ENCOUNTERING RHIZOMATIC RELATIONS AT THE RURAL EXTERNAL(ITY) OF AN ART MUSEUM: A DELEUZIAN INQUIRY ON THE POSSIBILITIES OF RURAL ACCESS

By

MALLORY SARAH LIND

(Under the Direction of Christina Hanawalt)

ABSTRACT

Grounded in the post-structural theories of Gilles Deleuze, this post qualitative dissertation examined rural adult populations' possibilities for access to art museums. Thinking with Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian concepts such as *external relations, encounter*, and *difference,* the study investigated the contingent and complicated relations that exist at the intersections of rural populations and art museums. To set aside preconceived notions of rurality, the study began by deterritorializing the definition of *rural* by disentangling it from existing definitions based on an urban-centered lexicon. Building on this effort, fieldwork destabilized existing perceptions of rural by examining perceptions of accessibility and the relevance of art museums for rural adult populations in the Ozark region of Northwest Arkansas, home to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, located in Bentonville, Arkansas. Fieldwork involved traveling among rural communities and interacting with their adult residents. In the dissertation, the *encountered relations* experienced by the author in both the rural communities and the museum are presented in a journal entry format, with each entry followed by a "thinking through" of the encounter *with* theory to understand what relations and concepts were at play. What emerged was the presence of an ontological divide between rural populations and museums that is grounded in a misunderstanding of rural communities, their residents, and their

complexities, all of which serve to alienate rural residents. The dissertation concludes by recommending that museums and their staff work towards dismantling hierarchies (both internal and external) and deterritorialize museums in order to *become-non-museum* and *become-rural*.

INDEX WORDS: rural, post qualitative inquiry, post-structural theory, rural education, rural adults, rural populations, art museums, museum education, Deleuze, becoming, encounter, external relations, deterritorialize, micropolitics, event, museum desert, museology

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2021

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May 2021

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my grandmother, ‘Mama’ Irene, for inspiring this dissertation, but my work isn’t done yet. It’s time for you to make your inaugural art museum trip, and I would love nothing more than to be the one to facilitate this visit.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to all four of my parents, Mom, Ron, Dad and Beth, for your unceasing love, encouragement, and financial support. Thank you all for showing me unconditional love and support, it means the world to me and I would not be here today without each of you.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my partner, Gonzalo. Thank you for seeing me, accepting me, and loving me, as I am, with all that you have. You are my greatest champion. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Christina Hanawalt: I really cannot thank you enough for your guidance and encouragement throughout this doctoral process. Thank you for pushing me to think harder about my research, to make deeper connections across the wide-ranging fields of philosophy, museum education, and rural studies. You have listened deeply in conversations, read my writing closely to offer knowledgeable guidance and advice, posed the most poignant questions to help me further my own thought and research to new depths. Thank you for helping me make this dissertation better than I thought possible.

Dr. Carissa DiCindio: Thank you for offering me my first internship that blossomed my love for art museums and museum education. Your continued support and encouragement throughout all of my degrees has meant the world.

Dr. St. Pierre: Thank you for inventing and subsequently introducing me to post qualitative inquiry and thank you for always encouraging me to keep doing the next right thing.

Dr. Sheneka Williams: Thank you for encouraging me to see rural more deeply and for sticking with me through the many delays and setbacks.

Dr. Callan Steinmann: Who would have thought, 11 years ago while working together at Transmet, you would end up being such a great friend, mentor, and now committee member. Thank you for sharing so many resources and tips throughout my studies.

I want to thank my best friend Victoria for being my biggest hype-girl, for allowing me the space to rant about my woes, and for bringing me the many surprise Red Bulls and Powerades that have carried me through my latest nights and my toughest deadlines.

I want to send a special thanks my family without whom all of this would not have been possible. Your collective support and love have meant the world to me.

I also would like to thank Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art for providing me with the internship that gave me a platform for me to preform my fieldwork for this dissertation. And I would like to give a particular thanks to Kim and Nile for welcoming me and offering guidance throughout my internship and after.

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CHAPTER 1: A Little Primer

This Started Long Ago

Growing up in a small town in South Georgia, I enjoyed very little access to art and arts programming in my schools. In fact, it was not until the fifth grade, at age nine, that I was first offered art class as part of my regular school curriculum. I was privileged to grow up in a family that values and supports the arts. This privilege allowed me to attend half-day art camps at the local university in the summer months and visit art museums while on family vacations to Atlanta or visits to relatives in Florida. These early experiences with art and in museums I have carried with me throughout my adult life, and I began to notice a dichotomy between the lack of presence of and access to art museums for small and rural communities, and the abundant access in urban areas that was being taken for granted by my peers who had known such amenities from a young age.

Figure 1:

Mallory holding a fish she caught on her family's farm as a child.

Since the 1990s, there have been improvements in the fine arts curriculum offerings in many small and rural schools like the one I attended growing up. However, many such schools still lack access to outside arts experiences like art museums, which leaves it up to parents to provide this kind of opportunity for their children. Many students and families in Title I public schools may not be able to afford basic necessities like food and housing, which makes it very unlikely that they would be able to travel an hour or two hours to the closest art museum. Access to arts programming for rural students should not be exclusive to upper- and middle-class families who can afford to provide such "luxuries" to their children. The problem with providing arts museum access, however, does not stem solely from the inability of public schools to afford extensive field trips or from parents' and families' inability to provide vacations or out of town excursions; rather, this problem is also deeply rooted in a pervasive perception, held by many in rural and largely blue-collar communities, that experiences in the arts are a frivolous, nonessential expense (Jung, 2014a). It is not that people in blue-collar, rural, and low-income communities do not value the arts, but as Donovan and Brown (2017) write, "Poverty can block access to arts education not only because of lack of financial access to opportunities but also because of the social, emotional, and intellectual barriers that can occur as a result of living in poverty" (p. 21). This is not to say that all blue-collar workers live in poverty, but rather meant to demonstrate how a perpetual lack of arts access is a disproportionately larger issue in communities with higher blue-collar, rural, and/or low-income populations. It is thus up to arts programming to make the effort to reach out to these communities on the exterior, whether they be blue-collar workers, rural communities, or other underrepresented groups. By making programming relevant to the experiences of rural adults, perhaps museums can begin to dismantle the insider/outsider binary that persists in art museum access (Simon, 2016).

Inspired by Irene

The general topic of my research came to me early on. I knew that I was going to do my dissertation research on rural access to art museums, but it was not until two and a half years into my doctoral program that I realized that my inspiration/focus/problem had been staring me in the face all along. Born on a farm in a rural town in North Florida, Irene Hagan moved across the state line to rural South Georgia to wed a WWII veteran turned cow farmer. They were married for 50 years happy years, and Irene became a mother of three, grandmother of nine, and great-grandmother to four. She has earned many titles: bank teller, expert gardener, master at canning, preserving, jarring, and freezing, best baker in Dixie (per our family Christmas Eve bake off), gin rummy champ, and most importantly, my grandmother.

Figure 2:

Irene working in the 1990's

My grandmother has never lived in a city, let alone a suburb, she has never flown on a plane, and most significantly for this research, she has never been to an art museum. She will be 88 years old in July of this year (2021). She lives in Dixie, Georgia, an unincorporated community near the Florida/Georgia line, with a population of under 1k residents. My mother was raised in Dixie, but moved to Valdosta, Georgia, the "big city" twenty-five minutes away where my sister and I were raised. Dixie is mostly farmland, houses, and churches, but it does have one small post office, and a "community center" that is the former K-12 school, where my mother and her siblings graduated. I remember being a child when the town finally got street names. There are no stoplights, unless you count the caution light for crossing the highway. You have to travel to Quitman (5-10 mins) for groceries and Thomasville or Valdosta (20-30 min) for "big box" type stores. Many of my relatives still live in Dixie, and the majority of the men on that side of the family are still farmers. Outside of necessary trips to Thomasville and Valdosta my grandmother does not leave Dixie much, but when she does, she has never shown a penchant to visit an art museum.

My grandmother did not have art education in school, and she certainly has never lived in close proximity to an art museum. This lack of access to and familiarity with art and art museums often gets passed onto the children of rural adults, who later grow up to become adults that also do not know the value of arts education, unless intervention occurs. My mother did not have arts education in school, and as you will learn in chapter 6, she did not visit an art museum until she was in her thirties. This cycle is likely to continue unless someone or something breaks it, whether this be a friend, family member, or child that facilitates or gives a reason for a visit to an art museum. Breaking this cycle of non-art-museum goers can happen at a young age through school field trips, for example, but the cycle is not likely to be broken if opportunities for access

are not created and made visible to potential visitors who live in rural communities. Far too often the door for museum access appears invisible for those in the margins, like rural adults. Simon (2016) expounds on this problem of invisible access: "When our institutions' offerings are too opaque, or require too much effort to access, we become irrelevant. Our doors aren't just hard to access. For most people on the outside, the doors don't even exist" (part2.3).

With the realization that some portions of rural populations, such as K-12 students, are already being shown the door into the museum, I realized that my study needed to address those potential visitors—like my grandmother, aunt, uncle, and cousins—who could not see the door to the art museum. Previously, I had been looking at the problem of art museum access from the wrong angle. I had been attempting to look at rural access to art museums in a holistic way that included all adults and children in the same category, but I then realized that if museums could get rural adults in the door, it was more likely that the children would follow. Instead of asking, who can access the art museum, I realized I needed to ask questions like, "Why do rural adults go or not go to the museum? how can/do rural adults access the art museum? what does this access mean for rural adults? and why should museums turn their focus towards rural adults?" Ultimately, I generated the following Research Questions:

1. What relations exist and are generated at the intersection of rural adult populations and art museums, especially as they are experienced over time?
2. What are the complexities surrounding the notion of accessibility as it relates to art museums and rural adult populations?
3. What potential relevance do art museums hold for rural adult populations?

Why This is Important

The purpose of this research is to understand and describe how rural adult populations access art museums, paying particular attention to the experiences, attitudes, and relevance of art

museums to the lives of rural adult residents. Through this study, I sought to understand the unique positionality of rural adult populations to one art museum in the United States, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, in hopes to contribute to the larger field of understanding that surrounds rural adults and their perceived access to art museums. I also sought to understand the many complex external relations that contribute to each rural community's unique becoming. Art museums are a scarce resource for those in rural communities and, without suggesting that museums are as essential for living as food, some comparisons can be drawn between the geographic isolation of art museums and the characteristics of food deserts. Food deserts are areas where people are unable to access healthy, fresh, affordable food, because grocery stores are geographically distant. Many in rural communities, like my grandmother, are living in food deserts, but this is why many members of rural populations have learned to live sustainably off the land for nourishment. In this same respect, many rural communities are in "art museums deserts" but because this is not an issue that is necessary to sustain life, it is a largely overlooked concern. Food deserts are designated by population size and distance to the nearest grocery store:

> In order to qualify as a food desert, an area must also meet certain other criteria. In urban areas, at least 500 people or 33% of the population must live more than 1 mile from the nearest large grocery store. In rural areas, at least 500 people or 33% of the population must live more than 10 miles from the nearest large grocery store (Caporuscio & Pharm, 2020).

I propose that art museum deserts can be defined in two ways. First, an art museum desert can be defined as an area that is more than two hours away from the nearest art museum or art center/gallery with an educational component. This distance makes a trip to a museum an all-day activity. After driving two hours to see a museum, you will likely want to take your time, and

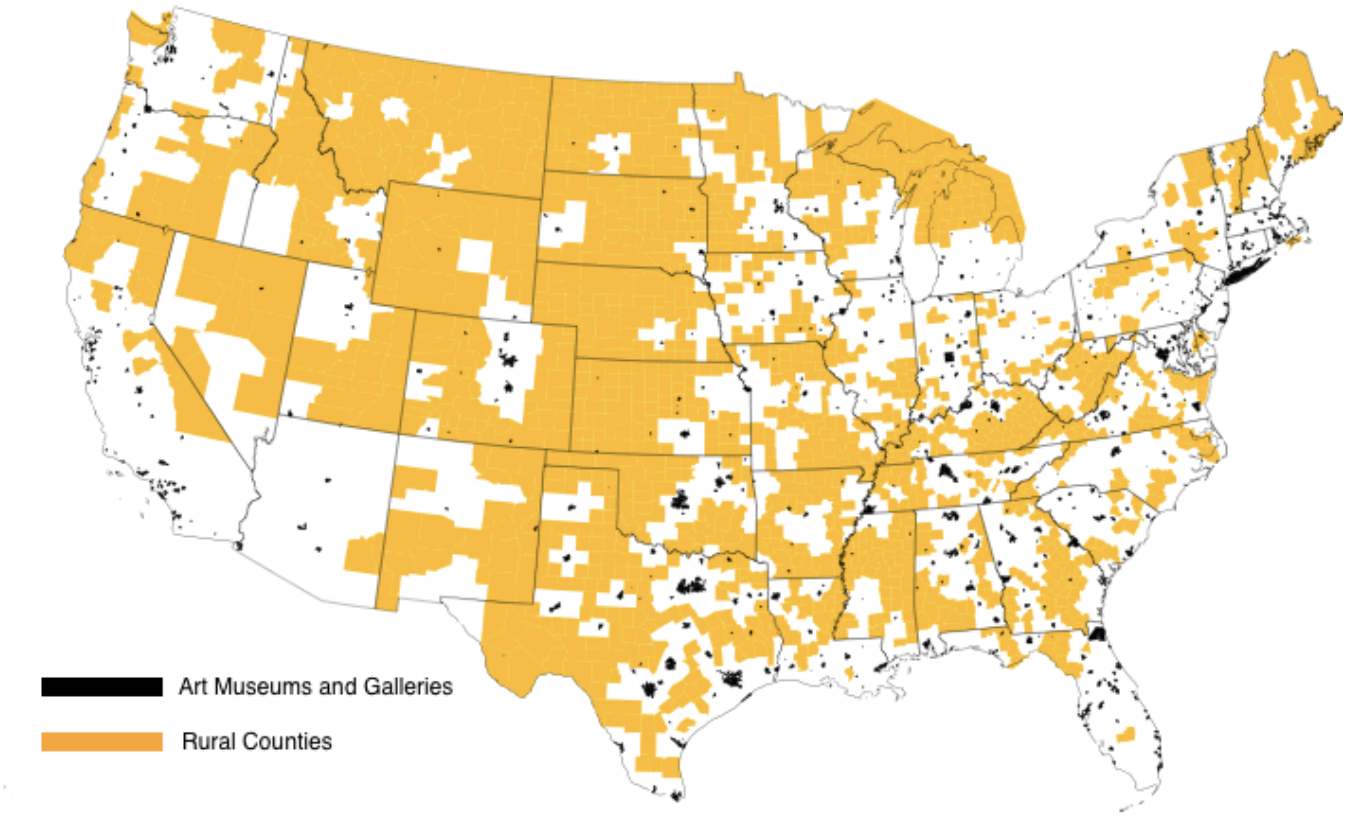
really experience the art, before a two-hour drive back, unless you have decided to make an overnight excursion of it. Such a distance makes it prohibitive to visit the art museum. The second qualifying factor that can make an area an art museum desert is if at least 33% of the population of a rural community cannot access transportation to an art museum that is more than an hour away, either because they do not have a car/cannot drive, or because of the prohibitive cost of transportation.

In order to visually demonstrate the magnitude of this issue I have created this map (Figure 3) using a data file from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS, 2018), where all data on U.S. museums and cultural institutions were compiled, as well as data from The Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP, 2010) containing the locations of all rural counties in the U.S. I then narrowed down the IMLS file to only include arts institutions and used Excel to map the arts institutions and rural counties. The resulting map displays the locations of both rural counties in the U.S., as represented by the yellow regions, and art museums and galleries with an educational component, shown by the black dots. The white areas represent non-rural counties. A higher concentration of museums and galleries with educational components in an area resulted in larger black spots. You will notice these larger black spots on the map in large metropolitan areas. For instance, the entire island region of New York, containing the NYC boroughs, Long Island, and the Hamptons, is almost totally filled in with black because the city boasts such a high concentration of art museums in a small geographical area. On the other hand, if you look at a larger state, like Texas, it becomes clearer that the museums are located in the major metropolitan cities, like Houston, Dallas, Austin, etc.; surrounding this concentration of museums (black areas) there are expanses of white, because the museums are located in and surrounded by non-rural counties. Very few art museums or

educational galleries, it would seem, are actually within rural communities, and as can be seen on the map, rural communities and the nearest art museum are often at a great distance from each other. Art museum deserts are areas, like many of the vast swaths of yellow land on the map (Figure 3), that are an hours-long drive away from the nearest art museum, and these deserts exist all over the country. Not all rural communities are inherently in art museum deserts, but distance and ease of transportation are a common barrier to accessing art museums for many rural adults.

Figure 3:

Map of Rural Counties in United States and Art Museums and Educational Art Galleries/Art Centers



While art museums are responsible for collecting, displaying, and preserving works of art that can serve as important markers for educating the public on cultural histories, as my own

family's story and the map of museum deserts both demonstrate, access to art museums is not a given for many people throughout the United States. Accessibility challenges with regard to art museums can come from a multitude of areas, including physical disabilities, geographical location, financial inadequacies, and even personal comfort levels; but, in this research, I focused specifically on geographical access to art museums for rural populations. As previously discussed, rural adults are a population that is inherently situated on the outside of typical art museum contexts because they are a difficult population for art museums to reach. Many programs and studies that currently exist on the topic of rural access to art museums focus on K-12 students on school field trips, but there is little current research that investigates if and how the rest of the rural population accesses art museums. Furthermore, when looking at the literature related to rural access to museums more broadly, many of the studies that do exist focus on science, math, and history museums, rather than art museums. The stark lack of available literature on this topic demonstrates the need for research that approaches rural adult populations and art museums free of categorical hierarchies that often presuppose certain fixed representations of rural communities, residents, and art museums. Research that attunes to the constantly changing field of external relations that comprise rural communities is currently absent, but sorely needed.

