging one's ability to get "lost" or disappear into the learning. There is little structure or time during task to measure outcomes or change; many more experimental schools or "unschools" value this model of learning. *Experiential learning* focuses on a direct encounter with learning environments. Experiential learning offers the most opportunity for what is called high impact practices (HIP), or rather, "experiential learning practices that teach individuals problem solving and critical thinking skills in real world, hands on settings" (Huddleston, 2017, p.27).

### **Experiential Learning Trends in Higher Education**

*“Scientific observation has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to works but by experiences upon the environment”*

(Montessori, 1946).

#### **How is it being deployed at universities?**

I began this paper with a brief explanation of the experiential learning requirement for all undergraduates at the University of Georgia. The website explains that UGA “gives students hands-on opportunities to connect their academic foundations to the world beyond the classroom, through creative endeavors, study abroad and field schools, internship and leadership opportunities, faculty-mentored research, and service learning” (University of Georgia, EL Courses and Activities). Certain experiential learning opportunities are approved for each major and can include various major related activities. For Franklin Arts and Sciences, the largest college at the University of Georgia, opportunities are broken down into different categories to cover all of the differing majors within that college. Creative options include senior exit shows for art and music students and Engineering Physics design project classes. Global options include classes on interracial communication and marine and oceanography field studies. Internship opportunities include opportunities to teach dance to children and business internships focuses on artificial intelligence. Research opportunities include intensive laboratory classes and ethnographic research. Any service-learning course offered at the university or study abroad language immersion courses also mark off this requirement (University of Georgia, Courses and Activities Approved for Franklin College).

Elon University, a mid-size private university in North Carolina, requires similar experiences for all students (Elon University). Kent State in Ohio has also incorporated experiential learning as a graduation requirement for students (Kent State). Miami University in Ohio has also incorporated this into their plan for a liberal education, meant to complement the coursework students complete in their major (Miami University). However, few other institutions have taken on this task at the university level, preferring to leave it to the individual colleges and schools. Some tie it to selective leadership or honors programs.

Business schools have long been at the center of experiential learning. In touch with corporate wants and needs, they have been working with students to develop skill sets that make their graduates successful hires. With a long history of internships, case studies, and competitions, learning that gets students closer to “the real world” is generally expected.

Penn State’s experiential learning program uses faculty to guide students into programs and courses that encourage full engagement with content and materials. Jeff Searly, senior director of learning and development for Penn State Executive Programs, remarks, “This approach isn’t about classroom teaching or faculty giving answers to students; it’s about faculty leading, directing, and coaching the group to find the answers themselves, and then to apply them. This type of learning drives real, lasting change in the workplace.” (Ferrazzi, 2015). California Polytechnic State University hosts a conference focused on experiential learning, called simply, Learn by Doing Conference. Ferrazzi (2015) describes this model as an “engaged approach to learning that takes students away from the traditional lecture model, and places them at the center of the

action to problem solve and troubleshoot situations designed to mimic what they'd see in the corporate world.”

Business schools are not the only ones who have historically incorporated experiential learning. Community colleges and technical schools have programs and degrees that require many contact hours and experiential practice in any number of career fields— medical technologies, engine repair, culinary arts, and cosmetology. Schools of education require intensive student teaching programs. Medical schools provide internships and residency programs to train doctors. In many fields, this is common practice.

If this is common practice in many areas, why the sudden interest in experiential learning at the university level? Likely, there are multiple reasons for this. Perhaps one reason is the rise of online teaching and learning has opened space for traditional experiences, like study abroad and field work experiences, to set students apart in the job hunt. Another reason could be that the job market dictates the need for different skills like risk-taking and self-motivation that experiential learning promises (Klebnikov, 2015). Another reason could be that the generation of millennials now in college demand meaningful experiences over traditional content delivery. There is any number of interesting reasons for this renewed excitement; however, diving into the depths of that question is not the task of this inquiry at this time.

### **Common Types of Experiential Learning**

#### **Community Engagement**

Tett (2016) explains that community is often a positive term that can be used as a basic descriptive category that can be divided broadly into three main areas of meaning;

place or locality (people in physical proximity to each other), interest (people who have similar interests or beliefs), or function (people who have the same profession or fulfill similar roles) (p.130). Community service is defined as “meeting a need in the community or solving a social problem in the community” (Huddleston, 2017, p.27).

Therefore, community engagement is often involving oneself in the problems of a community that is nearby, has similar interests, or fulfill common positions. However, the opportunity lies in experiential learning to truly experience something wholly other.

### **Service Learning**

Service learning is “a teaching tool where community service is used to teach individuals, in a hands-on way, what they are learning in the classroom” (Huddleston, 2017, p.27). Thus, both service learning and community engagement describe similar experiences of becoming more immersed in doing something within a certain kind of community. Service learning is defined by Falk and Vine (2017) as, “For credit work that both contributes to addressing community needs and provides meaningful experiential learning opportunities to students in their field of study” (p.224). Zimmerman (2017) adds that reflection and reciprocity are key concepts of service learning (p.251).

### **How is it measured?**

Experience is notoriously difficult to measure; Dewey (1938) explained that experience was educative if it benefited the community and the individual by promoting personal growth and spurred continued personal growth. How does a university measure the amount of personal growth or potential for future growth? Kolb (1984, *Experiential Learning*) explains that the cycle of reflection is an accurate assessment of learning. However, in the neo-positivist turn, universities feel pressure to assess their assessment

practices; how can reflection be quantified? Concrete learning outcomes are key to assessing student learning. Evans (1992) claims student assessment is “a matter of making independent judgments about the level and quality of learning which has been reached by an individual at a particular time” (p.68) and suggests portfolio assignments as systematic process for evaluation.

Northern Illinois University pulls from different resources about experiential learning to set forth certain steps that comprise experiential learning:

1. Experiencing/Exploring: “Doing”
2. Sharing/Reflecting: “What happened?”
3. Processing/Analyzing: “What’s important?”
4. Generalizing: “So what?”
5. Application: “Now what?”

(Northern Illinois University, Experiential learning, n.d.).

This process of experiential learning is nice and neat. Even with this process in place, benchmarks for experiential learning are subjective at best. Many institutions talk of measuring impact, attitudes, and effectiveness. However, how can these be effectively measured, especially when the nature of experience is compounded over time? How interested should institutions be in measuring these experiences? What does that really measure? Thinking about experiential learning as performance even further complicates the ability to assess outcomes. Thus, I found it necessary to reconsider the ontological commitments of experiential learning.



### **The Inquiry**

I have been involved in the TEDx organization at my university for nearly six years. When I enrolled as a graduate student in the first offering of the “TED and the Power of Storytelling” class through the New Media Institute, I had no idea the impact and commitment that would follow. Involvement with this organization, with TED, with the students and organizers would offer opportunities for what I believed to be true experiential learning. My graduate work in education led me to study the different types of experiential learning, but I realized that the power of experiential learning in this context came from the element of performance. Performance, as described by Butler and Phelan, had the power not just to shape knowledge and knowledge generating practices, but also to shift the ontology of participants, organizations, and curriculums—to create opportunity for growth and movement. I decided to participate in and study this ontological shift ignited through my participation in TED in the curriculum.

Through this affiliation with TED, I have had the opportunity to meet other TEDx University organizers and involved students from all over the world. For the purposes of this study, I conducted eight interviews with TEDx University affiliates from several locations in the United States and collected survey results from willing participants, mainly students who have been involved in a curriculum based learning experience. Four interviews were with university employees who have never experienced TED from the student perspective. Two of the eight interviews are university employees who first became involved in TEDx as students; the other two interviews highlight the perspective of students who have graduated from the university after several years of involvement in

TEDx University events. Three interviewees have been involved with multiple TEDx events. Five of the eight represented events are University based.

Total interview participants	8
Total TEDx events represented	8
Total TEDx University represented events	5
Total Surveys Collected	31
Total TEDx events represented in the survey data	6

Figure 35. Interview information

Two of the eight represented TEDx events have curriculum-based courses associated with involvement. Both courses at each institution are used in correlation with student TEDx organizations at those schools. Both schools are large, public, research institutions, one located in the Southeast and one in the Midwest regions of the United States. The course at one university is used as a curriculum based “gateway” to the student organization, so that all participants in the organization have a shared experience. The emphasis of this course is event planning, public speaking, and the impact of storytelling in New Media. The course at the other university is used as a leadership development course. Students in the TEDx organization are chosen as leaders and then take the class as a leadership preparation class. TED Talks and TED related materials are the main course contents. In the first course, the talks are used as training for students to be able to learn how to prepare presenters to give a TEDxTalk on stage. They spend time in and outside the classroom preparing talks and speakers to take the stage. In the second course, leadership related TED Talks are watched for content, not necessarily form. Students discuss the concepts presented in the talks and apply those skills in their leadership roles in the student organization. In the first, student organization meetings are

incorporated into the course; in the second, student organization meetings are held separate and apart from the course.

While the differences between these two ways of curriculum incorporation are interesting, they are not the focus of this study. What these interviews and surveys highlight is how performing experience incited a change in the ontology of learning for these students and administrators. This significant shift masquerades as something easily quantifiable. However, involvement in TED for these individuals became not just a resume line item, but changed how they lived in the world. This “becoming” is indicative of an ontological, rather than a solely epistemological, change.