Doing the Post, or Doing the Most? You Decide.

I first came upon the idea of post-qualitative inquiry in the first year of my doctoral studies in Elizabeth St. Pierre's Affect Theory course at UGA, and immediately I was enraptured with the possibilities this research could bring with its seemingly boundless limits. The term (and concept of) 'post qualitative inquiry' was first coined by St. Pierre in 2010 as a way to *do* research differently. It does not follow the typical conventions of qualitative methodology that most social science research uses and instead calls for a complete turn away from traditional

research methods, asking that researchers focus first and foremost on theory instead of data collection and practice. Post qualitative inquiry arose out of post-structural theories like those of Deleuze and Guattari, which called for an abandoning of the usage of "to be" and instead replacing it with the conjunction "and." This means that beings and relations cannot be labeled definitively, there is no one way *to be* rural, rather, rural is an amalgamation of a multiplicity of relations that are connected by "and." Within this perspective then, *rural* also cannot be defined based on population size alone, but includes geographical distance *and* available infrastructure or lack thereof, *and* the varied interests of rural communities, *and* so on *and* so forth. This is because post-structural theories do not mean to separate, differentiate, or close off, but rather create opportunities of *becoming*, not for the purpose of becoming a single thing, but instead the constant becoming, changing, and moving of ongoing relations (St. Pierre, 2018). The opportunities for *becoming* are new connectives and lines of flight that create new ways of being and seeing the world.

Within my own field of museum education, I seek to ask many of the same questions that Hooper-Greenhill (1992) asks, most notably: "What counts as a museum?" If it is true that we are living in a post-structural society, then the structure of the museum itself cannot continue to exist as it is commonly believed to. The museum now must exist beyond the physical structure, inhabiting all places and experiences. Furthermore, it is no longer possible to think of the paintings and artifacts in the museum as objects, but rather as an assemblage of relations from which intra-actions and affections can occur. With all this in mind, the field of museum education, as it is traditionally practiced, must be largely reimagined. Although Hooper-Greenhill first began asking these post-structuralist types of questions in 1992, almost three decades later, much museum education research still operates through a constructivist lens, only

recently moving toward critical theoretical inquiry. Thus, as a newly emerging scholar in the field, I felt compelled to begin a push toward this new ontological turn, not only in theory, but in practice. As discussed previously, there is very little research currently available regarding rural access to art museum education, but there is even less research focused on rural populations or art museums that takes a post-structural perspective. Therefore, in this dissertation, I attempt to address these layered gaps in the research by using Deleuzian concepts and other post-structural theories to study rural access to art museums.

What to Expect

As a doctoral student, I have spent a large majority of the past three years researching and writing about my interest in rural access to art museums. I foolishly thought this meant that I knew just about all there was to know about what it means to live in rural America, have access to art museums, and be a researcher. As you might imagine, I quickly found out how wrong I was. Up until recently I had never actually *done* any fieldwork. All of this knowledge that I developed came from my own personal and family history with the subject of rural access to the arts and existing scholarship in the fields and cross-sections of rural, arts, and museum education. It is not that the information that I had spent the past three years gathering was all of a sudden wrong, but rather that the ways in which I oriented myself as a researcher in relation to rural life and arts museums began to evolve when I moved from Georgia to Northwest Arkansas for my fieldwork.

I am not totally new to the sudden change of orientation as a researcher. Throughout my doctoral career I have significantly changed my theoretical framework no less than four times (perhaps more). Like many gung-ho politically charged researchers, I initially oriented myself within critical theories, looking to emancipate underserved rural populations and educate them on “problems” they might not even know they have. I had once hoped that, through my research,

I could develop a method, program, or even a large-scale awareness of issues surrounding the lack of rural access to art museums. I do not mean to say that this is not a possibility achievable through a lifetime of research, scholarship, and fieldwork, but within the short frame of my doctoral studies, this was probably an unrealistic outcome. What you are about to read is a journey in failures and missteps, but each of these came with valuable learning experiences. This dissertation is not intended to be used as a "how-to" guide for establishing rural adult access to art museums, but rather as an exploration into the relational possibilities for *difference* and *becoming* that can emerge at the intersection of rural adult populations and art museums. The following paragraphs offer a brief outline of how each chapter contributes to my understanding of the problem of rural adult access to art museums.

In Chapter 2, before embarking on the problem this research sought to address, I first examine what it means to be rural and how rural has been defined in existing literature. The first part of this chapter seeks to dissociate an understanding of *rural* from definitions that are dependent on urban as a delineator. I attempt to de-center urban from the understanding of *rural* and dismantle the harmful stereotypes that pervade rural communities in the process. As the chapter progresses, I move into analyzing research already available that focuses on rural access to art museums.

In Chapter 3, I explore the theoretical ideas that formed the basis of my thought in the doing and analyzing of my research. Being that this was a study grounded in post qualitative inquiry, it was imperative that my research be centered around a strong theoretical foundation. Beginning with a brief introduction to post-structural philosophy, the chapter then leads into a discussion of Deleuzian (and Deleuzoguattarian) ontology, because it was within this plane of immanence and through his (and their) concepts that I thought through my experiences in

Northwest Arkansas. This chapter includes a sizable analysis of the concept of external relations theorized by Deleuze (1991) by way of Hume (1896), with reference as well to William James' (1971) understanding and description of the concept. After describing relations and their qualities, the chapter concludes with an examination of how relations are being used in contemporary, post-structural readings in art education.

In Chapter 4, I discuss post qualitative inquiry as the non-methodological path of inquiry that I pursued in this research. This chapter begins with a comprehensive explanation of post qualitative inquiry as a turn away from traditional humanist qualitative methodologies, wherein "data" is rethought, and theory is the basis upon which research decisions are made. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how post qualitative inquiry has been and can be applied to arts and museum education research.

In Chapter 5, I begin with a description of the method-less de/sign of this research study. I draw de/sign from Higgins et al. (2017) and their attempt to deconstruct traditional models of research design. This chapter includes descriptions of the research as it was originally planned, information about the museum this research is centered around, and narrative interludes that offer a glimpse of the research-as-lived.

In Chapter 6, I discuss encountered relations in rural communities and in the museum. Each *encountered relation* is presented in a journal entry format, and following each encountered relation is a "thinking through" of each encounter *with* theory, to understand what relations and concepts were at play within each encounter.

In Chapter 7, I respond to the original research questions that I sought to address at the onset of my research. Then, having responded to these questions, I bring all of the information discussed throughout the dissertation together to offer suggestions for how art museums can

develop reciprocal relationships with rural communities that have the potential to catalyze new *events* and *becomings*.

A Note on the COVID-19 Pandemic

The fieldwork for this research took place in the summer of 2019, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. As the author of this dissertation, I acknowledge the drastic changes that all art museums have gone through as a result of this global health crisis, but because this research occurred before the pandemic, it will continue to read as such. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a sizeable structural transformation to art museums inside and out, but I will not be addressing these ongoing changes in this dissertation because they were not known at the time of this research and cannot be used to inform prior experiences. Many museums have strengthened and expanded their outreach programming in hopes of connecting with communities outside of the space of the museum as a result of the pandemic and this research is not meant to diminish efforts of community outreach at any museum. Museum education is a field that is experiencing a *becoming* within the museum, and it is my hope that institutions continue to recognize the impact of museum education programming, and the educators who create such programs, as invaluable sources for expanding community access and involvement.

CHAPTER 2: Investigating the Literature

Something is Missing

It is no secret that rural and lower socioeconomic areas do not have diverse access to arts and cultural opportunities. Most of the existing research about this topic, however, relates more to arts education within a K-12 school setting, rather than the ability to access art museums or arts programming for all ages. A recent study by Donovan and Brown (2017) explains that while attention towards rural arts access has increased thanks to groups like The Art of the Rural and Americans for the Arts, "there is still a paucity of literature on arts education in rural areas" (p.8). Thus, given that so little recent literature explores the area of rural arts education access in general, it would stand to reason that even fewer studies have examined the niche area of this study, focusing on art museum access in rural areas. Furthermore, most of the existing research addressing the topic of rural access to museums focuses on access to science and history museums rather than art museums. An additional problem afflicting the literature related to rural arts access and museum studies is the imprecise or outright absent definition of the term *rural* within this body of literature; even when it is included, it is rarely consistent across multiple sources. This is particularly significant as much of the recent literature and research within arts and museum education does not look to relevant literature within the field of rural studies and education for guidance on current trends and policies in rural studies. However, it is not surprising that current literature within rural studies is often overlooked when a researcher is situated so deeply within their own field of arts education and/or museology.

The average museum educator does not need to become fully immersed in a wide cross section of literature simply to write a definition of *rural* for an article, but this is an appropriate task for a doctoral dissertation and one I intend to tackle here. It is my goal to bring all of these fields together to form a new understanding of what is happening at the cross-section of the rural American community and the place of art museums.

(Un)Defining the Rural

Before embarking on what it means for rural populations to have access to art museums, I must begin by first discussing how *rural* is defined in various scholarly contexts. An issue I have found in scholarship published within the humanities focusing on rural access to the arts, art museums, and museums in general, is the fact that the research does not often take into account current, relevant research and scholarship in the field of rural studies and rural education. For many people, the word *rural* likely evokes idyllic landscapes of farms and rolling hills, with a stereotypical "small town" ambiance where residents work blue-collar jobs, go to church every Sunday, and neighbors share cordial greetings at every passing (Woods, 2010). This image is often reinforced by movies and television shows such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991), *Steel Magnolias* (1989), and *Footloose* (1984), as well as popular country music like Tracy Byrd's "I'm from the Country" (1998) or Kellie Pickler's "Small Town Girl" (2006):

> Everybody knows everybody, everybody calls you friend
> You don't need an invitation, kick off your shoes come on in
> Yeah, we know how to work and we know how to play
> We're from the country and we like it that way
> - Tracy Byrd, "I'm from the Country"

> I grew up where I could see the stars
> Drinking sweet tea from a mason jar
> Dogwood trees like leaves through the pines
> People on the porch watchin' fireflies
> And drivin' round the Wal-Mart on a Friday night
> - Kellie Pickler, "Small Town Girl"

Music, movies, and television shows uphold the myth of the stereotypical rural life, and while this image might in some ways be grounded in truth, it also pigeonholes rural life in a way that lacks depth and obscures understanding of the true complexities of rural populations. For people not living in rural areas, the stereotypes upheld in visual culture may lead them to interact differently with people from rural populations who are perceived as "backward," overly conservative, and uneducated –a set of perceptions synonymous with negative terminology such as "redneck" or "hick" (Thomas, et.al. 2011, p. 23). Tieken (2014) expressed a similar sentiment regarding stereotypical views of rural demographics, and she found that two contradictory myths dominate: one focusing on "deprivation and decline" (p. 7) and the other on "romantic nostalgia" (p. 7). Ultimately, by seeing rural populations and geographies as either the movie *Deliverance* come to life or some type of idyllic remnant of a simpler time, the true complexities of people's lives in these areas is, in fact, subject to erasure. In his book, *Rural,* Woods (2010) writes,

> One of the most powerful and enduring ideas about the rural is that of the 'rural idyll'. This imagines the rural to be a place of peace, tranquility and simple virtue, contrasted with the bustle and brashness of the city. Whilst the rural idyll has also become associated with an escape from modernity, idyllic representations of country life are as old as writing about the rural, and in each historical era people have embellished the rural idyll with antonyms to their own apprehensions…The rural idyll fed on discourses of anti-urbanism, agrarianism and nature that were used to differentiate between the urban present and a romanticized rural past, particularly by nostalgic urban residents. (p. 21)

Woods (2010) is careful to point out here that the rural idyll is perpetuated by urban residents seeking nostalgia, and in this way, "The rural idyll is therefore a normative concept, in that it seeks to construct rurality in a certain way rather than representing the rural that actually exists"

(p. 22). With the term itself subject to so much confusion and misunderstanding, it is no wonder that existing research pertaining to rural access to art museums and arts programming rarely adopts a common definition of *rural*, and often a definition is not included at all.

On a demographic level, one way that rural population sizes are tracked is through the United States Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau is a government agency responsible for producing informational data about the American people and the economy, and as part of their research, they conduct surveys of the U.S. population every ten years in order to keep track of population numbers (Geographic Products Branch, n.d). According to a 2010 brief, the U.S. Census Bureau defines *rural* as simply an area that is not urban—that is, what is left after urban areas have been delineated (Ratcliffe et al., 2010). This definition is therefore dependent on the Census Bureau's definition of *urban*, which they have broken down further into two classifications: urbanized areas, with 50,000 or more people, and urban clusters with at least 2,500 but fewer than 50,000 people (Ratcliffe et al., 2010). The delineations of urbanized areas and urban clusters are based upon studies of population density, land use, and distance between residences, but what does this tell us about rural areas? Does this taxonomy mean that "rural" only refers to those towns with fewer than 2,500 people? Is a town that has 3,000 residents no longer considered rural? If the U.S. Census Bureau is only conducting this research once every decade, how reliable is the data over an extended period of time? Because this definition of rural relies on a dichotomy of binaries to arrive at a vague definition, it seems that this conceptualization of the rural is ultimately much more complicated than is truly necessary. Furthermore, these numerical demarcations of rural and urban do not take into account the differences between rural areas just outside of major metropolitan areas and those a great distance from large, urbanized areas. The rural areas that lie just outside of a large urban center,

like those bordering the Atlanta metropolitan area, are quite different in makeup and identity from the more remote towns and counties of the southernmost part of Georgia. The further that a town or city is from a major urbanized area, the more its access to resources, such as art museums, are compromised. Thus, it is also important to make a distinction between different types of rural areas because ultimately, although two towns might have similar population numbers, the accessibility challenges for the two areas likely differ based on their relative proximity to a major population center.

In the book *Critical Rural Theory* (2011), four sociologists examined rural places and populations from a "political, economic, and cultural perspective" (Thomas, et al., 2011, p. 14), and in their analysis, they state that rural can refer to a multitude of different characteristics including, "people, places, occupations, particular modes of social interaction, and ways of life (culture)" (p. 24). The authors also understand that different definitions of rural are used depending on the context in which they are applied. According to the authors, there will never be one single definition of rural that satisfies all audiences, thus any definition of the term should have two qualities: it should suit the purpose of the current research and please the presumed audience (Thomas, et al., 2011). Within *Critical Rural Theory,* the authors discuss the myths and realities of what it means to be rural and even describe the official government definitions of rural as set forth by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (Thomas, et al., 2011). One of the more interesting descriptions of rural that the authors offer is that "the meaning of rural is socially constructed" (Thomas, et al., 2011, p. 26). They acknowledge that *rural* is often made to seem synonymous with agriculture, but that viewing rural towns as agricultural meccas can often be false and only truly beneficial to agricultural interest groups that

make up a very small portion of rural communities in the United States. The socially constructed idea of what it means to be rural also affects how people and institutions react to rural communities and their populations. As previously stated, false and stereotypical views of rural life can often ignore the social inequities and class struggles of rural towns, causing adverse effects on the people living in these areas. In this case, government funding might be made more available for agricultural services but lacking in arts and cultural domains because of the erroneous perception of rural areas as sustaining only one type of economic activity.

According to rural geography scholar Woods (2016), *rural* has been defined in four different ways:

1. Residual definitions (i.e., remnants of urban definitions based on population size or type of land use): rural is the residual place beyond those places.
2. In terms of accessibility to urban areas.
3. In terms of functions performed for urban areas. Rural space provides for urban areas, whether for provision of food, fuel, or recreation.
4. By level of development relative to urban areas, such as provision of services or issues of poverty and equality.
(p. 62).

These qualities of the rural are thus dependent on the definition of the urban and rely on how a rural area can compare to the nearest urban metropolis. Defining *rural* in this way calls into question whether the term is nothing more than a descriptor for: (a) areas that do not exist within a major metropolitan area, (b) areas with stereotypically rural workforces and lifestyles, or (c) areas that do not have the same urban development that many have come to expect in larger American cities. If researchers and academics set the default for defining and describing geographies at urban and the development of urban structures, then this leaves little room for the "urbanized" growth of rural areas because the only true remaining rural areas would be those that are undeveloped (National Academies of Sciences, et al., 2016). Contemporary rural societies and geographies are no longer undeveloped wastelands of wildlife and farming; they too have

experienced influxes of growth in business, social structures, and education, although perhaps at a slower pace than traditionally urbanized locales. It is important to remember that,

> [r]ural still has meaning; it still has power as a brand that attracts people to buy goods because they are rural in nature. It is a category that encourages people to invest money in buying property and moving for lifestyle reasons and is a source of identity for many people (National Academies of Sciences, et al., 2016, p. 63).

That being said, to limit the definition of *rural* to "everything that urban is not" and assume an attitude of pity towards the people living in such areas would be a grave misstep, as it would devalue all that rural geographies and populations have to offer.

Definitions of the Rural in Arts and Museum Education Research

In current arts and arts education research vis-a-vis rural areas, the term *rural* appears to encompass a multitude of different characteristics, with no single universally adopted definition. Often, in research regarding the arts and cultural access in rural areas, articles and reports will fail to even include a description of how the author or authors are choosing to define *rural*. Instead, readers are left to formulate their own understanding of the term, which is likely shaped by preconceived and stereotypical notions. In a working paper by Donovan and Brown (2017), "Leveraging Change: Increasing Access to Arts Education in Rural Areas," funded by the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, the authors describe the different ways in which rural has been defined in various forms of research, but they ultimately acknowledge that these definitions draw from sources ranging from population, geography, social constructs, and demographic characteristics, among many other areas. For the purposes of their research, however, Donovan and Brown (2017) chose to use the definition of rural put forth in a report by the Center for American Progress titled *The Rural Solution: How Community Schools Can Reinvigorate Rural Education* (2010). In this report, the author,

Williams (2010), describes the number and range of rural schools in each state and how these rural population numbers are also associated with a "high rate of poverty, uneven access to resources, and transportation barriers" (Donovan & Brown, 2017, p.16). It seems that, in this working paper on rural arts access, the authors are less concerned with the government descriptors and numerical data that classify a place as rural and more interested in how access to basic services and the geographic rurality of a place affects such areas. Additionally, throughout the research and writing on rural access to arts and museum education, many authors have centered their definition of *rural* around the accessibility challenges caused by geographical distance and poverty rates (Armbruster, et al. 2018; Ekhoff, 2011; Greene, et al, 2014, Hartman & Hines-Bergmeier, 2015; Villeneuve & Martin-Hamon, 2007; Villeneuve & Sheppard, 2009), although very few explicitly outlined their definition and understanding of the word *rural*. One can assume this is at least partially because of the space it would take in describing and defining *rural* while aiming to adhere to the strict word count required for an academic journal publication. Donovan and Brown, however, offer a much more thorough definition than does most rural art and museum education-related research. Perhaps this attention to rural classifications can be attributed to the fact that Donovan and Brown (2017) were tasked with creating a report rather than an academic article and had funding for their research from an outside source, which may have allowed them the time, resources, and unlimited space necessary to fully explore the competing definitions of *rural*.

Rural Post-Structuralism

Although rural studies tend to lean more towards conventional humanist methods of qualitative inquiry privileging the human—and in more recent years featuring an emancipatory, critical slant—some existing studies on rurality and rural populations do explore these topics through a post-structural lens. Therefore, I will now turn to scholarship in post-structural

geography in order to investigate how spaces are defined within this much less brute-data-driven field. In the article, “Heartlands or Neglected Geographies? Liminality, Power, and the Hyperreal Rural,” Lawrence (1997), calls for a reformation of the rural as it was then being studied. He did not approve of the ways in which *rural* was being defined in conjunction with *urban,* as if the two concepts were completely separate from and yet also reliant on one another. Instead, Lawrence (1997) suggested that we should

> understand rural not as an *a priori* category (in and of itself or as part of the traditional rural/urban dualism), but rather as something fashioned by academia, officialdom, the tourist industry, and other 'outside' actors in addition to rural dwellers themselves. (p.1)

In other words, Lawrence (1997) was proposing that the definition and further delineation of the rural has been constructed by outside actors and that this process has created a false duality between rural/urban spaces and their respective populations. This dismemberment of the rural/urban duality aligns with Lawrence’s (1997) post-structuralist view of power dynamics. In the years prior to this article, much of the power-related work in rural studies had arisen from Marxist analyses, which relied on the dichotomy of the dominant and lower classes. This view of power relationships pushed rural studies in a very critical and emancipatory direction, one that assumed rural populations were neglected and alienated from experiences and resources that were available in more dominant urban areas.

For Lawrence (1997), however, viewing rural populations as in need of emancipation only provided a very narrow understanding of rurality. In his assessment, our own ontological and epistemological biases of rural geographies only further “keep us from listening to some neglected voices or conversely lead us to too-readily provide in our accounts a space of representation for voices we might be better off disregarding” (p.2). In other words, most

researchers are so unable to escape their inherent biases, that, when researching rural areas, they will continue to search for and promote only the voices that they know to reinforce these biases, ignoring alternative perspectives because they do not fit within the narrative they have already come to understand. In this way, researchers might only be reinforcing existing power dynamics and misleading stereotypes (mentioned previously) because they are only able to see rural populations as marginal and lacking from an urban point of view, and thus they neglect to understand rural identity in a different way. However, rather than reiterate these same critical power narratives, Lawrence (1997) looked to the works of Foucault and Baudrillard, noting that while there were still power dynamics that existed between urban and rural areas, "power has become creative, productive instead of (merely) repressive" (p.13). This means that, for rural populations, power dynamics have not occasioned a neglected and repressive culture, but rather created and produced a culture entirely distinct from that of urban areas.

Power relationships are also discussed in Dufty's (2010) article, "Reflecting on Power Relationships in the 'Doing' of Rural Cultural Research." In this article, Dufty returns to her doctoral research from five years prior and reexamines how her misunderstanding of power and her misreading of Foucault and other feminist and post-structuralist scholars led her to recognize problematic issues in the 'doing' of her own research. Dufty seemed to have fallen into the positivist and sometimes critical/emancipatory view of power relationships in her doctoral dissertation work, leading her to conduct research within the problematic dichotomy of the "powerful expert/powerless subject" (p. 134). As she returned to her previous research, however, Dufty developed a new understanding of Foucauldian power relationships, writing,

> In previous understandings of power, freedom was conceived as some 'thing' that was relinquished when power was exercised. Foucault's notion of power inverted such

> understandings. Rather than being oppositional and destructive, the relationship between power and liberty was mutually dependent and productive. This understanding of the intimate relationship between power and freedom begins with the premise that power operates as a relationship: it is not a thing to be held by some at the expense of others' freedoms, but only transpires when it is exercised. Developing this further, power is only exercised when both parties in a relationship of power are free to act. (p.135).

This further builds upon Lawrence's (1997) formulation of power as a creative, rather than a repressive, act. In Dufty's (2010) reflection on and reexamination of the 'doing' of her doctoral research, she became aware that it was not herself, but rather her participants who seemed to be in power during the interview process. She recalls how she initially came into each interview situation with a set of questions, almost expecting to know how they might be answered, and assuming that she knew what her subjects' experiences would be like, because she herself was from a rural area. Ultimately, Dufty (2010) had to alter the original direction of her research because the interview 'data' she collected did not align with the anticipated goals of her study. It was not until Dufty's (2010) reexamination years later that she came to understand what was happening within this rural area and how her own misconceptions of the rural population she studied caused the 'doing' of her research to fall short. Dufty's research ultimately failed because of her own expectations for her research and her preconceived (and perhaps stereotypical) understandings of rural populations. Her article offers a glimpse into how studies of rural spaces and populations can be inadequate if they inadvertently assume a positivist, critical, and emancipatory stance in a manner that precludes the opportunity for any change or uncertainty to arise, and instead reinforce what was already 'known.' With the help of post-

structural theories and theorists, however, the notion of the all-powerful, all-knowing researcher can be left behind and knowledge can be understood as situated and partial.

Philips (2002) again addresses notions of duality within rural studies as he tries to dissolve the unnecessary divide between rural studies of political-economy and post-structuralism. Phillips (2002) argues that the field of rural studies has pitted the two theoretical approaches as antithetical opposites, but for the future of rural studies there should be more "attention paid to both the lines of inter-connection as well as areas of difference between them" (p.99). By this, Phillips (2002) seems to say that while there are some inherent differences between the two philosophical camps, moving forward binaries should be removed in favor of understanding the common ground, as both philosophies will be in a constant state of movement. His argument is congruent with post-structuralist thought in that he does not give a definitive answer on whether one concept is "right or wrong," but rather sees the multiplicity in the situation. Phillips (2002) continues this discussion of duality in rural studies as he tackles the discourse around class analysis and its inherently dualistic structure. Ultimately, he argues that social science texts invented classes, and people have simply continued to "discursively create, re-create, and transform notions of class" (Phillips, 2002, p.86). Thus, an analysis that pits rural class against, and more often under, urban class is inherently flawed because our distinctions of class and class hierarchies are constantly being situated and re-situated based on our "grids of intelligibility" (Foucault, 1978/1984).

In his 2006 book, *Post-Structuralist Geography: A Guide to Relational Spaces,* Murdoch draws upon Foucault, Latour, Law, and Deleuze to develop a new understanding of geography and relational spaces guided by post-structural concepts rather than positivist ones that rely on scientific data analysis or critical, emancipatory, and often dualistic approaches. He writes,

"Post-structuralism in geography focuses on the ways that dynamic and complex processes move through and across space, modifying spatial entities, recasting spatial relations" (p.107). This description of geographical areas does not include any excusatory or divisional language that separates geographical descriptions into human and physical geographies. Instead of separating these two *socials (human)* and *natural* (physical) relations, he calls for post-structuralist geography to join the two in "heterogeneous relations – that is, in mixtures of the natural and social and the human and the non-human" (p.3). The first chapter of this text describes six core features of post-structuralist geography:

1. Spaces and places should not be seen as closed and contained but as open and engaged with other spaces and places. These engagements mean that spaces and places are crosscut by differing processes and practices, some that emanate from within, some that emanate from without.
2. Spaces and places are therefore multiplicities – that is, they are made of differing spatial practices, identifications and forms of belonging.
3. There can be acute struggles over whose 'reading' of space should take priority. Thus, strategies of domination and resistance ensue around spatial identities and spatial practices.
4. The outcome of these struggles must be seen as under-determined by existing spatial structures. Rather, struggles can lead to the need for spatial 'openings', new forms of spatial identity and new forms of spatial practice.
5. The 'performance' of social practice and the performance of space go hand in hand. Space is therefore not fixed but mutable.
6. Moreover, the notion that the 'performer' (for example, the social agent) and the context of performance (for example, the space or place) are distinct from one another should be abandoned: both are entangled in the heterogeneous processes of spatial 'becoming' (Murdoch, 2006, p.18).

While none of these six core features of post-structuralist geography mention rurality, all can be applied to the notion and understanding of rural spaces. Because post-structuralism as a theory calls for a plurality and multiplicity rather than binary oppositions and duality, the rural-urban divide becomes much more complex when viewed through this lens.

While some scholarship on rurality reinscribes the role of power in an urban/rural dichotomy, making clear distinctions between the two areas can serve to reinforce negative and

misinformed stereotypes of rural towns and populations. Post-structuralist geography, on the other hand, does not inherently posit this binary opposition, which pits one definition against the other; instead, it acknowledges how relations within urban and rural environments are both similar and different from one another, though nevertheless entangled in an ever-changing *becoming*. Murdoch (2006) also recognizes how different 'readings' of a space or place can produce a struggle for dominance, much like how the stereotypical reading of rural leads many urban and rural populations to view rural life very differently. Ultimately, although Murdoch (2006) calls for pluralism instead of dualism, this does not mean that he sees both urban and rural environments as one in the same--rather, they are made up of different relations that allow each space or place to be equally valuable. Furthermore, Murdoch's (2006) description of performance and the notion of the performer can describe how the people and relations in rural and urban areas often mimic similar sized rural or urban areas, because both the performer and the performance space are entangled in one another and cannot be separated. This is to say that the ways in which people in rural areas perform their *identities* might be similar in similar geographic spaces because the space of the performance (rural towns and cities) plays a part both in the performance and the *becoming* of the performer and vice versa. I feel that Murdoch's (2006) six core features of post-structural geography offer a better understanding of how geography and rural studies can utilize post-structuralist thought and thus, for the purposes of this study on rural access to art museums, I will likely return to these key features of post-structuralist geography as a tool for understanding and researching rural populations. Defining and understanding rural is ultimately a more complex task than a single numerical categorization or short definition can accomplish. *Rural* cannot exist under as a singular defining term because

the rural itself is a multiplicity, and each rural community is in turn its own multiplicity and thus, it cannot be defined by the characteristics of another rural community (multiplicity).

Rural Access to Arts and Art Museum Education

Current research related to rural access to arts and museum education is entirely situated within the traditional humanist qualitative methodological tradition, often with strong footing in positivist and constructivist theories of research and methodology. Much of the research in rural arts and museum access seems to focus on practice rather than theory, which yields a very different approach than does my own research in rural arts and museum access. I still feel that it is important to explore what is currently out there in this very niche field of research, in order to fully understand what has already been done and is continuing to happen within these rural spaces. Additionally, of the research that currently exists regarding rural access to museums, a large portion is focused more on access to history and science museums, with an even smaller pool of research focused on access to art museums specifically.

The largest portion of research that focuses on rural arts access concentrates on arts education access at large, especially if that research is funded or supported by state or federal government organizations, such as the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), and other state-specific organizations (Donovon & Brown, 2017; National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2017; National Endowment for the Arts, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). These government organizations are also responsible for bringing arts related programming to many small and rural communities, because small local governments do not possess the funding on their own to conduct this type of arts access outreach and research. Still, organizations like NASAA and NEA are unable to provide annual or even biannual access to all rural communities,

thus it falls to state and metropolitan arts museums to reach out to rural communities and school systems to ensure that all persons and students residing therein receive the same educational opportunities.

One benefit of federally funded arts programs and research is that the information and data collected is often made publicly available, but the type of research that federally funded programs will support is very positivist in nature and focused on numbers, graphs, and statistics. As is the case with much U.S. government-funded social science and especially educational research (St. Pierre, 2016a), it is difficult to understand what is actually happening within these areas outside of the numbers put forth. St. Pierre (2012) criticized this positivist, government-funded educational research by saying, "everything must be scientized and reduced to the brute (value-free) data of mathematics for the purpose of control" (p. 484). Furthermore, this focus on value-free 'brute data' in positivism also "depend[s] on particular descriptions of human being, reality, language, rationality, science and so on" (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 493), which means that any type of research that does not fall within this narrow positivist view of scholarship is often discredited or ignored. Thus, for the purposes of my research it does not appear that the brute-data collected by these federally funded organizations aligns with the ontology of post-structuralist theories, nor does it seem to have a valuable place within the body of my research. So, while I could describe how nearly 14% of NEA-funded projects in 2015 were reserved for rural communities (NEA, 2017), or state that the NASAA served 2,071 rural communities in 2015 (NASAA, 2017), these numbers would ultimately have no impact on my research because they are not congruent with my theoretical framework and they do not actually describe what is happening within the rural communities for which they are gathering these statistics.

In a recently published working paper on rural arts access, Donovan and Brown (2017) highlighted five barriers facing rural communities and schools in terms of gaining access to arts, and they are as follows: poverty and lack of economic opportunity, geographic distance, recruiting and retaining administrators and teachers in rural areas, lack of funding for arts education, and policies that do not support the arts. Their working paper largely focused on access to arts education in general, but these barriers have also been proven to apply to accessing art museums in rural communities specifically. Many people in rural communities simply cannot afford to travel long distances to museums, as such activities would likely require time away from work or other responsibilities, as well as potentially expensive admission fees; moreover, without public programs in place supplying this cultural equity, rural communities and populations have little chance of receiving or benefitting from such opportunities.

A Close Look at Three Studies Related to Art Museum Access in Rural Areas

In this section I will look closely at three studies that have focused on rural access to art museums and I will discuss their strengths and weaknesses, as they relate to my research. As this area of research is still very much under explored, very little relevant literature was available, so instead of having a wide range of disparate studies, I will only assess three examples in order to understand how this research is currently being approached and to situate my research in the broader context of rural access to art museums.

While some research in the past decade has examined rural access to art museums specifically (Armbruster, Kindseth, & Taylor, 2018; Ekhoff, 2011; Greene, Kisida, & Bowen, 2014), greater attention has been given to access to children's museums, history museums, and science museums (Badger & Harker, 2016; Doody & Patti, 2017; Hartman & Hines-Bergmeier, 2015; McCleary, 2014; National Endowment for the Humanities, 2015; Zimmerman & McClain, 2015; etc.). Furthermore, while there are reportedly over 35,000 museums in the United States,

with 29 % located in rural areas, this number is calculated very broadly to include not only art museums but 14 other museum classifications, such as history, science, and nature centers (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2018). This means that while nearly 30 % of museums are located in rural areas, in actuality less than seven percent of these rurally located museums are art museums (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2018). These numbers not only reflect the lack of accessible art museums in rural areas but could also explain why there have been far fewer studies related to rural arts museum access as compared to other museum classifications: there are simply not enough rural art museums to study. While the ratio of art museums to other kinds of museums in rural areas might help explain the lack of available research, it does not elucidate why these rural areas have such a severe lack of accessible art museums in the first place.

In addition, much of the research involving rural access to arts and art museums is most often situated within the positivist tradition. Therefore, research that does not align with strict positivist methodological rules can often fall under the radar. Furthermore, post-qualitative inquiry is still a very new type of research, and while it has started to make some waves in the field of education, it has only emerged in the field of museology in the past few years and remains rare among published studies. Much of museology still tends to lean toward positivist and constructivist theories and methodologies, with the shift towards critical theories and methodologies only occurring in the past decade or so. Because of this positivist bias, a large majority of the research in rural arts and museum access seems to focus on practice rather than theory, which produces an approach to rural arts and museum access that differs greatly from my own.