### **Dealing with “Data” and “Subjects”**

In many ways, what could be considered data collection for this inquiry was performative for me. My participants and I engaged in a performance together—interviewer and interviewee mutually constituted, the performance of the interview irreproducible. I view my participants’ subjectivity as continuously shifting. While I have “captured” their viewpoints at a moment in time by recording their words, the poststructural concepts of assemblage, performance, and diffraction show me that there is no stable subject. Therefore, I have purposefully chosen to not describe the interview settings, my observations, or the participants themselves in depth. This is not to protect their identity, but rather to demonstrate the shifting nature of identity. In addition, in lieu of gender-based pronouns or even new non-gender based pronouns (like ze or hir), I have purposefully used the collective pronouns “they,” “their,” and “them.” I have found that these pronouns encompass the multiplicity of identity relations as described in poststructural inquiry.

I have included the interview questions in the appendix of this dissertation. Even now, many of the interview questions I asked seem irrelevant. I think of them more as discussion prompts, prompts that I would now change if given the chance to rethink this project at this time. It is not because I think the questions were “wrong”. After thinking and writing, they just seem as though I have moved away from them. This is the nature of post qualitative research—always on the move, always ontologically shifting. I use their words as an indication of a moment in time and space where one can identify the change in oneself through discussion and engagement, indeed in performance of an interview with me. This is not necessarily an opportunity for simple reflection (while that may be involved at points), but yet another performative learning experience.

### **Introduction to Performance**

Performance serves as a tool that exposes the most valued investments of an institution. What types of performing subjects are valued at a particular institution? What types of performances are valued? These questions are foundational to the educational debates going on currently in America. Therefore, an exploration of the nature of performance is necessary. The term *performance* is no stranger to the field of education; however, it has been hijacked in the post-positivist turn and taken to indicate merely observable learning objectives. A rethinking and even retooling of learning, while being mindful of the particularities of performative ontology provides a pleasurable disruption in the use of the term, thus opening doors to new uses. For the purposes of this paper, I use Phelan (1993) and Pollock (1998) as a guide through the comprehensive history of the genesis and proliferation of performance studies and performativity. I attempt to

provide a brief overview of this area of study in order to move into the ontology of performance to contrast its possible effects in the field of education.

While both teaching and learning engage the element of performance at many levels and in many different ways, the ontology of performance in *experiential* learning provides a productive space not offered by other similar learning theories. While numerous learning theories exist, there are only a few that are appropriate matches for this type of endeavor, namely, changing the current goal of education from the *reproduction* of knowledge to *creation*, *invention*, and *engagement* of knowledge.

### **Performance**

Performance has a rich tradition and has engaged the discipline of education from many different directions, most notably from language and psychology. J.L. Austin (1962) first employed the term in relation to speech acts. He moves from the traditional notion that statements are merely descriptive and their value is in their verity, to the study of the conditions of action made possible in utterance. He explains two types of utterances that are in contrast: performative and constative utterances. *Performative* utterances are those that indicate that the “issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (p.6-7). An example of a performative utterance would be “I now thee wed” in a marriage ceremony; the statement of these words cause an action or change of state. *Constative* utterances are, on the other hand, either true or false (p.46). For example, to say, “John is running” would be true or false depending on the fact or the truth of his running (Austin, p.54). In short, the difference between the performative and constative utterance is the difference between saying as *doing* and saying as *saying*. Pollock explains:

Insofar as an utterance is itself a form of action, insofar as it performs an action that may be followed or accompanied by other actions but remains primary, [...] it cannot be held to the standards of truth and falsehood that govern constative speech. *The performative utterance bypasses issues of validity and referentiality.* [...] From the perspective of linguistic performativity, asking ‘Is it true?’ yields to ‘What does it do?’” (Pollock, 1998, p.20, emphasis added).

What are the implications of asking these questions in the classroom? It is clear that the questions “what does it do?” or “how does it work?” provide more opportunity for exploration than merely asking, “is it true?” More knowledge is created and discovered through this process rather than the intentional reproduction of knowledge. This is a significant shift critical to the movement into an economy that values invention and engagement.

Austin’s work has been highly influential and has been taken up by many other theorists for different purposes. However, it seems that there is a distinct break between the different uses of Austin’s work; I see this break hinging on *intentionality* and the subject. Austin himself addresses this notion: “In the particular case of promising, as with many other performatives, it is appropriate that the person uttering the promise should have certain intention, viz. here to keep his word” (p.11). In this case, the action of the utterance is performed, yet the verity is based on a “bet” (1962, n.2, p.6). Per this point, one must again engage the question, what type of performance is valued by the institution? And by the same token, what type of performing subject is valued: intentional or unintentional? The answers to these questions imply concrete consequences for learning environments. Where are universities currently placing their bets?

Intentionality is the focus for John R. Searle, who engaged in an infamous debate with Jacques Derrida in the 1970's over the work of Austin. Searle, is primarily concerned with the relationship between authorship and responsibility. He (2002) notes, "My capacities to perform speech acts are realized entirely in my mind and my actual performance of speech acts are expressions of my intentionality" (p.155). Searle and the idealist view of intentionality can ultimately lead to reification of language. In his essay "Signature Event Context" (1988), Jacques Derrida reads Austin differently, according to Alfino, arguing that Austin's insight into speech acts is to "conceive of communication more in terms of the transmission of a force than the transmission of content" (Alfino, 1991, p.145). Therefore, Derrida moves away from intentionality (which assumes a prediscursive subject), and into two related theses: "first, that there is a 'structure of absence' in every meaningful use of language and second, that language is characterized by its 'iterability'" (Alfino, 1991, p.146). This debate continues in a sense today in the field of education: is the learning subject an intentional subject, fully aware and in control of her utterances and performances? Or is the learning subject one who disappears into the repetition of performances and utterances?

This clash of ideas provides an opening for the study of performance as a field; yet the boundaries of this field of study are at once welcoming and messy. Performance is interdisciplinary and ripe for the integration into learning theory. In a resource edited by Phelan and Lane, Richard Schechner (1998) explains performance studies (PS) as a field that does not value "purity" and thrives on interdisciplinarity. He says,

Accepting 'inter' means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter. Performance studies is unfinished, open,

multivocal, and self-contradictory. Thus any call for or work toward a ‘unified field’ is, in my view, a misunderstanding of the very fluidity and playfulness fundamental to performance studies (p.360-361).

I wish to take my lead from Schechner and take the opportunity to view the future of education in the same light. What would education look like if it were “unfinished, open, multivocal, and self-contradictory”? What would an institution that valued this type of education look like? This type of work necessitates a completely different type of learning “subject”. One must ask, what type of performing subject is produced by certain learning theories? For this point, we move to the work of Judith Butler who provides the feminist context of subjectivity for performance and performativity.

Judith Butler “elaborates Derrida’s notion of performativity through Foucault’s understanding of the productive effects of regulatory power in theorizing the notion of identity performativity” (Barad, 2003, n.8, p.108). Frederick S. Roden (2005) provides an excellent analysis of Butlerian terms. He states from her essay, “Critically Queer” (1993),

Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. It is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms, ones which cannot be thrown off at will, but which work, animate, and constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged (Butler, 1993, as cited in Roden, 2005, p.29).

Butler explains that “performance as bounded ‘act’ is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and



exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice' [...] The reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake" (as cited in Roden, p.29). The current trend in education is to do just this—reduce *performativity* to *performance*, to value the *reproducible* product (test scores, matriculating students) over the performativity of the learning subject.

Appropriately, Butler's work calls subjectivity and agency into question. Kirsten Campbell (2005) writes, "For Butler, the subject is a material instance of power, for 'if conditions of power are to persist, they must be reiterated; the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration'. Power thereby forms, and is performed by, the subject. For this reason, Butler argues that 'for power to act, there must be a subject'" (p. 82). For Butler, the subject is not prediscursive; there is no doer before the deed. Contrarily, in the current environment in education, there is the presumed doer: the typical college freshman, business majors, or the non-traditional student, for example. Each student is categorized and produced as a copy of the one before. Butler locates human agency within the processes of signification constitute the subject. Gender and identity are performative and agency is located in the possibilities (or refusal) of variation of repetition (Barvosa-Carter, 2005, p.176). What types of performances are available to these presumed subjects? What would education look like without these pre-appointed identifiers?

Butler works to bridge the views of J.L. Austin and Althusser by stating that an explanation would need to be offered that accounted for "how the subject constituted through the address of the Other becomes then a subject capable of addressing others. In such a case, the subject is neither a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation to language, nor a mere effect whole agency is pure complicity with prior expectations of

power. The vulnerability to the Other constituted by that prior address is never overcome in the assumption of agency (one reason that ‘agency’ is not the same as ‘mastery’)” (Butler, 1997, p.25-26). Troubling the subject and establishing the nature of agency is not enough. One must pull back the veil and expose what power is driving the educational machine.

### **Instability and Drive**

In an economy of reproduction, instability is not held in high regard. Current practices and regulations work diligently to eliminate variability and uncertainty. Regardless, one encounters the importance of instability and the psychoanalytic notion of drive in the field of education and its importance is critical to the shift from the reproduction to the creation, invention, and engagement with knowledge. Homi Bhabha says that instability of language is the defining characteristic of what he calls “performativity” (Pollock, 1998, p.23). For Bhabha, performativity designates not only the inherent instability of the sign (following Derrida) but its immanent ‘becoming’ (following Bakhtin) [...] According to Bhabha, performativity is an analytic framework for mining the creative implications of signification embodied in the duplicity of the sign and threatened by the totalizing effects of narrative closure” (Pollock, 1998, p.24). Pollock (1998) comments on the instable places: “The spaces betwixt and between emerging differences are performative spaces. They are sites of creative practice and imaginative play. They are slippery, liminal phases, fertile with the possibility of both reviewing and revising history” (Pollock, 1998, p.5). These areas are the site for the possible restructuring of education.