Other studies on rural access to arts museums, while also seemingly much more focused on practice rather than theory, still offer more information about what is actually happening within rural populations and why art museum access is necessary for these communities. In Eckhoff 's (2011) multi-year study, "Transformative Partnerships: Designing School-Based Visual Arts Outreach Programs," Eckhoff used Community Based Art Education as an approach to bring art viewing experiences to K-12 art classrooms in rural communities. Eckhoff (2011) began her study by surveying 31 K-12 art teachers, discovering that each of the respondents claimed to have "little or no current involvement with galleries and museums" in their classes or schools (Eckhoff, 2011, p. 258). She then set up a program that would bring small traveling exhibitions to the individual schools. The works of art shown at these exhibitions were made by seven artists, all of whom were current or former faculty from a local university's fine art department. Each artist donated three self-created works of art, for a total of 21 works available for the purposes of this study, all ranging in technique, medium, and genre. The researcher, along with the participating teachers, arranged miniature collections for each class based on the art teacher's interest in a particular educational platform or technique. She found that many of the teachers at the elementary level preferred a variety of media and artistic genres for their students' viewing, while secondary teachers preferred to display more thematic, inspirational works. The chosen artworks were then transported to the individual schools and each teacher was supplied with relevant instructional materials to present along with the art. In the conclusion of her study, Eckoff (2011), recounted that each of the teacher participants felt that the mini exhibitions had a significant impact on their students' art education experience.

While Eckhoff's (2011) multi-year case study was very successful in allowing students access to art viewing in a way similar to what they might experience in an art museum, the

structure of the study was somewhat flawed. First, for the purpose of art museum access, it would be more beneficial if an exhibition was set up more in the style of an art museum, containing museum quality works. Rural school access to art museums is not only about viewing art, but also about learning about museums themselves. Because this study was not conducted in conjunction with a specific art museum, the students were simply learning about art that was arguably already accessible to them.

The uniqueness of an art museum lies also in its institutional nature. It would be very beneficial for students of all ages to learn about why it is significant for museums to exist, both as venues for the public to enjoy art, and as institutions that safeguard and preserve culture. If an art museum were to supply students with a traveling exhibition at a non-museum site, a museum-like atmosphere could still be created. At an off-site art museum exhibition, students can still learn about the importance of art museums to our national education system and our culture. While it is very important that students have opportunities to view physical art pieces, Eckhoff's study failed to show students the value of an art museum and provide them with a true museum experience. Student participants in this study who had not visited an art museum beforehand did not gain knowledge and familiarity with art museums as a result of their participation. Thus, this study's focus seemed to be more about student interaction with physical works of art, rather than the authentic art museum experience. Eckoff (2011) designed this study using a conventional humanist qualitative methodology, in which she drew upon case studies, interviews, and field notes, to 'triangulate' and 'code' her data into themes for analysis. And while these methods of data collection and analysis are common in humanist qualitative methodologies, it is possible that her coding or triangulation techniques caused her to miss potentially valuable information, just as Dufty (2010) discovered after returning to her research

years later through a different lens. This study is nonetheless valuable, however, because any chance that students are given to experience art firsthand is doubtlessly beneficial. For the purposes of my own research, however, I will be pursuing a much different path.

In a 2014 article, "The Educational Value of Field Trips," the authors, Greene, Kisida, and Bowen, explored the educational benefits of art-related field trips to students in K-12 classes across the country. At the beginning of the article, the authors claim that:

> In particular, enriching field trips contribute to the development of students into civilized young men and women who possess more knowledge about art, have stronger critical thinking skills, exhibit increased historical empathy, display higher levels of tolerance, and have a greater taste for consuming art and culture (p. 80).

The authors then describe a study they conducted with over 10,000 students at more than 100 schools. In this study the authors surveyed students before and after they visited an art museum with their class to assess how they proved or disproved the authors' earlier claim about the benefits of culturally enriching field trips. The authors' description of their analysis of the results of the surveys reads more like a hard science or mathematical paper than a social science one, with phrases like "regression model," "control," and "standard validity test." The researchers ultimately tallied up and charted all of their results in a bar graph format. The charted results of this study showed that while students from all schools across various demographics saw an increase in the desired factors (historical empathy, critical thinking, tolerance, and interest in art museums), students in high poverty schools saw a slightly higher increase than did those in standard demographics, and rural schools saw the greatest increases across all areas (Greene, et. al., 2014). From the graphed figure (p. 82), it appears that the most staggering increase in educational benefits for rural students was an overwhelming increase in

critical thinking and interest in art museums as compared to students in other school systems. Additionally, at the bottom of their charted figure, the authors maintained that, "All results are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level except the historical empathy result for high-poverty schools" (Greene, et. al., 2014, p. 82), including "N" variants used for their standard deviation model.

It is clear that the authors had very specific goals in mind when setting up this study and to that extent they achieved their goals in "proving" the mass educational benefits that art museum access can have on students' educational capabilities. However, I am less convinced of the results of this highly positivist, mixed-methods study, not because I do not think that it is possible that art museum access can increase historical empathy, critical thinking, tolerance, and interest in art museums, but because I think it is almost impossible to very accurately measure and plot these factors using numbers and statistics. I want to believe that all of these things do indeed occur after a school visit to an art museum, because this would mean that art museums are even more powerful agents of change than I had realized, but I just am not sure how realistic it is to assume that a one-time visit to an art museum by a young child will drastically and permanently increase their critical thinking, general tolerance, or other desired traits. This study is paradigmatic of the kind of work that often dominates rural arts and education access research, especially if government funding is involved, as it mirrors the positivist movement in education that assumed increasing prominence after the implementation of No Child Left Behind (2001). It would not surprise me, however if the results of this study have boosted funding or helped change policies in some way, either at the governmental, educational, or museum level, because I find that it is often these types of statistical, quantitative reports that prove most valuable to the decision makers in these positions.

The studies examined, glance at rural art education and art museum outreach in the form of somewhat time-limited projects, but there are already existing programs at art museums in the United States that attempt to provide continual rural outreach to schools and communities. While these museums do not often receive national attention or publish research findings about the success or challenges of their efforts, many of these museum programs are groundbreaking in their approach to rural art access. One such program I would like to look at is Literacy Through Art (LTA) at the Asheville Art Museum (AAM), located in Asheville, North Carolina. The AAM serves Asheville and 24 other surrounding counties, 13 of which are classified as rural (Asheville Now, 2016). The museum first started LTA in 1994 as a way to allow for rural schools to have access to art education. The program is interdisciplinary in nature and it attempts to link language arts and visual arts, a project that could prove incredibly beneficial for a rural, underserved school system (Herman, 1998). LTA includes nine classroom visits by an educator employed by the AAM and one class visit to the museum after completing the classroom visits (Asheville Art Museum, 2012).

I find this program especially unique and impressive because of the breadth of art education the AAM is offering to rural and underserved communities. The AAM not only understands the need for art museum education in rural areas, but also how to make their offerings relevant within the education curricula at these rural schools. And while their program might be one of the oldest in existence, the AAM is not the only art museum in the U.S. offering a rural outreach program. Others offering rural outreach include the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Bentonville, AR), the North Dakota Museum of Art (Grand Forks), the Art Museum of Eastern Ohio, and the Georgia Museum of Art (Athens), just to name a few. These art museums are attempting to offer rural outreach by bringing art and exhibitions to schools and

rural communities, financially sponsoring school field trips, and by providing online educational resources to be used by teachers in rural schools. While museums around the country attempt to provide this outreach to rural communities, not all rural communities and schools are able to take advantage of offered resources. Each of these studies or programs has merit in its conception and execution, especially considering that there is so much left to explore in the cross-examination of art museums and rural populations, but they all only focus on the access of K-12 students to art museums, leaving out large segments of the rural populace.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

Ultimately, there is a stark lack of research related to rural access to arts and museum education, and what research has been made available is often positivist in nature. In order to fully commit to providing cultural opportunities to rural communities, it is imperative to first understand the people and the environment of the areas that have been designated as rural. However, this is a much more difficult task than it seems, because researchers have been trained by the media and our popular culture to have one, very limited, often negative view of rural communities and populations. If policy makers and researchers go into rural areas under the assumption that they are monolithic cultures with predetermined needs and wants based on stereotypical or purely numerical understandings of what it means to be *rural*, they will only further feed into the problematic power dynamic that exists between rural and urban areas.

Current research in rural education and art museum education might benefit from a post-structural awakening, which calls for a dismemberment of structural binaries and identity categories. Such an awakening cannot occur unless persistent assumptions about populations based on geographic location, such as rural and urban, are challenged. Therefore, my research aims to disrupt these power-laden binaries. The space my research occupies does not attempt to emancipate rural populations from their oppression of distance to art museums and other cultural

entities. Rather, my research examines what is happening in the current space of rural populations that shapes their views towards art museums and what might happen if participants born and raised in rural communities visit an art museum. This research does not wish to assume that a population is "underserved" simply based on their geographical location or other socioeconomic factors. Implying that a rural community is "underserved" because of their location discounts the many other wonderful qualities that come with living in a rural community, and the descriptor of "underserved" is not often paired alongside the thing the community is "lacking." For instance, while some rural communities might be underserved in their access to arts museums and cultural attractions, some urban areas may be underserved in their access to greenspace and affordable housing. Ultimately, I do not prefer to label a community as being underserved because any community can be seen as underserved in different aspects and to primarily label rural or working-class communities as underserved is disparaging to a way of life that many people find favor in.

With that said, it is imperative that researchers, museums, and other organizations not assume that just by bringing some form of arts access to rural areas they are inherently doing "good." Rather, researchers and organizations should make an attempt to create dialogue with people in these communities to learn what would most benefit them. This is not to say that it is wrong or harmful for a museum or other organization to attempt to provide arts access to a rural community, but that their provision of this access should not be delivered in a way that bypasses all communication with the people actually living in that area. It is of the utmost importance that rural populations are involved in the 'doing' of research that involves them, because without their participation and input, it often proves far too easy to reiterate the same stereotypical portrayal of rural life that has long presupposed the definition of such areas. In my own research,

I aimed to constantly attend to the unique circumstances of the rural populations I chose to study, and I attempted to consistently avoid trivializing or belittling the people, their perspectives, or their experiences.

Stephen Shore, a professor specializing in autism studies, once emphasized the diversity of people with autism by saying, "if you've met one person with autism, then you've met one person with autism." I first heard this quote while working at a summer camp for autistic youth at Crystal Bridges Museum, but it wasn't until much later that I started to think about how much this quote related to the essence of (Deleuzian) difference, not only for those with autism, but for individuals in rural environments as well. The quote contradicts the tendency in the general culture to render all autistic people as essentially interchangeable, and stresses instead that no two autistic persons are exactly the same. They will not have the same talents, interests, strengths, or experiences and perceptions of the world. So too, should rural geographies be acknowledged to contain the same multitudes. Each rural geography is made up of its own set of differential relations that cannot be compared in an analogous way to another rural geography. In a *Manifesto of Rural Futurism,* the Italian curators Ferrara and Pisano (2019) assert:

> Different (human and non-human) life forms exist and insist on a territory, any territory, and they are mutually implicated in one another. Sometimes, they co-exist together peaceably; at other times, they are in conflict with each other. Conflictual coexistences are valuable too, as they generate "grey zones" within a rural territory, which can productively challenge any inherited notion of "environment", "nature", and "ecology". Through its co-existences (and conflictual co-existences), the rural territory can in fact be approached otherwise, leaving aside contemplative, romantic or decadent clichés about "rurality".

So, it is these—human, non-human, more-than-human—forms that exist in rurality that I have sought to understand through my research and immersion in rural communities. Manning (2013) views this attunement and awakening of the more than human as a way to expand our field of perception, writing:

> Go beyond the human and see the more than human coursing in speciation's that exceed the mortal body to include different speeds and slownesses that cut across it, infinitely. Care for the human life span but never overlook the potential of the bacterial. Take note of how life-living courses across this event in the making (p.146).

Thus, in order to re-think current research in both rural and museum education, I first had to de-center the human subject and myself as researcher. I could not approach my post-structural research assuming the normative power dynamics of the all-knowing-researcher vs. the powerless-subject; rather, the "subjects" in my research took up space as rhizomatic assemblages, bodies-without-organs, more-than-humans, pre-individual singularities, and so on

Furthermore, it is my hope that by re-thinking the current research in rural access to art museums, and the body of research in rural and museum education in general, that there might one day be a shift away from the practice based, theory-free work of positivism, in favor of a different non-subjugated view of the world. This is not to say that work in the interpretive and critical fields is not valuable, because such efforts are making important changes to many oppressive structures, but the inherent focus on brute data, discovering the "truth," and creating research with repeatable results, is an unrealistic goal for the future of the social sciences. There should be a shift in focus that does not privilege any voice or type of research over any other because of its assumed validity based on pre-existing structures. A movement away from this in

both the fields of museum education and rural education could prove to open doors to many new possibilities and innovative ways of seeing the world.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretically Speaking

An Introduction to Post-Structural Philosophy

In order to fully understand this study, it is first important to understand the theoretical and conceptual framework that grounded the "methodological" background through which this study was conceived. The theoretical foundations of this body of research were based in post-structuralism by way of Deleuze, Derrida, and other contemporary philosophers who draw from their writings. A post-structural approach requires that one give up conventional definitions and uses of language, reality, power, knowledge, memory, and discourse. There is no longer a singular "truth" that must be recognized or found, hierarchical binaries no longer exist, and the human self can no longer center thought.

Additionally, the principles of post-structural theoretical work require that one give up the usage of "to be" and instead replace it with the conjunction "and" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The reason for this change in verbiage being that *to be* "establishes identity, stability, and closure" (St. Pierre, 2918, p. 4), while *and* symbolizes the opening of an ongoing relation, forever building, growing, and changing. Post-structural theories do not mean to separate, differentiate, or close off, but rather their objective is to create opportunities of *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994), not for the purpose of becoming a single thing, but the constant becoming, changing, and moving of ongoing relations (St. Pierre, 2018). Thus, by removing *to be* from the post-structural vocabulary, we also must remove Cartesian oppositional binaries because they too force closure (this *or* that), with no possibility for new creation (this *and* that, *and* that, *and*…) (St. Pierre, 2018). Without stable binaries, Cartesian dualism has been rejected,

the human is no longer the all-knowing being situated at the center of our world—all that is left now is to rethink and reconstruct entities we once thought as separate.

Furthermore, on the topic of language, it was not only Derrida but other post-structural theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari who felt that language in its primary function had become increasingly difficult to accept, because of language's tendency to enforce social order, structure, and categorization. And our human reliance on language for the representation of truth began to make language-based research unthinkable because, in the context of post-structuralism, language can no longer be stratified and coded, separating words from things; rather, all words-things exist on a single plane of consistency. Therefore, if we begin to breakdown our own language and obliterate the binaries that have been constructed to categorize our lives, the self, the human, and the "I" as we know it begin to disappear. This brings us to the decentering of the human being in post-structuralism and post-qualitative inquiry. Once researchers arrive at the realization that words and definitions have all been inventions of societal constructions at a particular moment in time, these definitions that we tie to our identity can no longer hold up. In short, if we had never, as a human population, invented distinct categories of identity classifications (black, white, male, female, etc.), would we even be able to see these implied categorical differences of the "human" assemblage? Furthermore, would we even be able to call ourselves humans, considering that "human" in itself is a classification against object/thing?

Given this stark departure from what is already known and accepted within traditional language use and research methodology, choosing post-structuralism as the foundation of a research project seems somewhat daunting, especially considering that it provides seemingly no designated starting point. Jackson and Mazzei (2011), however, tackled the task of working with post-structural theories in qualitative research in a book titled *Thinking with Theory*. For Jackson

and Mazzei (2011), to "Think with Theory" is to truly center one's research around theoretical concepts— theory does not function in the background or as an afterthought, but actually serves as the beginning of the research process. Throughout the process of beginning my own research, I attempted to fully immerse myself in post-structural theoretical texts, reading a range of works from the likes of Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, Manning, Massumi, and Barad. This immersion in post-structuralism provoked much confusion and uncertainty as to which concept would be the best choice for my research ambitions. I became almost obsessed with trying to "get it right" by finding the one *perfect* concept that could best help me navigate and understand what was happening within the world of rural access to art museums. However, I soon realized that perhaps there was no *one*, singular concept that would make this happen. Post-structuralism is based in multiplicities, assemblages, and rhizomes, and, in the context of my research, this inherent interconnectedness of concepts makes it impossible to disentangle a particular one and use it independently of others. This was a difficult realization for me to come to, as I continuously changed my theoretical framework from Foucault's *power*, to Deleuze and Leibniz's *fold,* to Deleuze's *event*. But, throughout all of this searching, my grounding in post-structuralism remained constant. Thus, post-structuralism in general served as the starting point for my research, with particular attention paid to the contemporary readings and interpretations of Deleuzian theories and concepts by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi. So, I will begin this theoretical exploration by first laying out the not-so-basic basics behind Deleuze's Ontology of Immanence, as it is this general ontology that became the thinking material that I used in the "analysis" portion of this dissertation.

Deleuzian Ontology

Gilles Deleuze was a 20th century French philosopher and originator of what he called "transcendental empiricism," a philosophical position he rooted in his ontology of immanence.

"Transcendental empiricism" was Deleuze's rebuttal to Kant's rational empiricism, and to understand Deleuze's position, it is first helpful to understand traditional humanist epistemological philosophers, because this is the tradition Deleuze sought to work against. While traditional humanist epistemology centers around the building of knowledge and the finding of truth, it discounts the ontological nature of the world. This epistemological philosophy forces hierarchical binaries, favoring dichotomies of mind/body, man/nature, human/non-human, et cetera. Traditional Western epistemology assumes that there is an ultimate truth that can be found if a human researcher performs certain actions according to the presets of humanist theory and methodology. The human "I" is thus favored because the philosopher/researcher is the all-knowing center of the research study, and their research is the yet-to-be-known truth. This traditional philosophy is an ontology of identity, an epistemological project of discovery (May, 2005). This epistemological project in the analytic tradition assumes ontology to be "the study of what there is, either in general or in some specific area" (May, 2005, p. 13), but for continental philosophers, "ontology has come to mean "the study of being (or Being)" (May, 2005, p. 13). The idea of ontology altogether was rejected by the contemporaries of Deleuze, including Foucault and Derrida, because they felt constrained by linguistic barriers that assumed "ontology is an attempt to *discover* the nature of the universe's fundamental entities." (May 2005, p. 17). May (2005) writes,

> By embracing ontology as the study of what there is Deleuze does not only go against the anti-ontological trend of much of twentieth-century philosophy. His work also cuts against the grain of those who have approached the question of how one might live. For Deleuze's predecessors and contemporaries, breathing life into that question requires abandoning what had been considered ontologically necessary, eliminating the search for

> entities that constrain us to asking questions less radical than that of how one might live (p. 16).

Hence, Deleuze is not interested in *discovering* an ontology of what is, rather he is concerned with *creating* a philosophy of ontology, as May (2005) goes on to explain

> If ontology is a project solely of discovery, its point is to articulate the nature or essence of what is. It is to offer us the *identity* of what is. An identity requires conceptual stability. In order for something to have an identity, it must have characteristics that can be *identified* over time. Those characteristics do not need to be stable. The stability needs to be possessed only by the concepts that identify them. Certain kinds of instabilities might be identified and might be part of the identity of what is (p. 18).

The reason that a philosophy of ontology must be *created*, rather than *discovered*, for Deleuze is because to discover is only to name what is already there, but to create implies an ontological philosophy built upon a difference in itself, not a difference in identity categorization (Boundas, 2010). Again, I find that May (2005) best describes Deleuze's break from earlier views of ontology in his book, writing:

> Ontology has been thought to be an ontology of identity since Plato. But it does not need to be that way. Ontology can be an ontology of difference. It can be an ontology where what is there is not the same old things but a process of continual creation, an ontology that does not seek to reduce being to the knowable but instead seeks to widen thought to palpate the unknowable (p. 171).

By refusing to reduce his ontology of being to what is already known and knowable, Deleuze seeks to avoid hierarchical comparisons through binary definitions – instead Deleuze's ontology is "univocity of being" (Smith, 2001, p. 168).

A univocal ontology assumes that Being is not and cannot be separated into different senses or categories; no longer can we separate "God or man, animal or plant" (Smith 2001, p.169). In earlier philosophies, *Being* was thought to be equivocal, meaning that the *Being* of God is separate from the *Being* of man, which in turn is separate from the *Being* of animals, etc. Each of these types of *Being* in an equivocal philosophy are different from one another in a way that reinforces the transcendent hierarchies Deleuze works against, but Deleuze (1994) also acknowledges that this concept of univocity causes a fracture to our thought because we are presupposed to think in equivocal and analogous representations. As Smith (2001) points out,

> "This is why Deleuze insists that univocity is such a difficult concept to *think*: how can we say that there are differences between beings, and nonetheless that Being is said in one and the same sense of everything that is?" (pp. 177-178).

It is thus, the difference-in-itself that is at the core of Deleuze's ontology of univocity. As Smith (2001) underscores, "For Deleuze, the only pure and fully realized ontology *must* be a univocal ontology, and only a univocal ontology is capable of thinking difference-in-itself, or of providing difference with its own concept" (p. 169). In *Difference and Repetition,* Deleuze (1994) describes the essence of univocity through difference, writing:

> In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, *of* all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities. Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is 'equal' for all, but they themselves are not equal. It is said of all in a single sense, but they themselves do not have the same sense. The essence of univocal being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence and do not change the essence of being - just as white includes various intensities, while

> remaining essentially the same white. There are not two 'paths', as Parmenides' *poem* suggests, but a single 'voice' of Being which includes all its modes, including the most diverse, the most varied, the most differentiated. Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself (p. 36).

Therefore, it is not that Deleuze is suggesting that all types of being, and modalities are the same or equal, because just as there are tints and shades of whites, so too, are there variations in intensities of beings and modalities – but the essence of Beings (and colors) is not dependent on varying degrees of intensity, because individuating differences do not change the essences of Being. Beings cannot be differentiated by varying degrees of power or intensity, because "difference as a degree of power is *a non-categorical* difference in that it preserves the univocal sense of Being" (Smith, 2001, p. 178). Within the *Being*, there are differences of relations, *internal* differences that cannot be related and compared, as Colebrook (2010) illuminates:

> If there is only one being then we cannot relate differences – say, differences of colour – as differences *of* some grounding neutral being, a being which is, and which then has secondary or less real qualities. Rather, each difference is fully real: each shade of a colour, each fleck of light, each sound or affect is fully real and therefore different in itself, not merely a different way in which some other subtending being is grasped (p. 295).

This *internal* difference most often referred to as a *difference-in-itself* is an essential concept of Deleuze's ontology. I explore this concept in more depth in later sections, but it is significant to note how this *difference-in-itself* shaped Deleuze's philosophy into a philosophy of immanence. The *internal* differences that exist are inherent differences that deny categorization because

“identities presuppose differences and are inhabited by them, just as differences inevitably presuppose and are inhabited by identities” (Patton, 2010, p. 76).

The idea of multiplicities and pluralism appears throughout many of Deleuze’s writings and has been seen as one of his most important concepts (Roffe, 2010), because for Deleuze everything is a multiplicity. Roffe, a philosopher and expert on Deleuzian theory, describes Deleuze’s multiplicities as follows,

> A multiplicity is, in the most basic sense, a complex structure that does not reference a prior unity. Multiplicities are not parts of a greater whole that have been fragmented, and they cannot be considered manifold expressions of a single concept or transcendent unity (2010, p. 181).

It is important to note that while multiplicities became central and important to the characteristics of relations, the concept of multiplicity was not fully explored until Deleuze’s second book, *Bergsonism* (1997a). Furthermore, all of these relations and the multiplicities wherein the relations reside exist on a singular plane of consistency (immanence), which he describes with the help of Guattari in their text, *A Thousand Plateaus:*

> All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak *of a plane of consistency* of multiplicities, even though the dimensions of this "plane" increase with the number of connections that are made on it. Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities. (1987, p. 9)

As is becoming apparent, in Deleuzian philosophy concepts are interconnected to one another in a way that makes it difficult to fully explain or understand one concept (like external relations) without also understanding some of his larger concepts (like multiplicity). This is because all Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian concepts live within the same rhizomatic plane of immanence. This Deleuzian/Deleuzoguattarian idea of the rhizome is drawn from botany and is meant to imply that concepts are connected by an intrinsic root system, like spider grass, or any other invasive weed species with root systems jutting out in all directions, producing new plants without any hierarchical ordering. This idea of the rhizome is first introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus*, wherein they describe this connection to nature:

> The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other. The rhizome includes the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed. Animal and plant, couchgrass is crabgrass. We get the distinct feeling that we will convince no one unless we enumerate certain approximate characteristics of the rhizome (p. 7).

This instance of the interconnectedness of the rhizome through which all Deleuzian/Deleuzoguattarian concepts exist, only further demonstrates the multiplicity in their thought. The rhizome never ceases to form new connections and spring forth new plants (or ideas) from its roots. Unlike the roots of a single tree that exist only to bring life to the tree from which its roots spring forth, the rhizome is like a weed, not only bringing life to one plant projection, but to an entire system of interconnected plants.

The rhizome is also connected to the functions and uses of language, because it requires that language be broken down to its internal, connective parts, and that language not be restricted

to representational definitions. Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizomatic qualities of language:

> It is always possible to break a language down into internal structural elements, an undertaking not fundamentally different from a search for roots. There is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people. A method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence (pp. 7-8).

This breaking down of language to its "internal structural elements" demonstrates the condition that in order to understand Deleuzian concepts, one must also re-define language in non-representational terms, because "Language, by itself, produces belief, as it substitutes observed repetition with spoken repetition, and the impression of a present object with the hearing of a specific word which allows us to conceive ideas vividly" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 70). As touched on in the previous section, language as we "know" it must be deconstructed and reconceptualized through a new lens that denies analogous representation.

Similar to this deconstruction of representational language/thought, Deleuze also rejects the chronological linearity of time. Instead, he splits time between the distinctions of Aiôn and Chronos. He defines Chronos as the "present which exists alone" (Deleuze, 1969/1990, pp. 77), and Aiôn as the past-future. Put another way, Aiôn is eternity that can be endlessly and infinitely subdivided in both directions, while Chronos is the depth of the present. Deleuze goes on to describe the opposition between the two time-relations, "whereas Chronos is limited and infinite, Aiôn is unlimited, the way that future and past are unlimited, and finite like the instant" (Deleuze, 1969/1990, pp. 165). This means that while the present, Chronos, is limited by the

specific moment, there are also more present moments to come; and while Aiôn is unlimited in its ability to continuously retreat back or forward and divide within itself, the creation of new past-future moments are finite. The description of these nonlinear time distinctions is important to the relation of series and events, because they describe the two sides of the event, the “actual passing side (Chronos) and the eternal but differential side (Aiôn)” (Williams, J., 2008, pp. 123). The distinction of the differential eternal is also significant, because Deleuze does not see this eternity as an actual immortal eternity, but rather, a virtual differentiation of relations. Deleuze explains his abstract and non-linear conceptions of time in *The Logic of Sense* (1969/1990), often regarded as one of his most complex theoretical texts. At the start of this book, Deleuze (1969/1990) describes the moment in *Alice and Wonderland* in which Alice becomes larger and then smaller and back again as an example of Deleuze’s non-linear conceptions of time and space, writing:

> When I say "Alice becomes larger," I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa (p. 1).

Williams (2008) described this Alice’s *becoming*, writing, “Assuming that you are growing in some direction – look back along the timeline and watch yourself receding and becoming smaller, as you become bigger; now look forward and watch yourself become bigger as you

become smaller" (pp. 28). This can be thought of as a parent watching their child grow older: through the present (Chronos), a parent can look onto the past or future (Aiôn), and looking back see the child as a smaller, younger child than they are in present. Likewise, as the parent looks to the future, they can see the becoming older of the child, in relation to the younger figure they are now (Williams, 2008). Again, to refer back to the time distinctions of Aiôn and Chronos, becoming is a never-ending multiplicity of production. Like Aiôn, becoming extends to infinity, but as Chronos, becoming is in the depth of the present becoming-self. Becoming is a type of movement, that divides infinity and creates difference. Becoming is what moves between events, not that events are situated on a particular timeline such that there are markers of starting and stopping points, but rather, becoming is made up of simultaneous start-stop-mid points in an ongoing cycle. Becoming is a constant movement, and thus the constant difference that is occurring in every multiplicity.

In the section following this brief exploration into Deleuze's essential ontology, I include a deep exploration into the Deleuzian concept of *e*xternal relations. This is because, at the outset of my research, I desired to have at least some familiarity with a concept that I believed would allow for the blooming of new ideas and possibilities throughout the research process. The term *relation* as a theoretical concept has been used in fields of philosophy, physics, geography, theology, and has not been limited in its use to specific movements in any of these fields. Often the uses of *relation* and *relational* as theoretical or ontological concepts relate to the physical aspects of relation, the relation between objects, people, and environments. Even still, philosophers throughout history have had much difficulty agreeing on a definition for *relation*, but for the sake of this research I attended only to its post-structural and post-human conceptualizations.

Deleuze's External Relations

At the outset of my dissertation research and field work, I concerned myself with the Deleuzian concept of "external relations," but, as with many of Deleuze's ideas, it became difficult to think this notion on its own given the way many Deleuzian concepts are connected through his "plane of immanence." The intertwining of Deleuze's concepts seems to require that one not only become familiar with multiple theoretical postulates, but that one, at least to some degree, understand their complex interactions as well. For Deleuze, external relations are the non-human lines of flight that are pervasive throughout life--this is less of a singular concept than it is an overarching ontology. As Colebrook (2010) explains, "Deleuze's ontology – that relations are external to terms – is a commitment to perceiving life; life is connection and relation, but the outcome or event of those relations is not determined in advance by intrinsic properties" (p. 5). Therefore, external relations are, in a sense, ontologically present throughout all of Deleuze's thinking because external relations are always already there.

In this section I explore Deleuze's notion of external relations through a rhizomatic field of philosophical and conceptual connections. External relations were first introduced by Deleuze in his earliest published text, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* (1991). Deleuze attributes to Hume the creation of "the first great logic of *relations*, showing in it that all relations (not only 'matters of fact' but also relations among ideas) are external to their terms" (1991, p. x). The important distinction made here is the way in which Deleuze (by way of Hume) describes relations as "external," thus differentiating them from the representational and structural definitions proposed by Kant. As Deleuze (1991) writes, "Thus for Kant, relations depend on the nature of things in the sense that, as phenomena, things presuppose a synthesis whose source is the same as the source of relations" (p. 111). However, it is not only Kant who used the term and concept of relations in its pre-determined sense; rather,

the term *relation* as a theoretical concept has also been used in the fields of physics, geography, theology, and mathematics, to name a few. As mentioned, often the uses of *relation* and *relational* as theoretical concepts is used to denote the physical aspects of relation: the relation between objects, people, and environments, such that the relation is equivalent to the object. This position is often referred to as relationism, and it holds that relations are internal in that "(1) entities are their relations to other entities; and (2) these entities cannot exist apart from their relations" (Bryant, 2011, p. 8). Deleuze, and Hume for that matter, insist on the exteriority of relations, meaning that, "there are *no* pre-given or a priori systems or structures through which the world is given, no single structure that would determine relations, differences or differentiation in advance" (Colebrook, 2006, p. 60). Thus, Kantian and structural definitions of relation(s) can no longer account for the relation(s) of physical objects and beings, "precisely because representations cannot present relations" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 30). While these distinctions between Kant and Deleuze are significant, Deleuze's concept of external relations cannot simply be defined in opposition to Kantian representational relation, because, like all Deleuzian ideas, external relations exist within a rhizomatic multiplicity characterized by constant back and forth movement between concepts.

What Are Deleuzian Relations?

The above introduction gives but a glimpse into the complexities that exist in a Deleuzian reading of relations, and to my present knowledge, Deleuze's use of the word *relation cannot be reduced to one set definition*, because he employed it so widely in his various writings. In a collection of essays published posthumously, Deleuze (2001) gave the only (somewhat) clear explanation of his notion of *relation*:

> What is a relation? It is what makes us pass from a given impression or idea to the idea of something that is not presently given. For example, I think of something "similar" …

> When I see a picture of Peter, I think of Peter, who isn't there. One would look in vain in the given term for the reason for this passage. The relation is itself the effect of so-called principles of association, contiguity, resemblance, and causality, all of which constitute, precisely, a human nature. Human nature means that what is universal or constant in the human mind is never one idea or another as a term but only the ways of passing from one particular idea to another (p. 39).

Prior to this posthumously published essay, it did not seem that Deleuzian relations could be summed up by a single definition or quality, but rather, that the term reflected an amalgamation of qualities and descriptions Deleuze explored in a number of different texts. Even with this "definition," however, it is not in Deleuze's nature to assign a single meaning to any term or concept, and this "definition" does not discount his earlier descriptions of relations. So, in this section, I will further elaborate on some of the most critical aspects of the qualities and descriptions of relations that Deleuze puts forward. As mentioned, one quality of relations is that they are external to their terms; this externality (and exteriority) is something that I will explore in further detail about later, as this property remains central to Deleuzian understandings of relations. In his first text, *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991), Deleuze uses the exact phrase "Relations are external to their terms" five separate times, excluding the many times he makes reference to relations being external to their terms but uses different phrasing. This alone tells us the significance of externality to Deleuze's descriptions of relations.

Another substantial trait of relations for Deleuze (1977/1987) is that "Relations are in the middle and exist as such" (p. 55). The middle is also a positionality that appears in other Deleuzian writings on concepts, including his descriptions of haecceity, rhizomes, becoming, and event, all of which he classifies as always existing in the middle, with no beginning or end.

Throughout Deleuze's writings, both alone and with Guattari, he concludes that we are always already in the middle, and that we start from the middle of things. This middle ground that relations occupy accounts for the conjunctive quality of relations; relations become the AND of our world, constantly adding, never ending. The AND of relations allows for the externality of relations, as Deleuze writes:

> The AND is not even a specific relation or conjunction, it is that which subtends all relations, the path of all relations which makes relations shoot outside their terms and outside their set of their terms and outside everything which could be determined as Being, One, or Whole. The AND as extra-being, inter-being. Relations might still establish themselves between their terms or between two sets, from one to the other, but AND gives relations another direction, and puts to flight terms and sets, the former and the latter on the line of flight which it actively creates (Deleuze and Parnet, 1977/1987, p. 57).