Thinking about the instability in performance leads us to the concept of drive in Lacanian thought. Žižek (1991) aptly explains,

A goal, once reached always retreats anew. Can we not recognize in this paradox the very nature of the psychoanalytical notion of drive, or more properly the Lacanian distinction between its aim and its goal? The goal is the final destination, while the aim is what we intent to do, i.e. the way itself. Lacan's point is that the real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, to continue its path to and from the goal. The real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit (p.5).

Pollock (1998) explains: "At this moment, at the very moment that performance seems to eclipse history, it achieves its surplus: it ruptures and rattles and revises history; it challenges the easy composure of history under the sign of objectivity. It decomposes history as myth, making of it a scene awaiting intervention by the performing subject" (Pollock, 1998, p.27). Performance, like drive, is always in motion; an object is not its aim, but rather more performative action.

In many ways the performing subject is an unintentional subject. Describing the radical work of Shoshana Felman, Butler attends to the unintentionality of speech and performance: "Felman thus suggests that the speech act, as the act of a speaking body, is always to some extent unknowing about what it performs. [...] For Felman, however, this does not mean that speech and the body are radically separable, only that the idea of a fully intentional speech act is perpetually subverted by that in speech which subverts

intentionality” (Butler, 1997, p.10). Accordingly, Butler argues that speech is always in some way uncontrollable:

Untethering the speech act from the sovereign subject found an alternative notion of agency and, ultimately, of responsibility, one that more fully acknowledges the way in which the subject is constituted in language, how what it creates is also what derived from elsewhere. Whereas some critics mistake the critique of sovereignty for the demolition of agency, I propose that agency begins where sovereignty wanes. The one who acts (who is not the same as the sovereign subject) acts precisely to the extent that he or she is constituted as an actor, and hence, operating within a linguistic field of enabling constraints from the outset” (Butler, 1997, p.15-16).

The uncontrollable aspect of speech and performance leads us to the new ontology of performance detailed by Phelan and prepares us to see how this ontology plays out in different learning theories.

### **Ontology of Performance**

Now that we have moved through the background of performance studies, and established that performance offers an opportunity to question institutional educational commitments, we must establish that a certain ontological framing is critical to the performative nature of the three learning theories addressed in the next section. This is important as one can see the different ontological commitments emerge through different types of instruction. I assert that the ontology of performance described by Peggy Phelan offers appropriate opportunity to challenge the prevalent economy of reproduction in educational institutions today.

According to Phelan (1993), performance only *exists in the present*; and the present cannot be preserved. She writes, “Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance [...] The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered” (p. 146, 147). As it only exists in the present, performance cannot be repeated. Phelan (1993) notes, “It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as ‘different’” (p.146). Repetition is ontologically impossible, as each performance is constituted as an entirely different performance. The elements or content of the performance may be the same, but the temporal the nature of performance prohibits any sort of repetition. Ontologically, performance is always “consumed” in the present (p.148). It cannot last.

In a similar fashion, performance is *nonreproductive* (Phelan, 1993, p.148). This is the critical ontological element of performance as this is where the performance is challenged to “succumb to the laws” of economy of production (p.146). According to Phelan,

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. [...] It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art. Performance closes the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital (p.146, 148).

This ontology of performance is very different than the one valued in the field of education today. It is clear that education today has become “something other than performance”.

It is necessary to inquire into the nature of the economy of reproduction; one only need to look to current evaluation and assessment practices in education for an example. Learning is viewed as reproducible in each class; each student receives the same instruction, the same learning opportunities. Since each student is essentially “the same” (economically) and content is “the same” (per the standards), any deficit in measurement is often attributed to teacher performance<sup>37</sup>. Lessons are reproducible; teachers are replaceable. It can be deduced that certain programs and departments are “worth” the money, time and effort if they ensure the reproduction of the valued product<sup>38</sup>.

We must turn again to the question of reproduction itself. What is the *value* of reproduction? Reproduction has a direct relationship to validity and accuracy. Reproductions of great works of art are sold and coveted because they are exact replicas of that work; this makes it possible for many to purchase or own these “exact” images. Similarly, it is not a stretch of the imagination to conjure an image of the “ideal” teacher, student, curriculum, or program and how much money, time, and effort are put in to reproduce these objects. Reproduction constitutes a certain type of “permanent” subject. However, performance cannot work in this way.

Performance specifically “refuses this system of exchange and resists the

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<sup>37</sup> The 2010 implementation of the Obama administration’s Race to the Top grants tied teacher pay and employment more directly to students’ standardized test scores (Turque, 2012). Emphasis on the amount and quality of university teacher performance evaluations (usually completed by students) has been a factor for tenure and promotion at many universities for some time. I have provided a link for the AAUP protective guidelines for this practice: <http://www.aaup.org/report/statement-on-evaluation>

<sup>38</sup> The valued products here are students in seats and matriculating students.

circulatory economy fundamental to it. Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward” (Phelan, 1993, p.149). There is no product to consume beyond the original performance in the moment. There is no substitution value; watching a performance live is not the same as watching a recorded version, reading about the performance, or even seeing a different performance-- once it has happened, it has disappeared. While reproduction constitutes an essential, consistent, preserved subject, performance constitutes a different type of subject through disappearance into memory, where it moves into “the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control” (Phelan and Lane, 1998, p.148). The subject and object of performance cannot be captured or grasped.

At this point, I must make it clear why these elements make a difference to learning. Under the reproductive regime, the *preservation* of knowledge is valued over the *creation* of it. In performance, the knowledge cannot be grasped as it leaves no bodily trace, but can be used in different modes in productive ways. To use Lacan’s concept of metaphor and metonymy, this new subject is no longer just a stand in for something else, but rather inclusive and open to new meanings. To say this another way, I turn to Phelan and Lanes’s (1998) detailed explanation:

Metaphor works to secure a vertical hierarchy of value and is reproductive; it works by erasing dissimilarity and negating difference; it turns two into one. Metonymy is additive and associative; it works to secure a horizontal axis of contiguity and displacement. [...] In performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of “presence.” But in the plenitude of its apparent

visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents as something else [...] Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relations between subjectivity and the body per se; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promises by and through the body-- that which cannot appear without a supplement" (p.150, 151).

It is important for education to embrace performance rather than reproduction, to choose metonymic over metaphoric relations. Phelan (1993) writes, "universities whose domain is the reproduction of knowledge must re-view the theoretical enterprise by which the object surveyed is reproduced as property with (theoretical) value" (p.166). As we see how performance changes according to how it is used in the classroom, it will be clear that experiential learning theory offers the most fruitful environment to promote the creation, invention, and engagement of knowledge.

### **Mapping the Ontology of Performance within Experiential Learning Theories**

Background on the concept of performance is necessary to understand how involvement in these TEDx events is not just "experience", but performance. The following provides a background of performance in education and how post qualitative and poststructural feminist theories used this concept to open new ways of being. Each learning theory brings a unique opportunity to map the ontology of performance. The most likely theoretical candidates for the inclusion of performance are active learning theory (or activity theory), engaged learning theory, and finally, experiential learning theory. In order to see why performance offers opportunity within experiential learning



theory to change the ontology of experience, it is essential to define what makes this theory different from these others.

### **Activity Learning Theory and Performance**

Thinking performance in an activity learning framework turns performance into an activity or object—a *thing* to be observed. However, due to its ontological status as an experience that disappears, performance cannot exist as an object, Therefore performance is effectively transformed into *practice*. Sannino, Daniels, and Gutierrez (2009) explain:

Activity theory, as a practice-based theory, is grounded in practice both theoretically and concretely. On this basis, we argue that the very nature of activity theory relies on establishing a bridge between theory and practice. On the one hand, [...] the study of higher mental functions was made possible by turning to the observation of concrete life situations. On the other hand, transformations of real practices are promoted while research within activity theory is performed. In this sense, we identify a dual role of practice in the works of the founders. From a theoretical point of view, practice is the epistemological source of knowledge, and it is their very concrete involvement in practice and activism that characterizes the lives and contributions of the founders (Sannino, et. all., 2009, p.7).

In activity theory, practice is reproducible and is an action that creates objects. This can be described through the process of internalization and externalization, which activity theory recognizes as two basic processes continuously enacted at all levels of human activity:

Internalization is related to reproduction of culture; externalization as creation of new artifacts makes possible its transformation. These two processes are inseparably intertwined. Roy Bhaskar, elaborating on the notion of emancipatory social activity, comes to essentially the same conclusion. “It is no longer true to say that human agents create it [the society]. Rather we must say they reproduce or transform it. That is to say, if society is already made, then any concrete human praxis, if you like, act of objectivation, can only modify it; and the totality of such acts sustain or change it. It is not the product of their activity (any more that their actions are completely determined by it). [...] People do not create society, for it always exists for them” (Engstrom, Miettinen, and Gitai 1999, p.10).

This inside/outside binary is firmly established in activity theory: practice is clearly external. Engstrom, Miettinen, and Gitai (1999) states this concisely, saying that activity theory places an “emphasis on mediation of human action by cultural artifacts” (1999, p.11). One object that is produced through this practice is *community*.

James R. Taylor (2009) draws on the work of Algirdas Greimas to problematize one element he deems particularly weak in activity theory; the concept of community. Taylor agrees with Engstrom, et.al’s assertion that community is an “outcome”, not just a situating context. He says, “All activity is realized in performance, in a mixed environment of ‘helpers’ (*adjuvants*, in the French) who are both material (‘tools’) and human” (p.230). These “helpers” help to construct activity and are in turn recursively constructed. Taylor’s aim is to further trouble the construction of community. However, as this work is taken up in the study of performance in education, one must make an

important observation. If community is an *object* created through practice, then it is also subject to the economy of production and reproduction.

One interview question I asked participants highlighted this tendency of this particular active learning theory to rely on an economy of production. The question, “What skills or benefits do you think involvement in the TEDxUniversity organization provides for students?” tapped into the possible performance of students within activity theory and exposed the desire of a particular machine. From several participants, I received a list of skills that involved community, but focused on the outcome of the performance:

- “community engagement, personal development, professional development...collaborative and creative partnerships” (Participant 6);
- “if you are a designer, or even if you are not a design student and you have an affinity for design or art, you can enhance your skills because we have programs and flyers and slides and stage design, so not only are you working with a computer, you can work on a stage design, something that you generally don’t get to do unless you are a theater major” (Participant 4);
- “I think one of the best things we offer is an exercise in clear communication. I mean, like articulating your thoughts and being a powerful persuader” (Participant 1).

The desiring-machine powered by activity theory values nameable and marketable products of performance.

However, when interview participants focused on benefits rather than skills, the answers were more robust, linking the “doing” of the task to the community as a whole.

Participant 1 expanded on the aforementioned acquired skills of articulation and persuasion and put them to work in community:

I think for me, it's been the experience of having to sit in a meeting with someone and think on my feet, or have to respond to a topic I am not familiar with, or have to quickly think about how can you say something better? Can you be clearer?

[...] The practice of having to sit face to face with someone and talk about intellectual things or something they really care about and not only create something, create a product that they are proud of, but also be able to maintain a feeling in the room (Participant 1).

The difference of the answers depending upon which word in the question triggered the response was staggering. "Skills" triggered answers that demonstrated the product of the performance; "benefits" triggered relational answers that highlighted intra-action and difference within the community. The theory behind language matters; a machine powered by a "contribution" rather than a product creates a different type of learning experience focused more on community and relations.

In summation, "performance" in activity theory is as a mode of production and reproduction. In this case, performance is used as a mode of *reproduction*. When community is an outcome of this mode of performance, it is then a measurable entity. It is measurable in quantity, quality, and distinctive features. At that point it can be determined whether or not the product of the performance is valuable. If so, then the performance can be determined as positive and productive. If not, then the performance can be determined as faulty, and the elements of the unproductive performance can be replaced to produce a more favored outcome. While the element of co-constitution of the

performance and the community is not a necessarily a negative effect, in this way, activity theory falls short. Thus we move on to another possible desiring-machine for performance, engaged learning theory.

### **Engaged Learning Theory and performance**

Performance offers opportunity for space of both disappearance and engagement of the subject. This disappearance of the subject is neither concrete nor objectifiable and, therefore, not reproducible. Hence, one might surmise that the ontology of performance proposed by Phelan would be evident this theory. Yet there is a problem: namely, flow—a benchmark of engaged learning—is not a state but an *affect* of engagement. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, “Affect is the active discharge of emotion, the counterattack, whereas feeling is an always displaced, retarded, resisting emotion. Affects are like projectiles just like weapons; feelings are introceptive like tools” (p.399). Affect is not an emotion but a set of forces, investments, logics, relations, and practices of subjectivation that are the conditions of possibility for emotion (Lundberg, 2009, p.390). Spinoza (2001, p.158) describes affect as “a confused idea by which the mind affirms of its body, or any part of it, a greater or less power of existence than before” (p.158). This confusion is what “moves us” according to Hickey-Moody (2013, p.79). Yet, that confusion actually functions as difference. Flow is not the normal state of life. It is a moment of difference and intensity, of force and relations.

There are some aspects of flow that will help us understand how flow (or rather engagement) is ontologically different from performance. There are seven conditions that, according to Csikszentmihalyi, seem to be present in flow:

There's this focus that, once it becomes intense, leads to a sense of *ecstasy*, a sense of *clarity*; you know exactly what you want to do from one moment to the other; you get *immediate feedback*. You know that *what you need to do is possible* to do, even though difficult, and sense of *time disappears*, you *forget yourself*, you feel *a part of something larger*. And once the conditions are present, what you are doing becomes worth doing for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004, TED, emphasis added).

Flow can occur within performance, but also within practice, play, or any activity that resonates with the actor. Engagement theory is really a conceptual framework for the production of the affect of engagement (called flow). Thus, this affect of engagement seems on the surface to fit with the ontology of performance proposed. But here, again, performance turns into a vehicle for *possibilities* for flow; the ontology of learning and performance are not changed by flow or engaged learning. This type of learning is not consistently conducive to an ontological reorientation of experience.

The need for this existential experience beyond self, beyond body is a desire-machine. There is an intensity that leads to a sense of euphoria, or at the very least nostalgia, about how in the moment, one knows exactly what to do from one moment to the other; the performance provides immediate feedback. Even though the task or performance may feel challenging or difficult, a sense of time disappears. The performer forgets herself and feels a part of something larger. In fact, flow seems to create possibilities for a "junkie" affect. TEDsters often call themselves "idea junkies". Even just watching TED Talks for some "idea junkies" can produce this sense of flow, belonging, or euphoria.

Several of my interview participants described moments of flow that occurred within their experience of working with the TEDxUniversity organization and events. Each of these responses were prompted by the question about the participants favorite memories related to their involvement. Thus, while the momentary experience produced flow, the reflection upon the experience does not detail evidence of a significant change in the ontology of learning.

- “Like in 2015 when we lost a presenter, and we could not find him. And we needed to find him. So the solution was I handed my car keys to a student and said, ‘I don’t care where you go, but don’t come back until he is with you.’ [laughs] And there he went to find the presenter.” (Participant 2).
- “I mean, I can get so proud about how many views we have [on the internet] and whatever. But to what end? That doesn’t get us to where we want to be which is that in-room experience.” (Participant 7).
- So last year, I was opening the event [...] I was greeting everyone in the audience and we had our event at the largest auditorium on campus. And the bright lights were on my and I was so nervous. I get super nervous whenever I am in front of a lot of people, but I couldn’t see anything in the audience. And I was talking and I had to take a deep breath and kind of started over, but I can remember everything in that moment, but it was amazing looking into the darkness and seeing nothing and then seeing a few faces as my eyes got accustomed to everything; it was just like, holy crap. There are 1500 people here at the event” (Participant 4).
- “Another moment would be at TEDActive, the last day, there was a party on top of a mountain at this lodge, and I remember just singing and talking and dancing

with amazing people that I had gotten to know over the past week” (Participant 4).

Engaged learning needs continual reterritorialization because flow is not sustainable or even powerful enough to provide an opportunity for a shift in ontology. Experiential learning theory offers different possibilities for engagement with performance.

### **Experiential Learning and performance**

Experiential learning theory has been pushed aside in many realms of education in favor of empiricism and positivism, yet it can provide a much needed corrective to the rationalism and behaviorism that can reform the economy of reproduction into one that values creativity, invention, and engagement. Experiential learning is a hybrid space of learning that can take advantage of different aspects of each. It offers a productive outlet in which to think about performance that allows the specific ontology of performance detailed in Phelan’s work.

This multidimensional approach to learning and teaching through experience offers an excellent space for the incorporation of three aspects of performative ontology: the relation/disappearance of the subject/object, the inability for reproduction, and the impossibility of preservation. Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) come closest to making an overt connection between experiential learning and these aspects of performance. In order to make this connection clear, the word performance has been placed in brackets in several locations to replace the word experience:

For the sake of simplicity in discussion learning from [performance],  
[performance] is sometimes referred to as if it were singular and unlimited by  
time or place. Much [performance], however, is multifaceted, multi-layered and



so inextricably connected with other [performances] that it is impossible to locate temporally or spatially. It almost defies analysis as the act of analysis inevitably alters the [performance] and the learning that flows from it (as cited in Beard and Wilson, 2002, p.15).

This multiplicity of experience is embodied through performance, thus illuminating the unlimited possibilities this theory can offer to institutions of higher education.

The ontology of performance described in Phelan's work is incompatible with activity or engagement theory because performance does not exist in those theories in the same way as in experiential learning. In activity theory and engagement theory performance is transformed into a mode of reproduction of certain objects, a tool for measuring change, or a vehicle for the production of a particular affect. The performative aspect of experiential learning, however, is compatible with the ontology of performance explained by Phelan; experiential learning does not produce a product, it cannot be grasped and leaves no bodily trace; it cannot be reproduced or quantitatively measured. Experiential learning theory already contains this type of performance.

### **Subjectivity as Performance**

"Becoming a subject is coming to hold certain things as true about oneself, saying certain things about oneself, and intentionally acting in certain ways" (Prado, 2000, p.80). We are all subjects in many ways; however, the ways in which we subject ourselves are not stable. Each affiliation, experience, and involvement usually calls for the constitution of some kind of subject. This study is one of the ways the organization of TED and TEDx offers language, values, beliefs, and practices that constitute the TED-subject. There is power in the constitution of the TED subject and value in the world; but this

power and value are not stable. This particular exploration investigates how subjects within this context are constituted by their performance, with a focus on how performing this particular subjectivity offers opportunities for ontological freedom. Thus in many ways, the following is a study in subjectivity; yet to focus on that aspect would be to draw power away from the topic at hand. Rather, I will highlight the productive possibilities for experiential learning through performing this particular subjectivity.