Thus, AND can be a relation, but it can also be the path that connects and presupposes relations, and these relation conjunctions come together to create a multiplicity wherein the relation can continue to exist and move within. For example, as I have previously mentioned, throughout many of Deleuze's writings, he describes relations as "external to [their] [its] terms" (Deleuze, 1991, p. x; 1987 p. 55; 1997b, p.10; 2001, p. 37). And it is not only his use of the word "external," but also "term" that is significant, because Deleuze uses the word "term" not to refer to a "singularity, but rather an actualized object" (Bryant, 2008, p. 200). Thus, through his unique use of language, Deleuze, by way of Hume, is already demonstrating the non-representational qualities of relations. I will continue to discuss relations and their many qualities and characteristics later in this paper. First, however, I want to look at the way in which

Deleuze uses the concept of the external, as it is much more complex than a typical binary definition of internal/external might lead one to believe.

External(ity)

External(ity) and exterior(ity) are often used interchangeably throughout Deleuze's writings, but it is in his first book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991), that he begins to explore this concept of the external/exterior through a reading of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1896). In the first book of Hume's *Treatise*, originally published in 1739, Hume explores the externality of existence by describing how all ideas are conceived as existent, regardless of their origin in the memory and consciousness. In actuality, however, the existence of ideas is merely a perception, as Hume (1896) writes,

> A like reasoning will account for the idea of *external existence.* We may observe, that 'tis universally allowed by philosophers, and is besides pretty obvious of itself, that nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion. To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; all this is nothing but to perceive.
>
> Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are derived from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of anything specifically different from-ideas and impressions (p. 67).

By this, Hume (1896) means that it is only through our own experiences, memories, and consciousness that we are able to conceive of any object or idea, but to conceive of external objects and ideas,

> when supposed *specifically* different from our perceptions is, to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking, we do

> not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations. (Hume, 1896, p. 68)

Deleuze's emphasis on Hume's use of external(ity) is where he begins to depart from traditional empiricist readings of the *Treatise* (1896), as he problematizes the Cartesian and Kantian notion of "ideas as experiences." Instead Deleuze emphasizes the *external*, because this externality allows for pluralisms and multiplicities that are not tied to an internal subject for creation. Deleuze actually rejects the concept of the interior/interiority of relations and sees this interiority to be dominant thought of much of Western philosophy—exemplified in Descartes' cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), in which the human subject has an interior mind separate from the exterior body and physical world, and this interior mind can transcend the external world around it (Parr, 2010). This transcendental interiority embraced by traditional Western philosophy assumes that knowledge is created within the mind alone and thus produces what we know about the external world. In contrast, Deleuze believes that it is not the human mind which has created the exterior world, but rather the existing field of external relations which has allowed for us to perceive the world and our own subjecthood. For example, to say that "I think, there for I am" would mean that the subject/body did not exist before the thought of it, but on the contrary, for Deleuze this subject/body was already in existence through a field of relations and simply assigning a new name to subject does not change the relations that already existed before/during its creation and continue to exist after.

The externality of relations is also important when considering the potential origins of relations because, "If there is *no* being that determines relations, if each relation is produced on the basis of each new encounter, then *all* we have are connections and relations without prior ground: a series of 'ANDS' with no 'IS' (Colebrook, 2006, p. 74). I have previously mentioned

the connection between AND and external relations as a means to signify the middle, but this AND becomes doubly important in the external qualities of relations. Just as the AND of relations signifies something that is in the middle of things, the AND which connects as a conjunction does in the middle of a sentence; this AND, however, also signifies an external offshoot. In this way, the AND is a constantly added conjunctive, subtending the relations into an ever-growing assemblage/rhizome.

Relations of Hume Vs. William James

Although Deleuze mainly credits Hume with creating "the first great logic of relations" (Deleuze, 1991, p. x), in *Treatise*, philosopher William James also wrote about relations in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism,* originally published in 1906. Being that Deleuze did not publish his first monograph, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, until 1953, it is possible that Deleuze was also familiar with James's writing on relations, especially considering Deleuze briefly mentions James in *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991, p. 99), though he does not mention of James' relational writings. Rather, Deleuze only refers to James as a pluralist, likely referring to James' *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). Given their shared interest in Hume's writing on relations, Deleuze's neglect of James in his early writing on external is curious. As such, now I will briefly examine how Hume's and James' descriptions of relation compare to one another in an effort to understand the reasoning behind Deleuze's decision to focus solely on the former.

James was an American philosopher and was credited with the creation of a "radical empiricism" that challenged the traditional rationalist philosophy of Kant. It was not until the last decade of his life that he wrote some of his most important philosophical contributions, including *Essays in Radical Empiricism* and *A Pluralistic Universe,* which were more widely published and distributed after his death. James (1971) described his radical empiricism as follows:

> My description of things, accordingly, starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of the second order. It is essentially a mosaic philosophy, a philosophy of plural facts, like that of Hume and his descendants, who refer these facts neither to Substances in which they inhere nor to an Absolute Mind that creates them as its objects. But it differs from the Humian type of empiricism in one particular which makes me add the epithet radical (p. 24)

Thus, we can already see both the influence of Hume on James in his push for empiricism over rationalism, and how James also distinguishes himself from Hume by labeling his empiricism 'radical.' James (1971) goes on to describe what he means by this term:

> To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system* (p. 25).

Here, James also lays out his philosophy of relations, which parallel those of Hume previously expounded upon by Deleuze, except James' conceptualization allows for causal relations, something of which Hume was skeptical (Fen, 1952). It is important to note, however, that although James does account for relations that are felt as 'real,' this does not mean that the relation is true, meaning, "the 'truth' of a specific causal relationship cannot be verified by our feeling alone" (Fen, 1952, p. 161). This is actually quite similar to Deleuze's description of relation's causality: "Relations are not doing the connecting, but rather they themselves are connected; causality, for example, is passion, an impression of reflection...Causality is felt" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 26). Here we can already see the similarity in James and Deleuze, with both

acknowledging the fact that we believe relations to be real because they can be felt and perceived immediately. This causal felt relation thus belongs not to the realm of *knowing*, but rather the domain of *being* (Fen, 1952). Knowledge and knowing, which to traditional rationalists like Descartes and Kant, constituted the existence of being, is inverted in James's radical empiricism such that, "Knowledge of sensible realities thus comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It *is made;* and made by relations that unroll themselves in time" (James, 1971, p. 32). Likewise, Hume and Deleuze also took issue with the knowing subject of rationalist philosophy, as Deleuze (1991) wrote,

> Hume constantly affirms the identity between the mind, the imagination, and ideas. The mind is not nature, nor does it have a nature. It is identical with the ideas in the mind. Ideas are given, as given; they are experience. The mind, on the other hand, is given as a collection of ideas and not as a system (p. 22).

Here, Deleuze lays out Hume's issue with the knowing subject, 'the mind,' as he explains, like James, that knowledge is not pre-given and it does not have a set nature, but rather experience creates ideas (knowledge), which transcend the nature of the subject because "ideas are connected in the mind—not by the mind" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 24). It is thus apparent that James and Deleuze share many similarities in their understanding of Hume, but I have not yet touched on the way James theorizes the external quality of relations, which Deleuze thought to be one of Hume's greatest accomplishments. Therefore, I will now begin an examination of how James used this concept in his writings.

Just as Deleuze repeats significant phrases and concepts, so will I repeat Deleuze's exclamation that Hume, "created the first great logic of *relations*, showing in it that all relations (not only 'matters of fact' but also relations among ideas) are external to their terms" (Deleuze,

1991, p. x). Deleuze's insistence on the externality of relations runs central to his reading of Hume's *Treatise*, but it seems to play a less significant role in James's writing on relations. This is not to say that James did not include external relations in his texts, but rather he does not necessarily attribute the externality of relations to Hume. In speaking of relations, James (1971) writes, "The first duty of radical empiricism, taking given conjunctions at their face-value, is to class some of them as more intimate and some as more external" (p. 58). James's (1971) classification of externality versus intimacy of relations is placed on a scale in which,

> Merely to be 'with' one another in a universe of discourse is the most external relation that terms can have and seems to involve nothing whatever as to further consequences. Simultaneity and time-interval come next, and then space-adjacency and distance. After them, similarity and difference, carrying the possibility of many inferences. Then relations of activity, tying terms into series involving change, tendency, resistance, and the causal order generally. Finally, the relation experienced between terms that form states of mind and are immediately conscious of continuing each other. The organization of the Self as a system of memories, purposes, strivings, fulfilments or disappointments, is incidental to this most intimate of all relations, the terms of which seem in many cases actually to compenetrate and suffuse each other's being (p. 26).

Similarly, Hume (1896) divided relations into two classes, the first being, "into such as depend entirely on ideas, which we compare together" (p. 69), which is comprised of "resemblance, contrariety, degrees of quality, and propositions of quantity and number" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 99); and the second class of relations "such as may be chang'd without any change in ideas" (Hume, 1896, p. 69), which encompasses "identity, temporal and spatial relations, causality" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 99). Essentially, what James, Hume, and Deleuze have all demonstrated here is a

classification of two types of relations: those which do not relate to changes of ideas, and those that depend completely on ideas. But all of these relations are no less external to their terms. As Deleuze (1991) explained,

> Relations are external to their terms. This means that ideas do not account for the nature of the operations that we perform on them, and especially of the relations that we establish among them. The principles of human nature, or the principles of association, are the necessary conditions of relations (p. 101).

Ultimately, it appears that James and Hume agree far more than they disagree. Perhaps then, the reason that Deleuze did not focus on James in his reading of relations is because Deleuze was intending to return to what he called "the first great logic of relations" (Deleuze, 1991, p. x), the creation of which he credited Hume, and so to include James would acknowledge a secondary source that at the time was inessential to Deleuze's understanding of relations. Deleuze is known for his anthologies of historical philosophers and their concepts, but here, James does not fall into Deleuze's historical category; starting and focusing only on the primary source is very indicative of Deleuze's other works on historical figures. Deleuze's lack of inclusion of James' relations does not mean that James' reading of relation is any less significant to my project at hand, because James' relations along with Deleuze's have both shaped contemporary readings and writings on the subject. Without an understanding of the nuances of both James's and Deleuze's relations, it would be difficult to accurately analyze and incorporate these contemporary relational texts into my project.

Contemporary, Post-Structural Readings of Relations

As with many theoretical concepts, the notion of relations can vary across theorists depending on who they are drawing from and to which subject they are attempting to apply the concept. Theories of relations arise in the fields of mathematics, sciences, theology, and

metaphysics, just to name a few, but the uses of the terms ‘relation’ or ‘external relations’ in many of these subjects differ greatly from those I have explained in Humean, Deleuzian, and Jamesean terms. These differences in use and explanation across various fields stem from the use of traditional rationalist philosophies, such as those of Kant and Hegel. Examples and uses of a more Deleuzian, transcendental (radical) empiricist reading of (external) relations are, comparatively speaking, harder to find than those of the rationalist variety. The most extensive use of Deleuzian (as well as Humean and Jamesean) relations can be found within the writings of the contemporary cultural theorist and political philosopher, Erin Manning and philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi.

Manning makes the most extensive use of relations throughout many of her written works, but as she positions “*relation* as key to experience” (Manning, 2013, p. 2) she makes a connection to the relations of James. Describing her position, Manning (2013) writes,

> Relation, understood here in a Jamesian sense, is a making apparent of a third space opened up for experience in the making. This third space (or interval) is active with the tendencies of interaction but is not limited to them. Relation folds experience into it such that what emerges is always more than the sum of its parts (p. 2)

What Manning (2013) means by this is that relations are the key components of pure experience because it is relations that both allow for and create experience, and when relations fold into that experience, a new multiplicity of relations emerge. Relations thus presuppose experiences and emerge out of them. As can be seen, Manning (2013) is consistent with the Deleuzian (1991) assertion that, “The relation always presupposes a synthesis, and neither the idea nor the mind can account for it (p. 100). This is because, as mentioned, relations exist in the middle, they function as conjunctives, doing the connecting on a horizontal “plane of immanence” (Deleuze &

Guattari, 1996). The horizontality of the plane on which concepts and relation connect is further important because it denies the vertical hierarchy and dualistic tendencies of rationalism. It is important to note that Deleuze took issue with the nature and status of experience as the concept had been employed in phenomenology, because it "attributes to experience the origin *and* the source of validity of all possible knowledge" (Boundas, 1991, p. 6). The "pure experience" to which James and Manning refer, rather, differs from that of phenomenology because this "experience" is neither a mental nor physical experience, it is not the immediately analogous conception of experience, rather, pure experience is the *more-than* of experience that presupposes consciousness (Manning, 2016). Thus, relations are not, as in the case of phenomenology, created in experience as taken up in the subject or object, but rather relations occur within the nonconscious, pure experience.

The relations and experiences which Manning refers to throughout her texts are often movement/body relations, but this is not to be confused with a relation or experience that occurs in the subject. "The body" as Manning (2013) describes, "is what comes-to-be under specific and singular conditions" (p. 16). According to Manning (2013), the body is a multiplicity:

> When the skin becomes not a container but a multidimensioned topological surface that folds in, through and across spacetimes of experience, what emerges is not a self but the dynamic form of a worlding that refuses categorization. Beyond the human, beyond the sense of touch or vision, beyond the object, what emerges is relation (p. 12).

The multiplicity of the body is thus further connected to the multiplicity of the relation in Deleuze's *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, as both the body and the relation cannot be reduced to the subjective. The relation does not belong to the mind of the subject; relations are *preindividual* (Manning, 2013): "the phaseless excess – the more-than – that envelops yet exceeds the newness

of the process in its unfolding. The preindividual is the germ of potential in every activity" (p. 16). Thus, as Manning asserts, the way in which we must use and describe relations cannot stem only from the human-centered experience but must encompass the *more-than*. In *Always More Than One,* Manning (2013), talks more broadly about the body and the implications of the way we view the body. Her focus is not on the researcher's context, but rather the philosopher's. She does not focus on the problems around the "I", but rather it appears she has already moved past this and sees her body as an ever-changing being. Manning (2013) sees the body as a body becoming, an assemblage of movement and affects, always folding onto itself (p. 2). In this way, Manning (2013) is thinking very much in the same way that Deleuze (1988) described Foucault's foldings. The body is not a container of a singular self, but rather a constant fold of the outside, where the inside is made up of the preexisting foldings of the outside that is ever changing. I believe this is to say that both Manning and Deleuze (1988) believe that the outside can create innumerable folds, and those inside folds are reflections of the once newly altered outside. Something that I might visually compare this to is the process of tie-dyeing: as the fabric is twisted and folded, the interior folds stay relatively unaltered, changing only mildly through the slight bleeding of color, and it is the outside folding that changes wholly along with its dipping into color, much as our outside self-changes within specific relations and intra-actions. This folding and dyeing of fabric are a constant process, always starting anew, and it is where these colors bleed together between these intra-actions that we have, not the repetition of the same exterior, but a repetition of difference (Deleuze, 1988, p. 98). Thus, the relations of *experience* are constantly being folded into our *more-than-human* self, to create a unique body becoming.

In earlier writings on relations, Manning (2009) explains that, "Relation cannot be foretold: it must be experienced" (p. 41), and in order to experience these relations, Manning

(2009) and later Manning with Massumi (2014) explain what they have termed *techniques of relation.* Techniques of relation allow for relation to be experienced because they are "devices for catalyzing and modulating interaction" (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 91). Other characteristics of these *techniques of relation* are mentioned by Manning (2009) in her book *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy:*

> Techniques of relation produce events. Every event is a relation. Events create relation as much as relation creates events…. The essence of a technique of relation is not its content per se, but its capacity to become more-than and create more-than (Manning, 2009, p. 41).

The *event,* which is referred to here, is a complex concept explored by Deleuze (1990) in his text *Logic of Sense.* The *event*, much like many of Deleuze's other concepts, exists within its own lexicon of understanding. Deleuze wrote that, "Events make language possible. But making possible does not mean causing to begin" (p. 181). By stating this, Deleuze is saying that without events, language would have no properties by which it could exist. He goes on to describe various properties of language, including verbs, nouns, propositions, and denotations, all of which are in turn attached to events. It is within the twenty-sixth series (what Deleuze terms the book's chapters) that he explains the connection of language and events, and that were it not for events, language would be nothing but "an indistinct noise" (Deleuze, 1969/1990, p. 182). Events are shrouded in verbs and expressed in propositions. Deleuze does not see verbs as expressions of actions, but rather as expressions of the event. Much like how he links external relations and conjunctives, Deleuze again connects parts of language to theoretical concepts by seeing verbs as events. Thus, verbs are connected to one another and other parts of speech through external relations (conjunctions).

That being said, Manning and Massumi (2014), in their book *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience,* describe how they use techniques of relation to catalyze academic events through Manning's brainchild SenseLab:

> It was conceived as a flexible meeting ground whose organizational form would arise as a function of its projects and change as the projects evolved. Process would be emphasized over deliverable products. In fact, process itself would be the SenseLab's product. Membership would be based on elective affinities. Anyone who considered himself or herself a member was one. The result is a shifting mix of students and professors, theorists and practitioners, from a wide range of disciplines and practices (p. 90)

The only way in which the creation of an *event* would be possible is if the event "gave rise to new thoughts through the interaction on site," and this occurrence must not be "pre-reduced to the delivery of already arrived at conclusions" (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 90), but being that this was an academic event, it proved difficult to catalyze interactions, as Manning and Massumi (2014) describe:

> It was clear from the start that to succeed in getting philosophers out of their seats and put their thinking bodies into movement and getting dancers untrained in philosophy to engage rigorously with difficult theoretical texts, without a crippling self-consciousness on either side, careful attention would have to be paid to the techniques used to design the event itself. The idea was that there are "techniques of relation"—devices for catalyzing and modulating interaction—and that these comprise a domain of practice in their own right. It would be the work of the event organizers to experiment with inventing techniques of relation for research-creation, not only as part of a practice of event-design, but as part of a larger "ethics of engagement." The techniques would have to be

> structured, in the sense of being tailored to the singularity of this event, and improvised, taking the desires and expertise of the event's particular participants into account, inviting their active collusion in determining how the event would transpire, so that in the end it would be as much their event as the organizing collective's (pp. 91-92).