### **Experience/Performance as a Diffractive Apparatus**

One way to study specific instances of experience and performance in the curriculum of higher education is to use the concept of diffraction to explore how students are affected and changed by their experiences. Barad (2007) provides a simple definition of diffraction: “Simply stated, diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction” (p.74). Diffraction is a methodology that allows for ontological indeterminacy. For example, in the two-slit diffraction grating, the atoms behave like waves rather than particles when they encounter an obstruction: “But atoms everywhere show themselves as particles. And proper particles don’t go through multiple slits at once!” (Barad, 2014, p.180). The two-slit experiment, therefore, enables atoms—which normally perform as particles—to behave as waves. Therefore, this change is brought about through performativity, not essentialism. Are atoms waves or particles? The answer depends on how they perform when encountered by a distinct apparatus.

In this case, the diffractive apparatus or the obstruction is involvement in TED and TEDx organizations. When participants pass through this apparatus, or rather experience involvement in this organization, they perform in certain ways. That

performance demonstrates ontological change. Change is hard to identify; diffraction provides a methodology that allows for the effects of those changes to be mapped; “Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of difference appear” (Haraway, 1992, p.300, as cited in Barad, 2014, p.172).

In this study, involvement in TEDx events at a curricular or organizational level serve as a diffractive apparatus in the lives of students. The following vignettes highlight the experience of involvement in TEDx University events. I have organized these vignettes to highlight ontological change as described by my interview participants.

### **Vignette #1: Change in Purpose or Path**

Judith Butler (1995) explains "to be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. 'Agency' is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed" (p. 135). The discourse within TED and TEDx organizations can not only communicate messages about values within the community, but also exhibit where there are fertile areas of change and disruption. The term “life changing” is a common within the TED and TEDx community.

#### 15 TED Talks That Will Change Your Life - Mashable

[mashable.com/2013/07/08/ted-talks-change-your-life/](https://mashable.com/2013/07/08/ted-talks-change-your-life/) ▼  
Jul 8, 2013 - Share it with us in the comments. Jill Bolte Taylor: A Stroke of Insight. Brené Brown: The Power of Vulnerability. Elizabeth Gilbert: Your Elusive Creative Genius. Meg Jay: Why 30 Is Not the New 20. Amy Cuddy: Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are. Dan Pink: The Puzzle of Motivation. Deb Roy: The Birth of a Word.

#### 17 TED Talks Guaranteed To Change Your Life - BuzzFeed

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/.../lets-give-ted-somethin-to-talk-about-how-about-love> ▼  
Jun 23, 2016 - Here are the brilliant results. "The Price Of Shame" — Monica Lewinsky. "My Year Of Saying Yes To Everything" — Shonda Rhimes. "Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are" — Amy Cuddy. "We Should All Be Feminists" — Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. "To This Day..." "How The Worst Moments In Our Lives Make Us Who We Are" — Andrew ...

#### A better you | Playlist | TED.com

[https://www.ted.com/playlists/8/a\\_better\\_you](https://www.ted.com/playlists/8/a_better_you) ▼  
Ready for a change? These ... (and heartfelt) talks offer ideas and inspiration for all aspects of your life, from ... Most of us will do anything to avoid being wrong.

#### 10 Inspiring TED Talks That Will Completely Refresh Your Perspective ...

[www.lifehack.org/.../10-inspiring-ted-talks-will-completely-refresh-perspective-life.ht...](http://www.lifehack.org/.../10-inspiring-ted-talks-will-completely-refresh-perspective-life.ht...) ▼  
Some of the most inspiring TED Talks that will greatly motivate you and positively change your perspective on life.

#### These 9 Motivational TED Talks Will Change Your Life - Lovin.ie

<https://lovin.ie/news/.../the-9-most-motivational-ted-talks-that-will-change-your-life> ▼  
Jan 7, 2017 - There's no time like the start of summer for making major changes to your life and the way you think. We all have those intentions every year ...

#### Top 10 TED Talks That Could Change Your Life - Lifehacker

Figure 36. Screen shot. TED will “change your life”.

(Screenshot 6/21/2017 of Life Changing TED Talks Google Search)

Much of the that language is hyperbolic; for example, after watching Shonda Rhimes 2016 TED Talk, one of the students in the theater exclaimed, “My life just got changed!” What is usually meant by this talk of “life-changing” is that the student or participant experienced something powerful or inspirational. However, involvement in TEDx at the university level can actually trigger life-path altering opportunities.

“When I came to work at [my university] in 2009, [they] were holding their very first event [TEDxUniversity] event. And for me, it was a very profound experience of being at a place in my life where I was looking for something and really was kind of struggling with my next move...my very first [TEDxUniversity] event was absolutely life changing. [...] And it’s been really...even though I didn’t start it in 2009, it wasn’t my idea, it’s been something that I hold...it’s just the highlight of my year. Because the way the

kids react to the speakers, at that age, with that unfiltered, raw curiosity and joy, it's just so much different than what we do at any other event.” (Participant 7).

Involvement in TEDx at this university offered this participant new professional opportunities of which they were completely unaware. Nearly eight years later, this participant not only plans yearly TEDx University and TEDYouth events, but works closely with the main TED organization to plan events and new initiatives.

Another participant expressed that involvement in TED completely changed their career path.

“I reassessed what my purpose in life is; it's not to *become a doctor*, even though that is a noble and amazing profession. I want to do so much more. Personally, I think healthcare should be a basic human right, so I want to *work towards that* in my life. And I don't think I would have necessarily had the thoughts or the actions that I have had that led to that unless it was for TED. [...] I don't know if I will have wealth or stability in my career, but seeing everyone else at TED and looking at what amazing things my friends are doing, my TED friends, I am ok with that uncomfortability of not knowing if I will be successful or whatnot.” (Participant 4, emphasis added for analysis).

Note that the language used here—“become a doctor” and “work towards that”—indicates an ontological shift. One term has an end goal or a product (“become a doctor”); the other is a continual becoming (“work towards”). When this participant began college, they had a vision of getting the appropriate degree and experience necessary to do a certain job—become a doctor. After one becomes a doctor, they *are* a doctor. They choose to repeat that identity over and over, each day “being” a doctor. However, a

fundamental shift occurred that allows this student to realize the desire behind the initial goal of becoming a doctor, which is the basic human right of accessible healthcare. Upon exploration of this idea, the student realized there are many ways to pursue this passion—healthcare, public policies, politics, law, social work, advocacy, etc... Therefore, the impetus to help others is to become the type of person who continuously performs actions in line with this goal, no longer just to become *something* as a stable identity. Identity in this case is continuously ripe for change and constantly in flux.

The participant's language also indicates an ontological shift of the in the definition of success. Success is no longer what you have or are, but what you continuously do. May be even what you are willing to try. This is a larger definition of success that merely "I have money and a good job" which provides a clear end-goal, a picture of what success looks like. This ontological reassessment of success allows of many opportunities for success, which in this case is dependent upon welfare of others. Thus, success is measured in relation, not as product or result.

Identity is something that is also formed in relation, and is not viewed as something so stable and real. This participant laughingly described the personae that they must perform in order to make TEDx events function.

"I have such fond memories of the bustle each event day and the day before is like the most adrenaline fueled 48 hours. And honestly, it weirds me out. I think I take on this dress rehearsal persona that I never am anywhere else! I never am that person! And then, I'm like wow. Shit happens. It works whenever I become that scary person, you know. It's fun." (Participant 1).

This participant enjoys the ability to perform different identities in relation to the event itself. Therefore, one's identity is not stable in this space. One is free to perform any role to fulfill a need. Additionally, participants often described the specific ways that TEDx involvement has impacted their lives.

“There are so many ways my life has changed because of TED. I slowed down and experienced—instead of rushing on a daily basis. I’ve learned to slow down and appreciate the beauty of life. And most people do grow through college in many ways, but I think that TED has catalyzed so much more growth for me. I feel like I have become a different human being than I was four short years ago and a lot of that has to do with TED and the opportunities that has provided me.”

(Participant 4).

Catalyst is also a commonly used word in this community. It's generally a referential word that indicates some sort of beginning, but also acknowledges that at the beginning, it was already happening. In many ways, these ontological changes are illustrated by new habits or traits that participants continually practice. Foucault explained these as technologies of the self, "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1982/1988, p. 18). Therefore subjects within the discourse of TED acknowledge the ability to continually constitute themselves as subjects of TED while allowing their identity as an individual to shift as needed in the community. This kind of participation also allows participants to consider the transient nature of organizational involvement.

“[TEDxUniversity involvement] has connected me widely across campus and [the community]. I don’t think TED is forever. I think there will come a year when it is done. But if I can make as many connections between now and then as possible, then those connections will benefit me for whatever the next thing is. There is always going to be something.” (Participant 2).

Once one is comfortable with performance, there is always somewhere, somehow to perform. When one understands the power of performative ontology, no longer are they bound by particular structures, like TED or even the bonds of higher education. They are free to be nimble in their approach to new environments and situations.

### Vignette #2: Change in community



**Emily Dardaman** with Ian Webb and 19 others.

March 26 at 12:46am · 🌐

Four years ago, [Kate Devlin](#) told me to join her TED conference. It would be cool, she said, and I might like the people.

What she didn't tell me: that we'd spend delirious days and nights sweating the details. That sometimes, presenters wouldn't play by the rules. That our event would triple in size.

She didn't tell me I'd find a family here. A fiancé, bridesmaid, and many dear friends who will stand witness to our marriage.

\*\*\*

Every year after we take down the round red rug, there's a moment when the frenzy stops. We collapse over dinner and a drink too many, and the night always ends the same way: "I love you. I love you. I love you all."

What you see in this picture is a rainbow pile of humans. We've all got different majors, talents, races and religions. But each of us are here because we're hungry for ideas—ideas that will bring healing to our society and help create the future we want to see.

If you share this hunger, you belong in this picture. We are [TEDxUGA](#) and we love you.



[Mollie Simon](#)





Figure 37. Screen shot of a Facebook post by Emily Dardaman; picture by Mollie Simon. March 26, 2017.

One implication of students engaged in a performative classroom experience is that those subjects create new communities based in creativity, invention, and engagement, rather than proximity, common interests, or professional roles. Why should this matter to institutions of higher education? When learners participate in communities that value creative invention, problem solving, and performance, they experience a greater sense of belonging, commitment, and success. This is of critical importance to institutions of higher education as students who feel a part of a community have a higher retention and matriculation rate. Most opportunities to build strong community bonds happen outside of the classroom: athletic events, Panhellenic societies, cultural/religious organizations, professional clubs and student government. (Bureau, et. al., 2011). What if an institution could harness that same power of community and commitment in a classroom setting as part of the curriculum?

A productive tension exists in the examination of community creation within TEDx organizations, especially within a university context. In many ways, TEDx offers an opportunity for students to find “their tribe,” or a group of like-minded people who can push individuals into new areas of growth because of similar ideologies and commitments.

- “And so it’s been the connections to that kind of like-minded community where you just kind of, you know, when you find people like that, you stay in touch with them and you never know how they can connect you and help you later on in life.” (Participant 7).
- “...all of the kids are so close. They get so excited to see each other, but they see each other every week. You would think they hadn’t seen each other in months. They get so excited each week to see each other. And even the TED Alumni stay involved and come back and are constantly sending us love. You know, it’s like a family.” (Participant 2).
- “[TEDxUniversity involvement] connected me with the beginnings of a tribe of people, of thinkers and doers, who have inspired me since the moment I met them, and have kept me thinking and challenging me on what it means to be passionate and do something I am passionate about.” (Participant 6).

Many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to find these like-minded individuals who were interested in both “thinking” and “doing”. “Thinkers and doers” is a common phrase with TED affiliates (TED.com, Speakers, n.d.). “Like-minded” in this case does not indicate common beliefs in anything other than the openness of thinking and doing; part of the identity of TED is the fact that it is important to incorporate both

the intellectual (thinking) and the physical/material (doing). Neither idea is privileged over another, but they must be together and they must be performed in community. Connections and interactions are valued in this space. This is rhizomatic behavior; these connections disappear and reemerge. One participant shares how they navigate these rhizomatic connections.

“It’s amazing to be a part of a community where I honestly feel like anywhere in the world, I could reach out to someone. And I’ve done that. I’ve worked abroad in Southeast Asia, and when I was in Viet Nam, I just reached out to a TEDx organizer in one of the cities [...] and they responded, ‘You know, you probably don’t want to come [to the event], because it will all be in Vietnamese, but here’s my information and we can meet up.’ And they ended up connecting me with this family that I ended up with as a host family for a couple of days. And they connected me with people up the coast, and I just traveled up the coast of Vietnam just staying with different people in the TED community. [...] It was because I was connected with the TEDx community, but it had nothing to do with TED. I mean, it was just cultural competency and learning from the world around me, but if I hadn’t had TED as, like, a linking point, I wouldn’t have been sleeping in the homes of these Vietnamese families, you know, for FREE!”

(Participant 6).

This is a relational, dynamic relationship between a tribe of people who think and do together with connections all over the world. Even an unformed connection—a potential connection—has power in this space.

On the other hand, TEDx offers opportunities to be in community with those from whom one is very different. This organization has the ability to throw people and ideas together in totally new configurations.

- “One of the main things they are learning is how to work with someone they would not normally work with. In college, they do a lot of group projects and a lot of teamwork, but there is very rarely a 60-year-old [University] alumni ‘on their team’. So how do you work with that individual, how do you work with their busy schedule, how do you communicate professionally with that individual? How do you cheer on that individual when they are doing great, but how do you also be the bearer of bad news when they need to make a change?” (Participant 2).
- “The practice of having to sit face to face with someone and talk about intellectual things or something they really care about and not only create something, create a product they are proud of, but also to be able to maintain a feeling in the room. [...] That’s another thing. Managing difficult situations. Dealing with difficult people. That is something I have gotten a lot better at because I have had to deal with people who are not necessarily like me.” (Participant 1).
- For being a large, research one, mid-western predominately white institution, this [TEDxUniversity] group is one of, if not the most, diverse student organizations that I have personally ever been exposed to. [...] But it is a very diverse group with all different races, ethnicities, nationalities, countries of origin, all represented. And all different majors too. The last time we taught the class in 2014, we had a communications major, marketing major, two neuroscience [majors], a pre-med, and a graphic design [major]. I mean it really spans the

gamut. And so I think one of the huge benefits for students is being able to reach out across cultures and background and even majors to get to know students from all different spaces, working towards a common goal.” (Participant 5).

Many clubs and organizations at the university level form around common identity groups or causes. However, TEDx organizations gather around the power of ideas. This type of organization opens the possibility for interdisciplinary interests and diversity of members. In addition, the ability to have inter-generational relationships and the space where hierarchy is flattened is an opportunity for ontological shifts in learning. Performance in this space disrupts and reorders existing authority structures. The power now lies in the relations and interactions between team members instead of a hierarchy. Therefore, difference is as valued as like-mindedness in this space. TEDx events seek out different voices to highlight; they value new ideas and new ways to do things; they want to get new voices out on stage.

### **Vignette #3: Change in Boundary-drawing Practices**

Another way that involvement in TEDx experiential learning offered opportunity for ontological change is in boundary drawing practices. The interviews provided information about two main boundary-drawing practices that different from typical university settings. The first is the easy incorporation of interdisciplinarity. Universities are organized by college or discipline. The rise in interdisciplinary certificate programs have bridged this gap considerably; however, many opportunities for experiential learning are discipline-based (internships and curriculum study abroad experiences). Involvement in TEDx organizations and participation in TEDx events can re-draw the lines between disciplines since TED events are interdisciplinary in nature.

“So I think breadth is what makes it so compelling and so important because it exposes students to new ideas that they might not otherwise hear in their classes. To be a certain major, you are going to take this type of course. And on top of the general electives and the things they are they are going to have to take in their core in the first few years, they may not have a lot of exposure outside of their department or their major and their courses. [...] The expansive nature of what TED does, I think is what is so appealing to see. And what draws such a diverse crowd and that’s really important. I mean, our civilization today, and allowing for multiple voices to be heard and allowing for different perspectives to be celebrated, and I think TED really resonates with that.” (Participant 5).

In typical college curricula, students are often only exposed to interdisciplinary experiences their first two years of college. However, with more and more entering freshmen transferring with most of their first two years complete due to AP credit and dual enrollment, colleges need to plan to accommodate for these missed interdisciplinary experiences. For example, freshmen at UGA transfer in an average of 12-27 hours of AP/IB/Dual enrollment credits (University of Georgia, Admissions Fast Facts, n.d.) Performance related involvement with organizations like TEDx can offer this transformative experience.

Another area where boundaries can easily be redrawn by performative experience is in our community. Community is broad term, but here I mean specifically expanding the places and types of people to which one is exposed. One of the interview participants had the unique experience of organizing a TEDx event in a local prison. Normally, university students do not have direct contact with a large population of

incarcerated inmates; however, this opportunity provided a seminal foray into social justice and community work for this participant.

“The men I met through that experience changed my life. From a TED perspective, I love the idea of leveraging the conversation about social change through such a powerful platform. [...] But I mean, that whole experience has been one of, not only just TED, but the entire reality of, like, being in a prison, learning from that, just totally shifting the way I see my life and my world, you know? [...] It just really hard for me sometimes to articulate it because it was so transformative and it was completely...it gave me a new lens to look at everything and to act, and to appreciate, you know, my reality. And I am really glad that TED was the catalyst for that. I have the men incarcerated, [the correctional institution], and my mentors who have kind of come out of the woodwork throughout the process, I have them to thank for that. I just could not be more grateful. Because it has made me a more dynamic and thoughtful person in the process.” (Participant 6).

The realization that these performative spaces and experiences have the power of ontological change is dynamic in the lives of these participants. There is a considerable shift in who the student works to become after this encounter with these men. The language “transformative” and “changed my life” indicate this ontological change. Acknowledging this power of experience and performance can push into more powerful space and help participants lean into this kind of experiential learning. This intra-action in this new environment acts as a diffractive apparatus. On the other side of this experience,

the participant noted a change in behavior and character. Simply, this is evidence of an ontological shift, not just the acquisition of knowledge.

One aspect of boundary-drawing is within the digital communities we inhabit. Social media allows us accessibility to nearly anyone, anywhere. However, the performative experience of TEDx involvement provides a context for redrawing the boundaries of our digital community. One participant explores how their experience differs from other university students without this performative platform:

“And the friendships I have created around the world. [...] I was able to go to TEDActive last year and the year before because I was able to get the university to pay for it. So because of that, I have friends from all over the world. [...] So that is something that most of my peers can’t say—that they have a friend in every single time-zone in the world. So the worldly connection I get is amazing. So after I went to TEDActive and made friends, I friended everyone on Facebook. So instead of just seeing English in my feed, I saw Arabic and Spanish and Portuguese and French and so many different languages. If I were to open up one of my roommate’s Facebooks, I would probably not see that. And because of this global community, not only is there lots of worldliness, but there is this sheer amount of knowledge and all these people are go-getters.”  
(Participant 4).

This participant’s experiences allowed them to open to a significantly different social media experience because of the new connections and relations made through their performance in this space. Thus, experiential learning in this case is not a one-time experience, but opened the door to continual learning and renewal.