The goal of these *events* catalyzed by techniques for relations was not an earth-shattering occurrence during the duration of the *event* (which in one case was three days long), but rather, what the *event* produced. For example, if this event is thought of as an academic conference of sorts, the success of this conference would not be measured in the presentations and information shared throughout the duration of the conference, but rather, by what this conference sets into motion. Manning and Massumi (2014) realized that these relational techniques would have to be both structured and improvised: structured, because they need only to pertain to the event at hand but improvised so that the event reflects the desires and expertise of all event participants. At the outset of their academic *event* making, Manning and Massumi (2014)

> …came to realize that we had embarked upon a highly technical process that could not function purely through free improvisation. This led to the emphasis on a certain notion of structured improvisation building on enabling constraints: "enabling" because in and of itself a constraint does not necessarily provoke techniques for process, and "constraint" because in and of itself openness does not create the conditions for collaborative exploration (p. 94).

These enabling constraints can be thought of like a set of productive rules or guidelines that are pre-determined for the specificity of a singular event and explicitly known by all participants in the event. To return to the academic conference metaphor, the enabling constraint could be the theme around which the conference is situated, or the time and place of its occurrence, or even

any pre-registration for participation. The enabling constraints are inherently loose and open ended. This leaves room for the event to catalyze, like an art provocation; it will not lead participants to a desired result, but rather provoke expanded thought.

In addition to these techniques of relations, Manning and Massumi (2014) also created a new genre of these relational techniques—what they called "platforms for relations" (p.100). They described these new platforms for relations as:

> …a setup, system, or set of procedures that is already tendentially operative, but rather than affording a specific function at first approach, is more suggestive of it. A platform for relation does work, it embodies a certain technicity, but it is designed in such a way that the limits and parameters of its potential functioning are not readily apparent. This strategic incompleteness makes platforms for relation function first and foremost as attractors offering openings for inventive interaction. Platforms for relation are not technical forms standing as end products of a design or creative process. They are germination beds for a process rebeginning (p. 101).

Thus, to Manning and Massumi (2014), platforms for relations are like a theoretical provocation, or an invitation to engage in a new relational beginning. Techniques and platforms for relations are not creating the relation, but rather allowing a space for relations to prosper and actualize. Whereas techniques for relations have clear enabling constraints structured for the singularity of one event making, the enabling constraints for platforms for relation are already in place in such a way that they are not apparent. If this were to be compared to an art experience, one could look at Rirkrit Tiravanija's *untitled (free/still)*, originally actualized in 1992, wherein Tiravanija transformed a Manhattan gallery space by removing all of its previous contents and turning it into a temporary kitchen where he prepared and served Thai vegetable curry for free to anyone

who wanted it. In this work, Tiravanija's platform for relation was the creation of a familiar and inviting food space, not unlike everyday life, where visitors felt comfortable to share a meal together because they already understand the "rules" of this environment. Thus, there is no actual product for this work--Tiravanija's *untitled (free/still)* is focused on the creation and interaction of social relations from the start. In my own research, a similar process occurred in my discussions with community residents in rural communities, local libraries, and farmers markets. These locations and times of my visits had been pre-planned, but my attendance at these places catalyzed interactions with the rural residents. Prior to my discovery of Manning and Massumi's (2014) concept of a platform for relations, I was quite honestly daunted by the task of trying to understand and analyze Deleuze's seemingly invisible and exceedingly complex external relations. But when I was able to apply the concept to my own research within the field of post-qualitative inquiry, I could see techniques of, and platforms for, relations as a manageable, theoretical-nonmethodological step toward understanding how relations could be used in research-doing and research-creation.

After this in-depth exploration and examination of Deleuzian external relations, it became clear to me that the external relations did not occupy a space separate from all other Deleuzian and Deleuzoguattarian concepts, and neither should they within my own research. It was not immediately clear to me what other concepts would arise within the doing of my research, but as a becoming-researcher, I knew it would be impossible for me to unthink the rhizomatic connections that intertwine and uphold many Deleuzian concepts. Therefore, it was not my goal to force the direction of my research; rather, I tried to allow the doing of my research and the becoming of my more-than-self to guide my inquiry in a way that best fit within the ontological workings of Deleuze and post-structural theory.

CHAPTER 4: Discovering Non-Methodological Practice

A Post Qualitative Beginning

As detailed in the previous chapter, this study is grounded in post-structural theories that seek to disrupt all that is "normalized" and conventional by dismantling concepts like language, power, knowledge, discourse, reality, memory, and so on (Moon, 2016). For this reason, it was not possible for me to think methodology in the predominant manner of traditional, humanist, qualitative research. Thus, for this study I turned to post qualitative inquiry, because it calls for a researcher to ground their work in theory over practice, dismantle traditional methods, and leave open the possibility for something new and unexpected to emerge. I did not hold tight to the methodological steps and data analysis techniques of traditional humanist qualitative inquiry because I did not want to limit my understanding to preconceived notions and ideas of what *I wanted* to happen. Rather, I allowed theory to serve as a guide for the creation of new multiplicities. For me, the most significant way post qualitative inquiry differs from conventional humanist qualitative methodology is in its attempts to move away from epistemology (knowledge) and instead focus on ontology (being). So, throughout my research and investigation into post qualitative inquiry and adjacent post-structural theories, I concerned myself less with what I could and should know and instead attempted to become more aware of all that was happening in a particular space.

Post qualitative inquiry as a form of research was created in 2010 by Elizabeth St. Pierre as a way to *do* research differently. It does not follow the typical conventions of qualitative methodology that most social science research uses and instead calls for a complete turn away

from traditional research methods, asking that researchers focus first and foremost on theory instead of data collection and practice. Because post qualitative inquiry is connected to post-structural theories, it requires that research move away from epistemology (knowledge) and instead focus on ontology (being). It is this break from epistemology and towards ontology that most differentiates post qualitative inquiry from conventional humanist qualitative methods. It is important to note that post qualitative inquiry did not just spring up out of a refusal to do widely accepted academic research; rather, it was built upon a history of Derridean deconstruction that caused once conventional concepts to take on new meaning, leaving what was once believed to be proper qualitative research in ruins (Lather, 1997; 2001; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). But what exactly does it mean to be left in *ruin*? For MacLure (2011), "*ruin* is just a term in a wider lexicon of uncertainty and disappointment that has emerged across the humanities and social sciences" (p. 997). She goes on to name alternative terms for *ruin*, including failure, disappointment, entanglement, getting stuck/lost, troubling, etc. Thus "working the ruins," as Lather (1997) named it, is what happens after these conventionally accepted concepts and methods no longer make sense within one's shifting views of the world.

For Lather and St. Pierre, these ruins appeared after reading and thinking within feminism and post-structuralism. Working in these "post" traditions left these feminist scholars troubled: "All those things we assumed were solid, substantial, and whole— knowledge, truth, reality, reason, science, progress, the subject, and so forth" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1). Now left with deconstructed meanings of concepts like truth, knowledge, reality, and subject, it became difficult to continue to think and work within conventional humanist qualitative methodologies that privilege a type of knowledge and truth that can be discovered by the all-knowing subject. Even still, with this "troubling" of major tenets in traditional qualitative methodology,

including methods and data, it would still be more than a decade before St. Pierre would put a name to this "new" form of inquiry that could better align with the ontology of the "post." During these years of "working the ruins" researchers like Lather and St. Pierre deconstructed conventional methods while applying post-structural theories like the fold, becoming, subjectivity, haecceity, and so on (St. Pierre, 1997; 2004; 2008; 2013b; 2017).

While I have given a brief description of post qualitative inquiry in a very general sense above, it does not even begin to cover the complexities of this form of inquiry. Post qualitative inquiry does not follow the same structures and rules of the traditional humanist methodologies, which means it is difficult to explain exactly what post qualitative inquiry *is* and even harder to explain how to *do it.* Thus, inspired by St. Pierre's (2011; 2015; 2017; 2018) litany of examples, rather than beginning by describing what I think post qualitative inquiry is, I feel it would better serve the interests of post qualitative inquiry to explain what I know post qualitative inquiry is not and cannot be. Post qualitative inquiry is not a research method or methodology, it is not built upon common worldly assumptions or power inducing binaries, it cannot be free of theory, it is not meant to represent a "lived" experience or discover a solution or "truth," it does not rush to application or practice, it is not about collecting and analyzing numerical or brute data, it does not center the human being, and research in post qualitative inquiry cannot be modeled after any other study (St. Pierre, 2018). All this being said, many scholars interested in post qualitative inquiry might be left with the feeling that there is nothing left for post-qualitative inquiry *to be*, and to some extent these hesitant minds might be correct. The "doing" of post qualitative inquiry can be almost anything, as long it is first and foremost grounded in a post-structural theoretical ontology. Thus, post qualitative inquiry cannot be described or inferred from a single definition, but rather it is much like the Deleuzoguattarian image of the rhizome, never stable, ever

changing and *becoming*, creating something new in each relation. Consequently, if I explicitly state what I believe post qualitative inquiry is, this definition will hold no real merit, so rather than attempt to define this inquiry process further in this paper, I will instead describe the conditions which make up all of the impossibilities in post qualitative inquiry.

What You Should Know about Post Qualitative Inquiry

First, it is important to always keep in mind that post qualitative inquiry is not a research method or methodology, and it should never resemble the conventional humanist qualitative methodologies of the social sciences. This also means that it should not resemble anything related to positivism, constructivism, mixed-methods, or any other similar human-centered, truth-seeking, research methodology. Methods for research within these humanist methodologies are prescribed, structured, and ordered, in a meticulous way that does not leave room for different, unforeseen possibilities. As Manning (2016) wrote, "Method stops potential on its way, cutting into the process before it has had a chance to fully engage with the complex relational fields the process itself calls forth." (p. 33). Furthermore, if one is claiming to follow post-structural theories, these methodologies would become impossible to think from the start because the strict ordering and replication of traditional methodologies creates recycled thoughts built upon conventional linguistic representations, rather than the creation of the *new*. This further aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (1968/1994) description of method, in which they state, "The Cartesian method (the search for clear and distinct) is a method for solving supposedly given problems, not a method of invention appropriate to the constitution of problems or the understanding of questions" (p. 161). This lack of structure and method is often a difficult concept for many to grasp, especially those raised on conventional humanist qualitative methodologies. It is often hard to un-think something that has been so well ingrained, especially for graduate and doctoral students like me, whose first graduate class was a research

methodology course. Where does one start when there is no methodology to tell them how to begin research? How does one fill out IRB forms or write a research proposal if the researcher does not even know where this research will go or take her? These are questions I, myself, has struggled with and I have not yet come to a clear answer as to how to appease faculty and review boards who are not yet ready to abandon the conventional humanist methodologies of traditional qualitative research. The question on where to start, however, has become clearer to me as I have become immersed into Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical concepts including the rhizome, the plane of immanence, and the assemblage, because it is within these concepts that I have come to realize that everything is always, already happening. Within these concepts, time is no longer linear and matter, memory, being and all that is of the world can no longer be separated and categorized. Thus, there is no true start to research utilizing post qualitative inquiry, because we are always, already in the middle of it. Furthermore, lacking boundaries or clear direction in post qualitative inquiry does not mean that the research had no place to go or reason to exist, rather, post qualitative inquiry opens up research to an entirely new world of possibilities. As Foucault said in a 1978 interview,

> And if I don't say what needs to be done, it isn't because I believe there is nothing to be done. On the contrary, I think there are thousands of things that can be done, invented, contrived by those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they are involved, have decided to resist them or escape them (p. 294).

The task of post qualitative inquiry is not to name what *should* happen, because ultimately anything *can* happen; these possible relations are impossible to predict ahead of their conception.

One of the most important things about working within post qualitative inquiry is its theoretical underpinnings. As stated earlier, post qualitative inquiry is built upon post-structural

theory, and the alignment of ontologies between post-structuralism and post qualitative inquiry is key. Unlike some versions of traditional quantitative or qualitative methodologies, post qualitative inquiry cannot be free of theory, which must be woven throughout the entire inquiry process. As Kuhn (1962/1970) said, "there is, I think, no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like 'really there'; the notion of a match between the ontology of a theory and its "real" counterpart in nature now seems to me illusive in principle" (p. 206). In many cases of conventional humanist qualitative methodologies and research, theory will only appear briefly in the literature review or be used as a tool to analyze or code data but remain largely invisible in the body of research as a whole. In post qualitative inquiry, however, it is important to do as Jackson and Mazzei (2011) have called "thinking with theory." In order to think and do research focused and grounded in theory, theory should not come as an afterthought, but rather be the base that the research is built upon. Because much of the training in conventional humanist qualitative methodologies centers its focus not on theory, but rather on the structured steps for achieving a desired end result, when theory is brought into the study it can get lost within the predetermined methodological choices. A strong theoretical framework should act as just that, a framework upon which all other choices are made; research decisions should not be made simply because a textbook says, "you must do a, b, and c in every interview study." If a theoretical framework is chosen as a focus of your research, such as a Deleuzian rhizomatic study, it should become very clear what you can and cannot do while researching and collecting "data."

To further reiterate the move away from traditional humanist qualitative methods and methodologies, post qualitative inquiry is not built upon common assumptions or binaries that reinforce power dynamics. Rather, through the use of post-structural theories, post qualitative inquiry seeks to dismantle and disrupt these commonly held representations by adopting an

entirely new linguistic style. By utilizing Derrida's concept of deconstruction in a post qualitative piece of inquiry, the researcher can put concepts such as presence, being, self, method, time, etc., under erasure. In his deconstruction of common notions, Derrida also tackled binary oppositions in which things, people, concepts, etc. are forced into a dichotomy that leaves the latter of the binary in the lesser position (i.e., subject/object, inside/outside, mind/body, man/nature, etc.), and as he deconstructed these oppositions he called not for a hierarchical stance, but rather a liberation of thought that allows us to think in these categorical ways. Derrida (1967/2001) said of binary oppositions,

> Thus, we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believed— which we still cannot not believe—to be the very ether of our thought and language. To attempt to think the opposite is stifling. And it is a question not only of thinking the opposite which is still in complicity with the classical alternatives, but of liberating thought and its language for the encounter occurring beyond these alternatives. (p. 118)

It must be pointed out, however, that while Derrida does encourage deconstruction of language, oppositions, and common notions of the world, he is explicit in saying that deconstruction is not a method that one can use to perform research, in further alignment with the anti-method approach of post qualitative inquiry. So, from my own understanding of post qualitative inquiry, if one is to be truly successful in their attempts to move away from conventional humanist qualitative inquiry and begin anew in the post, the human subject as we have known it must be left behind along with all the other structured and methodological constraints of traditional qualitative methodology.

Another issue with traditional qualitative methodologies in the social sciences, especially positivist methodologies, is their constant search for a singular "truth." As Lyotard (1979; 1984) said,

> "Traditional" theory is always in danger of being incorporated into the programming of the social whole as a simple tool for the optimization of its performance; this is because its desire for a unitary and totalizing truth lends itself to the unitary and totalizing practice of the system 's managers. (p. 12)

This compulsive need and search for truth is derived from the hard sciences, where numbers and factual evidence are readily available. But in the social sciences, this "truth" is much less stable. Scientific truth depends on repeatable, testable, hypothesis, but social sciences cannot have the same expectations for repeatable results, because the conditions of the results are based on thinking, feeling, individuals and methodologies that, if changed in any slight way, could produce a completely different result. Post qualitative inquiry on the other hand recognizes that there is not a singular achievable result for social science research, but this acknowledgement of multiple possible truths does not make the research any less "valid" or important. Furthermore, as Law (2004) pointed out, perhaps the "truths" of the conventional humanist qualitative methodologies are not fully directed by methodological choices, but rather political decisions, as he said, "If truth by itself is not a gold standard, then perhaps there may be additional *political* reasons for preferring and enacting one kind of reality rather than another" (p. 13). This further speaks to the way that within social science research, when the researcher often has a desired result, motivated by some outside force, these outside *political* forces in turn can push the result in the desired direction. This is likely particularly true in grant funded research, in which the funding body experiences a positive or negative effect depending on the results of said research.

Because post qualitative inquiry does not recognize a correct methodological way to perform research or a singular true result as the final goal, research using post qualitative inquiry cannot be modeled after one another. This means that studies in post qualitative inquiry will never look the same, there is no stable force on which to build one's research because as St. Pierre (2018) states, "*Post qualitative inquiry never is.*" Finally, the last thing that one should not do when using post qualitative inquiry is rush to application. All too often research is focused on application, occasionally without allowing the time and proper development of the theoretical foundation to guide the field work. Rather than theory-practice, research often ends up practice/theory, further reinforcing binaries in the research process (St. Pierre, 2018). In post qualitative inquiry practice and application should not be rushed into, because the theory upon which the research is built should always come first; theory needs time to fully develop into an ontology by which things come into being, rather than a forced, situated, scenario.