#### **Vignette #4: Change in learning/teaching**

“I had never been to [a TEDx event] before; I had only watched TEDTalks. And I can remember sitting in the audience and going, ‘This is what the university should be every day of the week!’ Exposing people who are interested in ideas to innovative ideas.” (Participant 3).

After attending that TEDx event, the participant above came back to their campus and immediately began the process of starting a new TEDx organization. In the university setting, involvement in TEDx organizations have the opportunity to significantly alter how teachers teach and how students (and teachers) learn. One participant discovered that they were in fact a hands-on learner due to the performative nature of the TEDx course.

“You know, it’s refreshing to be around people an in a process that is pretty much holistically about learning, from all sides of it. It’s a kind of hands-on learning process that I have found necessary for my education because I wasn’t finding it elsewhere. And I think that is what attracts some of our students. Because to me, it’s like the class I am taking [the TEDx class] is a hands-on experience. But I also hands-on learning about the [topics presented by the speakers]. I have to learn about these topics to be able to help the person who believes in them.” (Participant 1).

Hands-on is code word for performance and practice. This is not just an experience; the students are literally are doing it all—event planning, talk curation, organization, fund raising, everything. This is performance because these interactions happen in the moment. Therefore this hands on nature of learning in relation with so many different

people and things; the actions are repeatable, but the experience is never reproducible because of the ever-changing relations. Subjects are mutually constituted in relation. The learning happens in all directions; students learn how to become planners and curators through the process of planning and curating. They learn from the speakers and from each other about the myriad of topics discussed at these events. This same participant expands on a new-found desire for this new kind of learning.

“I think I found [TEDxUniversity] at a point in my college career where I needed it. I was at a gap with my classes, I was right before my real major classes started and I was coasting by and bored in classes and I just thought this isn’t why I came to college! To be sort of doing homework for a class that I don’t really care about. I think that is the educational benefit that is has had for me. I think I never really considered myself a hands on learner, mostly just because I never really thought about the fact that I needed that.” (Participant 1).

Performative experiential learning allows for the connection between the thinking, doing, and becoming. It’s an ontological shift in learning.

Similarly, teachers are also changed because of this performance-based course. Rosi Braidotti (2010) explores the possibility of “hybrid” social identities and that “the new modes of belonging they enact may constitute the starting point for mutual and respective accountability and pave the way for an ethical regrounding of social participation and community building” (p.204). In this environment, teachers step back to take a hands-off approach to teaching so that students have room in this space to try things. This creates a hybrid identity of leading/learning that puts instructors in a space of productive disequilibrium.

“But the students were very much involved in it and I had to learn to take a step back and allow the kids to do it. [...] I work with a great colleague here [...] and a couple of times she had to pull me aside to tell me I was pushing too hard, that I was leading too much, and to let the students lead. And she really worked with me; it’s embarrassing after I have been teaching so long, for her to have to teach me how to teach. But she really helped me kind of learn when to back off and when to allow people to take things on their own.” (Participant 3).

In this space, instructors can see how knowledge is being used—they can immediately tell when that knowledge is put to work. Sometimes that knowledge is put to work incorrectly.

“I think when I get uncomfortable is when I hear a student say, ‘Where is your ethos?’ and I’m like, ‘I don’t even know if you know how to use that word!’ [laughs] Ethos is not a checkbox. That’s the line I always hear and I am like, God! I need to teach this better” (Participant 1).

In this way, students are able to perform their knowledge in ways where the instructor can shape that knowledge in more constructive ways. This allows students to learn to lead and to become leaders. However, there is no doer before the deed (Nietzsche, 1887, p.29); students are not leaders until they begin to lead. Teachers in this context can allow for students to become leaders within the unique assemblage of agents. When students are allowed to lead in this way, a safe environment is created for experiential learning. In this way, educational objectives lean away from production and into performance: “They are learning failure and how that feels.” (Participant 3). Students are able to perform success and perform failure, often in relation to others.

Those relations are the main difference with this type of experiential learning. Below, a participant discusses how teamwork in this performative context is different.

“Every time we do one of these events, there is a problem with teamwork that students realize just because someone says they want to be on a team, doesn’t mean they understand exactly HOW to work on a team. So it gives them a different way of teamwork than they experience in class.” (Participant 3).

In this type of experiential learning, success and failure is tied to so many other factors outside of themselves. In addition, the product of their hard work is often made public in the form of a posted TED talk. While the students are often not the speakers themselves, their work has helped create the online product. Therefore students have to continuously perform their own ideas of success and failure in relation to the public.

“...when they see a talk go online that they have invested six months in curating, you know it’s delivered and it’s great, and it goes online and we are so excited, and it’s got ten thousand views and you’ve got three haters who are posting comments. They see that a lot because there are TED haters. [...] It teaches them to have a tough skin. It teaches them that haters are going to hate and there will be a hater everywhere in life. And they can’t take it personally. Even if they wrote that script 15 times with the presenter and it came off well.” (Participant 2).

Strangely enough, this ability to perform in relation to others, to try out their own definitions of success and failure are related to a new embodiment of freedom.

“Freedom is thus not primarily a capacity of mind but of body: it is linked to the body’s capacity for movement, and thus its multiple possibilities of action. Freedom is not an

accomplishment granted by the grace or good will of the other but is attained only through the struggle with matter, the struggle of bodies to become more than they are, a struggle that occurs not only on the level of the individual but also of the species” (2010, p.152). Grosz definition of freedom (originating from Henri Bergson’s understanding of freedom) is key to the importance of experiential learning. Often in experiential learning endeavors, the goal is to provide a similar experience for all students. Universities regulate and mitigate that experience until it becomes a “boxed” experience for students. While the struggle to experience experiential learning opportunities does not necessarily change the species as Grosz mentions (she is talking about a larger view of freedom than discussed here), it does emphasize the communal nature of experience.

### **Conclusion**

*“[My employers] love what I have with TED and I know that was a big part of why I was hired; it was all of those experiences of organizing events and fundraising and the personal development that goes into it.” (Participant 6).*

What is lost in the standardization of content and teaching methods is the emergent opportunity of experience. Experiential education is not a new idea. The concepts of field education and apprenticeship are ancient tactics of immersive learning. Yet, as modern education models began to take root, a split between practical job training and classical education emerged. Experience and experiences are very difficult to measure; thus with this split became the necessity to measure and manage classical learning through the use of standardized testing.

However, as a university education became more ubiquitous and college degrees aren’t enough to land graduates good paying jobs, it becomes clear that students need to

make themselves stand out through experience. Even in today's rage for measurement and assessment, universities are seeing what John Dewey famously called the "greatest pedagogical fallacy", which is "the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time" (1938, p.49). Thus, institutions of higher education are taking hold of this idea, to purposefully incorporate it into the curriculum of higher education to provide students with skills that are specific, identifiable, and adaptable.

As universities receive students who are the products of mass-reproducible knowledge, the realization that churning out graduates with no real experience is a problem. Both universities and employers realize that skills other than knowledge and training are the key to successful students and employees. Traits like grit, resilience, and adaptability are more difficult to measure. Even more difficult is the ability to place students in safe environments where they are challenged in ways other than in knowledge of a subject. The rush to correct this problem has caused universities to lean too heavily into a solution that is easy to count, manage, and control.

The reality is that experiential learning that challenges students in this way may be immeasurable to a great extent. But this is not unimportant work. This example of instruction involves undergraduate students in a learning opportunity through collaboration with the organization of TED and TEDx events. This performative classroom space offers a multilayered experience unique among typical curricular offerings. While this example offers opportunity for analysis, this particular partnership should be an example of possibilities, not just form or content. The collaboration with TED described here does not offer a prescription for action or an endorsement that this particular partnership will work at every institution. It is important to begin here with a

mindset of creation, invention, and engagement rather than reproduction. One must not ask how it can be done exactly in this manner, falling into a pattern of reproduction. The question is rather, what partnerships, collaborations, or relationships can offer opportunities for experiential learning? What *types* of collaboration is ultimately profitable for the institution as a whole? What types serve as a connection to these communities and offer opportunities for relationships to be forged between students, the local community, and the global community at large?

Why worry about ontological diversity rather than knowledge accumulation? Why is this a problem? Because the values employers want are ontological values. The values that create healthy citizens are ontological issues; they are not knowledge problems. Methods of diffraction allow for a new understanding of experience. Knowledge can be infinitely reproduced; experience can lead to new knowledge or extend prior knowledge, yet knowledge is not guaranteed to lead to experience. Isolating experience as a list of places visited and tasks completed must be resisted. Rather, experience can be viewed as a relational web of interconnected entities. The relationships between people, between humans and machines, the interaction of humans, machines, and nature. We must account for the effect of a curated and cultivated life, as well as the things that happen that sweeps us up, forever changing the path of being. Thinking of experience like this allows us to encompass the complicated nature of how interactions can cause ontological shifts.

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## PROPULSION

### Theory-Method-Living as a Quantum Entanglement

I have described elsewhere that this dissertation is organized into prolonged intensities called plateaus after Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. I discovered that some plateaus behaved differently than others. Two plateaus in particular, what one would typically call the introduction and conclusion, required an implication of motion. Ontologically, this type of work could not have a beginning or end. I thought for a long time about what to call these two plateaus that would not give the sense of completeness or wholeness, undoing my theoretical work. I came across one word buried deep in Alaimo and Hekman's (2008) *Material Feminisms*. In a chapter about Darwin and Feminism, Elizabeth Grosz (2008) describes Darwin's model of history:

Darwin had provided a model of history that resorts neither to the telos or a priorism of the dialectic, nor to a simple empiricism that sees history simply as the accumulation of variously connected or unconnected events. History is fundamentally open but also regulated within quite strict parameters. There are historical—that is, temporal, genealogical—constraints on what becomes a possible path of biological/cultural effectivity: it is only that which has happened, those beings in existence, now or once, that provide the germs or virtualities whose divergence produces the present and future. That which has happened, the paths of existence actualized, preempt the virtualities that other existences may have brought with them; they set different paths and trajectories

than those that might have been. While time and futurity remains open-ended, the past provides a *propulsion* in directions, unpredictable in advance, that in retrospect have emerged from the unactualized possibilities that it yields. (p.45) (emphasis not in original).

This particular sentence where this concept appears perfectly describes the methodology used for this dissertation. Working in the middle, one acknowledges a past and future, which are in relation and provide tension for the middle, where one does the work of living. Post qualitative inquiry purposefully works to keep the futurity open, to revel in the emergence of unpredictability. But eventually, that unpredictability leads to the emergence of action—thinking and doing—the work of life. We live in the middle, but do not stay in the middle; we are always in motion.

While plateaus allow one to stay awhile and enjoy the intensities of deep thought and play in one area, bodies, minds, time, and the physical world are in constant motion, a site of continuous change. Staying awhile in one place does not ensure stability; in fact, it can multiply difference. This concept of propulsion stuck with me as I considered how to move in and out of a body of middles for this particular work of inquiry.

Propulsion is a concept from physics that describes a means of creating force leading to movement. Forward movement or motion is typically implied by the prefix “pro,” as opposed to repulsion, which acts as a separation (i.e. magnetic polarity). The word comes from the Latin *pellere*, which means to drive, expel, hit, or push. This term implies both multiplicity and movement, often with the expectation of violence.

During this inquiry, I had the opportunity to attend a TED Global conference and TEDx Worship in Geneva, Switzerland (December 2015). The workshop was held at

CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research. We were able to tour the facility, talk with those there, and learn about their experiments, most famously, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).



Figure 38. Wall hanging of the LHC at CERN. Taken December 2015. This is a huge wall-hanging at CERN showing one of the particle physics detectors of the LHC. The real equipment is not accessible to the public. Picture by Jessie Daniels.

The LHC is the collective name for the machine and experiments contained therein. This includes seven particle detectors located at various positions along a 17 mile underground tunnel that crosses the border of France and Switzerland four times, going as deep as 574 feet beneath the surface.



Figure 39. Part of the underground track of the LHC. Picture by Jessie Daniels.

I am far from a physicist, so forgive my unskilled and insufficient layman's description of what happens in the LHC. The tunnel is used as a track for atoms; they are propelled by magnets and other methods of acceleration around this 17 mile track at increasing speeds. The acceleration and motion increases the energy produced by these atoms as they travel around this track and they collide with great force. This violent collision breaks open the atoms into particles, which provide great insight into different elements of the universe never before seen or understood. However, scientists are not just discovering new things about the universe; scientists are discovering that under different conditions, the way they thought things worked, do not always work that way—this is the field of quantum physics, why particles can be in two states at the same time (i.e. wave and particle, per the two-slit experiment). These particles are quite unstable. For example, the Higgs Boson particle discovered by the LHC is only detectable in a certain field; it also has no spin, electric charge, or color charge. It also emerges and then decays into other particles almost immediately. This particle is important because it basically explains why the universe is something, rather than nothing.

Ontologically, the practices of post qualitative inquiry works in a similar fashion. One finds themselves on the track of inquiry; the current and flow of life propels one through certain activities of research, some planned, some emergent. At certain points, usually through the activity of writing, the atoms of inquiry collide, changing states, sometimes so quickly it's difficult to detect. Particles of inquiry shoot in different directions, changing states as they encounter other particles. Some disappear, while others leave traces. We write about those traces; we write about what we think may not be there, or something we think may be undetectable. Mainly, like quantum physicists,

we remain open to the surprise, unpredictability, and wonder the universe has to offer.

This is called theory-method-living.

Thus, what one may call the introduction and conclusion of this dissertation is an act of propulsion, an accelerator that pushes readers into something else. Reading this is the past, what happens next is the future. Unplugging from this machine allows one to plug into something else. With any luck, this piece will leave a trace or hint of existence, pointing to what is new or next. Basically, the importance of this work is that it's something, rather than nothing, and there is no logical or fancy explanation for why that is. But as another particle in this universe, it tells us something about the past and the future. It is time to do something in the in between.

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## Appendices

### **TED, TEDx Involvement Survey**

My name is Jessica Daniels, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia, as well as one of the members of the TEDxUGA advisory committee. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study entitled, “Becoming TED” that examines your local experiences with the organization of TEDxUGA and the larger organization of TED or TEDx. Your participation in this survey indicates your voluntary involvement with this survey. This survey should take no longer than 10-20 minutes. If you do not wish to give consent or participate, please close the survey window. You are eligible to participate in this survey if you are enrolled or have ever been enrolled in the NMIX 4200: TEDx class, a part of the student council, a member of the advisory committee a presenter in the Student Idea Showcase, or the main TEDxUGA event. Yet your participation in this research study is voluntary and will in no way affect your grades or jeopardizes your involvement with this organization or related events. You are also eligible to participate in this survey if you have an interest or affiliation with TED or any TEDx event. However, you must be at least 18 years of age to participate. While I ask for your identification on this survey, your name will be used in no way in my final analysis. I gather your contact information here in case I would like to contact you for a follow up interview or clarify information. If you have further questions, you can contact me at (931) 260.1819 or by email [daniels.jessie@uga.edu](mailto:daniels.jessie@uga.edu). You can also contact the principal investigator for the study, Dr.

Donna Alvermann. She is also in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia, and she can be reached at dalverma@uga.edu or at (706) 542-

2718. If you would like to share this survey with others, please share this link:

[bit.ly/TEDsurvey\\_uga](https://bit.ly/TEDsurvey_uga) Thank you for your participation!

**Last Name**

**First Name**

**Email**

**Please check your affiliation:**

**If you answered "other" to the question above, please describe your affiliation.**

**If you chose that you are affiliated with a local TEDx organization, please indicate your affiliation. (Which organization/event? i.e. TEDxUGA)**



**TEDxSurvey**

**Please describe your role in the TED or TEDx organization or how you are affiliated with TED or the TEDx organization.**

You may only choose one option, so please choose the option that most closely describes your role or choose "other" and provide additional feedback.

**If you answered "other" to the question above, please describe your role with TED or TEDx.**

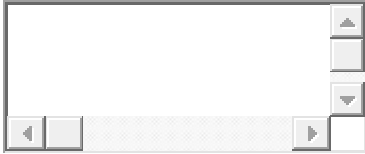
**How long have you been affiliated with TED or a TEDx organization?**

**Briefly explain why you got involved with TED or TEDx.**

**Please describe some of the actual activities in which you have been involved.**

For example: promotional activities, stage design, prepared presenters, made name tags, etc...

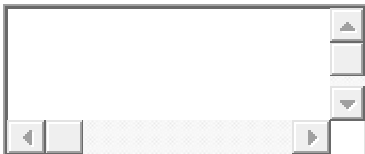
**What has been your most favorite part of your involvement with TED or TEDx?**



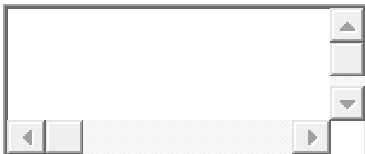
**What has been your least favorite part of your involvement with TED or TEDx?**



**What is your favorite TED talk and why?**



**Any final thoughts on TED, TEDx, or TEDxUGA that you would like to share?**



**Would you be interested in being a participant in a 30 minute interview about your involvement with TED or TEDx?**

As part of this study, I will conduct interviews with some participants. If you would like to be considered, please answer "Yes".



## **Becoming TED Interview Email**

Greetings!

My name is Jessie Daniels and I am conducting a research study about TED, TEDx, and specially involvement in local TEDx events, like TEDxUGA and many others. The purpose of this study is to explore the structure of TED (and/or TEDx) and the interaction of that structure within different structures and environments. I am particularly interested in the way TED videos, TED and TEDx events are used in higher education curriculums.

Since you have some involvement with TED or TEDx, either through watching videos, using videos in your classroom, or being involved with a local TEDx event, I would like to interview you for my study. The study is open anyone over the age of 18 with any involvement in TED or TEDx, so feel free to share this email with others who you believe may qualify and wish to participate. The interview should last between 30-45 minutes and consist of questions that inquire about your experience with TED. Here is a sample of the types of questions you can expect to answer:

- Describe your involvement with the structure of TED.
- How would you sum up the impact of TED (or TEDx) on your life?

If you agree to participate in this study, please contact me via email (daniels.jessie@gmail.com) or phone (931.260.1819). At that time, I will send you the consent form for you to sign and we can schedule the interview.

Again, participation in this study is purely voluntary; refusal to participate will not affect your grades or jeopardize your involvement in any TEDx organization.

Thank you for your consideration!

Jessie Daniels

### **Becoming TED: Basic Interview Questions**

- Describe your involvement with the structure of TED.
- How would you sum up the impact of TED (or TEDx) on your life?
- What do you think are the most important elements of the structure of TED?

What are some things that you find or found interesting, uncomfortable, disturbing, refreshing?

- What are some experiences or memories that stand out in your mind of your involvement?

- Describe your involvement with the structure of TED.

- How would you sum up the impact of TED (or TEDx) on your life?

- What do you think are the most important elements of the structure of TED?

What are some things that you find or found interesting, uncomfortable, disturbing, refreshing?

- What are some experiences or memories that stand out in your mind of your involvement?