In thinking about the ethics of the researcher in traditional humanist qualitative research, ethical concerns might require that the researcher formally acknowledge their own subjectivity in order to situate themselves amongst their own inherent bias in an attempt to be an objective researcher (Prasad, 2015). The traditional humanist qualitative researcher is assumed to be an unbiased outsider who can perform objective research simply by recognizing their human identity beforehand in what is often referred to as a "subjectivity statement."

Post-structuralist/post-methodological/post qualitative researchers and scholars have otherwise noted that this finding of a supreme "truth" is not possible through these traditional qualitative methods. This "post" all things mindset led writers, researchers, and scholars to problematize the "I" and realize as Barad (2007) did that, "individuals do not preexist their interactions, rather, individuals emerge though and as part of their entangled intra-relating."

After the dismantling of the "I", St. Pierre (2011) notes that traditional humanist qualitative methods and research are no longer feasible, because the "I" can no longer remain at the center of research studies (p. 51). Researchers cannot simply decide to "set aside" their own inherent subjectivity. St. Pierre (2008) had this to say about the use of these so-called "subjectivity statements" as they are used in academic research,

> To address bias and objectivity — positivist concepts still evident in so- called interpretive qualitative inquiry — we've asked our students to write "subjectivity statements" in which they "reflect" on their "subjectivities" as if "subjectivity" is, first, something that can be pluralized and, second, as if the subject is a stable entity upon which one can reflect (pp. 327-328).

As St.Pierre (2008) explains, subjectivity has many problems, but for her and many others attempting to work in the "post" tradition, the acknowledgement of subjectivity and the human subject, as well as the language of "subjectivity" that is required by traditional humanist qualitative research, is not thinkable in the new era of post-structural and post qualitative research. Subjectivity does exist and while the researcher can state and restate their subjectivity, in the end there is no way to fully remove one's subjectivity—neither by acknowledging personal biases nor by attempting to keep oneself at arm's reach during the research (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; St. Pierre, 2004). Simply put, everything is subjective and no statement acknowledging this can make it otherwise. This is not to say that it is not still necessary to understand and acknowledge our own subjectivity, but rather that we should not assume that the acknowledgement of this subjectivity can in turn make our research objective. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain it as such,

> 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). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject. In short, we think that one cannot write sufficiently in the name of an outside. The outside has no image, no signification, no subjectivity (p. 23).

This means that it is no longer necessary to separate the subjectivity of the author(s) from their field of research and their writing about said research, because they are always-already intertwined in a continuous assemblage. Research is inherently guided by our own personal biases, beliefs, thoughts, and opinions because we are fully inside our research. I cannot change the fact that I am personally influenced by the topic of my research study because I am from a rural area in South Georgia, and I grew up with very little access to arts programming. This research has grown not out of a single idea at a random moment in time, but rather it is a culmination of years of thought and wonder about what life would have been like if I was raised in a more urbanized area where arts programming and museum visits were a normal occurrence, not a special occasion.

Aside from the issues of subjectivity in humanist qualitative research, there also arises an issue with "experience" in humanist qualitative research because as I will come to explain, the traditional qualitative classification of experience is unthinkable in the "posts." Empiricism, the field in which qualitative methodologies reside, is first and foremost concerned with human knowledge and that knowledge has come to be understood through "sense-based observations of experience" (St. Pierre, 2016b, p. 113). St. Pierre (2016b) explains, "Empiricists insist on facts supported by sense impressions or *brute datum* found through careful observation of experience

(experiment) to justify knowledge claims" (p.113). This means that ultimately the experience of the human subject is privileged, giving way to Cartesian dualism and hierarchical ordering. Given such, when placed under the microscope of post-structuralism, the "experience" becomes increasingly troubled. The experiences of research participants are often examined through ethnographic research and, more specifically, critical ethnographic studies, but this ethnographic experience tends to focus on preexisting social inequalities (Moon, 2016). Guided by critical theory, critical ethnographic studies aim to take the experiences of a collective group of people who have been marginalized and make their voices heard (Moon, 2016). By focusing on critical and emancipatory concepts, experience that tends to center on the human subject is often referred to as "lived experience." The "lived experience" is often used when a researcher intends to recreate the research participant's descriptions and interpretations of their lives through word-for-word interview transcriptions and descriptions (St. Pierre, 2016b). However, this lived experience is increasingly problematic in post-structuralism and post qualitative inquiry, because it only takes into account the retelling of experience, without acknowledging experience's discursive properties (St. Pierre, 2008). This troubling of experience in post qualitative inquiry does not mean to say that experience no longer matters or that the way that people describe their experience is not significant, but rather that the way that we as researchers approach experience within empiricism is far too narrow. Thus, the discursive properties of experience entail not only the "lived" moment within our bodies, but also the ongoing relations that influence our changing perception of said experiences. Moon (2016) explains it as such, "Experience is always discursively constructed and interpreted in a particular setting, for a particular audience, and in a particular place" (p. 48). Consequently, in order to fully understand experience through a post-structural theoretical lens, one must first acknowledge that experience

is not a singular event and does not exist on a linear plane. And because of the multiplicity of experience, one's interpretation of their own experience can change through what Moon (2016) calls "discursive construction." In the next chapter, on the theoretical framework for my research, I will go into more detail about the way that experience can be used in post-structural philosophy, but for now, I will note that experience through a lens of the "posts" should not and does not imply a subjective, physical or mental experience, but rather a conceptual, more-than-human experience.

Enhancing Research with Post Qualitative Inquiry

One of the characteristics of post qualitative inquiry that excites me the most is the fact that post qualitative inquiry does not uphold the same strict structures as conventional humanist qualitative methodologies. This means that I was not restricted by conventional methods of data collection and analysis that employ prescriptive steps for doing research. Instead, I felt that post qualitative inquiry opened up room for a more creative research practice because I was no longer tied to very specific definitions of the human and power-laden binaries of opposition. In the case of my research in rural access to art museums and museum education, post qualitative inquiry allowed me to approach my field of research with opportunities for newness and difference in a way that does not yet exist in museology or rural studies. I did not come into this research claiming that it would be inherently groundbreaking or cause massive transformations in the areas of rural access to art museum or museology. However, I think that the fact that I did not go into this research expecting something extravagant and life-altering to happen allowed me to take my research as it came and to not force my hand in any one direction for the purposes of my own ego. The problem with these inflated hopes is that all too often, researchers, especially in the conventional, humanist, qualitative realm, begin our research with too many preconceived expectations of what will happen within our project, ultimately allowing our research to

disappoint us if that *one* desired result is not achieved. Furthermore, attention to perceived outcomes can cause researchers to miss other larger, potentially more important *events* or *relations* because we allow ourselves to become blind to other possibilities and results.

Another very distinct quality of post qualitative inquiry that separates it from conventional humanist qualitative methodologies is the fact that post qualitative inquiry does not require or rely on pre-determined methods to perform the research. As stated in the previous section on post qualitative inquiry, strict methodological boundaries do not have a place in the world of post-structuralism and post qualitative inquiry. In performing research of any kind in the social sciences, outcomes of a study could differ drastically depending on the type of method chosen or even the researcher performing them, so the fact that there is no strict method to follow should not alarm conventional humanist qualitative researchers. The research that I performed did not have to follow any strict prescriptive steps to actualize and this allowed for the research to move and flow on its own. This method-less research can guide the researcher step by step in its conception, without the researcher constantly thinking ahead to the anticipated next step in their chosen method. This allows the post qualitative researcher to stay in the moment of the research and hopefully allows for a better perception of all that is happening within the data-observation-writing cycles of research. As Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) stated, "the painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with preexisting, pre-established clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision" (p. 204). Thus, in my research, not following preconceived methods allowed for further creativity in the conception and actualization of my research because there were no boundaries restricting me from exploring all of the possibilities.

"Data" In Post Qualitative Inquiry

Data in post qualitative inquiry can be everything that data is in conventional humanist qualitative methodologies, but unlike qualitative data analysis, analysis in post qualitative inquiry is much less prescriptive and structured toward finding a single truth. Before continuing in an in-depth description of data collection and analysis in post qualitative inquiry, it is important to understand that the human subject is not central to post qualitative inquiry in the same way that it is in conventional humanist qualitative methodologies. As St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) write,

> the empiricism that guides conventional humanist qualitative inquiry is grounded in the Cartesian dualism, subject/object, that implies the existence of an object separate from and independent of the collecting subject, a *brute datum* – pure data that exists in an eternal reality waiting to be collected and analyzed (p. 716).

Once we remove the human from the center of our research, data becomes inherently different because we are no longer tied to the identity categories that make us the all-powerful, all-knowing researcher and our participants the powerless subject from whom we extract brute data. We thus situate ourselves outside of this duality of power and as such we can no longer even think of data collection and analysis in the same way.

It should be noted, however, that this does not mean that a research in post-qualitative inquiry cannot utilize interviews, observations, fieldwork, and so on, because without at least some of these forms of "data collection", there would not be much left to actually *do* in the research. On the contrary, post qualitative inquiry can have interviews, observations, or fieldwork as "data", but unlike data in conventional humanist qualitative methodologies, we will not privilege one form of data collection or analysis over another, nor are we to privilege or center the human subject. Furthermore 'data analysis' in conventional humanist qualitative

methodologies has become synonymous with coding, forcing data into a positivist stronghold of 'scientific' fact. This insistence on coding and privileging the human subject is problematic because it often comes with the assumption that data and results are repeatable, but this idealized notion must be left behind in social science research. In Post qualitative inquiry, coding, sorting, and triangulating data is not possible because these practices rely too much on distinct humanistic classifications, hierarchical binaries, and a use of language that has been deconstructed by post-structural theories because of the linguistic tendency to enforce social order, structure, and categorization. This means that in an interview within my own post qualitative research, I have not privileged the spoken word of the interviewee-participant as solitary self-evident truth and these interviews were not 'coded' in an effort to look for 'themes' or answers. In order for a person's spoken word to be taken as truth, this word would have to remain constant, regardless of changes in time, but in actuality, it is highly unlikely that a person would give the same answers to an interview a week, month, year, or more after an initial interview, because we are thinking-feeling beings moving through a constant becoming-self that is ultimately unstable in its relation. Furthermore, if the same questions (assuming that they are not leading or bias leaning questions) were asked to one hundred different people, it would be unrealistic to assume that every interview would have a similar outcome. If similar outcomes like this are desired then a survey would be the only obvious option, but by the same token, if you only allow people a few ways to answer, how accurately can the data truly capture the essence of your research?

On this concern for desired research outcomes, St. Pierre (1997) has this to say, "We are very concerned that we have pieces of data, words, to support the knowledge we make. Yet, how can language, which regularly falls apart, secure meaning and truth?" (p. 179). By stating this,

St. Pierre (1997) is not trying to ease our concerns that our data might be 'wrong,'--she is pointing out how we have been wrong from the start to assume that there is true *brute data* to be discovered among a language that regularly and frequently falls apart. Our language fails us because it is so easy to disassemble the meaning of words, and if we as researchers rely solely on these words, their meaning will not continue to hold the same value. After all of this has been said, it is also important to point out that the idea that we have about data in the first place is built upon the definition of data within the conventional humanist qualitative methodologies. This is to say that, in post qualitative inquiry, data and data analysis can take up many different forms that would be unrecognizable to the typical conventional humanist qualitative researcher. In her article, "Methodology in the Fold and the Interruption of Transgressive Data," St. Pierre (1997), identifies four other types of data, not traditionally found within conventional humanist qualitative methodologies, and these are, emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data. As St. Pierre (2013a) says, "…data appear, come into being, exist (or not) in a particular ontological, epistemological, and methodological structure. The meaning and function of data depend on the meaning and function of a constellation of other concepts with which it is imbricated…" (p. 223). Thus, just because we might not traditionally recognize alternative forms of data in the conventional humanist qualitative methodologies, it does not mean that they cannot exist. It simply means that onto-epistemological methodologies are making these other data possibilities impossible to think. But once we choose to see data differently and remove the strict barriers around what we consider data to be, we will then begin to learn that data is all around us, in our thinking, feeling, dreaming, sensing, movement through the world. These alternative data forms became increasingly important in my research. After returning from my summer in Arkansas, I reread my notes and research journals and listened to voice memos recorded in

Arkansas. Revisiting these resources allowed me to connect with this "data" and the memories that I had on a different sensual and emotional level than I understood at the time of their collection.

Ultimately, what is of the utmost importance when collecting and analyzing data within post qualitative inquiry is the constant linking of data to my theoretical framework. This is also probably where post qualitative inquiry might differ the most from conventional humanist qualitative methodologies, because while these qualitative methodologies do often call for a theoretical component to their research and analysis, it can be somewhat of a last-minute tie-in, rather than a backbone upon which the research rests. This is particularly true of the positivist methodologies of the social sciences which claim to be theory-free, as if collected in a vacuum apart from outside circumstances. The insistence on brute data and practice over theory is ultimately misguided, because "there are no data without theory that orders and gives classification to the things of the world" (Popkewitz, 2004, p. 72). Thus, in post qualitative inquiry, the data collection, analysis, and all points of research should be constantly connected to the theoretical framework on which they rest, because whether we realize it or not, every decision that we make is guided by a theory by which we live our lives. And this theory and the research we are collecting is further embedded within the circumstances of the time and place of which we as researchers are situated.

The Impact of Post Qualitative Inquiry on Rural Education and Museum Education

A problem I have run into and am still working through in my bridging of museum education, rural studies, and post qualitative inquiry, is the fact that the current research and scholarship in the field of museology is very constructivist as a whole, mostly focusing on practice and application with very little attention to theoretical concepts. Likewise, in the field of rural art education research, the research varies between positivist to critical, but very rarely has

a post-structural, post qualitative type of focus. It is only recently that the world of museum studies is experiencing its critical turn, with focuses on emancipatory practices that align with feminist theory, critical race theory, disability studies, and queer theory, and while this move into the more critical realm of practice in museology is a step forward from constructivism, it still holds up many binaries that I seek to dissolve within my post qualitative research. These dualistic binaries (rural/urban, city/country, rich/poor, advantaged/disadvantaged) are also very evident in research in rural art education because stereotypical images of rural populations remain persistent and widely held. This is not to say that the researchers working with rural populations are aware (or unaware) of their biases, but that our popular culture has instilled an image of what it means to be rural in our minds, making it hard to re-think our image of what it means to be part of that population. With post qualitative inquiry, however, I seek to dismantle the binaries and stereotypes that have permeated our views of both rural populations and troubled the current research in rural education and art museum education.

While there is not much in the way of published research concerning post qualitative inquiry approaches to museum education or rural education, post qualitative inquiry has been taken up in the field of art education research more broadly. Forms of inquiry such as arts-based research and arts-based educational research lend themselves very effortlessly to the field of post qualitative inquiry because both research in and about arts and by artist-researchers, allows for a certain type of creativity, not often seen in more prescriptive, humanist research methodologies. This connection between post qualitative inquiry and research in art education seems to have flowed naturally out of arts-based-research as this is already practiced on the outskirts of the conventional humanist qualitative methodologies (McNiff, 1998; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). While arts-based research has been explored

variously across different geographical contexts, one unique result has been the Canadian move toward the term "research creation." In Canada, the term "research-creation" grew out of academia as "a funding category that would enable artists teaching in universities who didn't have PhDs to apply for large academic grants" (Manning, 2016, p. 26). The original conception of research-creation was more attuned to the studio practice physical product, where the research occurs before the creation, resulting in "what has come to be known as the theory-practice split" (Manning, 2016, p. 27). Instead of this separation of theory and practice in research-creation, Manning (2016) suggests instead emphasizing the *study* component of research-creation. The term *study* Manning (2016) borrows from Moten and Harney's 2013 book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study,* where they specify its use by saying, "The point of calling it "study" is to mark that the incessant and irreversible intellectuality of these activities is already present (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 110). Manning (2016) proposes this combination of research-creation and study, saying,

> In most cases research-creation as an academic category is directly concerned with *artistic* practice. Combined with study, however, the emphasis moves toward the exploration of how modes of making and thinking become consolidated in emergent, collective forms of practice that are artful, if not necessarily artistic in the strong sense (p. 13).

Thus, for Manning, research-creation as a study is not something that has a set beginning and end, starting with research and ending with creation, rather, Manning suggests:

> that research-creation does much more than what the funding agencies had in store for it: it generates new forms of experience; it tremulously stages an encounter for disparate practices, giving them a conduit for collective expression; it hesitantly acknowledges that

> normative modes of inquiry and containment often are incapable of assessing its value; it generates forms of knowledge that are extralinguistic; it creates operative strategies for a mobile positioning that take these new forms of knowledge into account; it proposes concrete assemblages for re-thinking the very question of what is at stake in pedagogy, in practice, and in collective experimentation. And, in so doing, it creates an opening for what Moten and Harney conceptualize as the undercommons: it creates the conditions for new ways of encountering study—forms and forces of intellectuality that cut across normative accounts of what it means to know (p. 27).

This description of research-creation by Manning requires that the artist and the researcher become one, so that the artist can allow for their research to emerge out of a creative process. But the research and the creation cannot be separated from one another or from the philosophy upon which they are built. It is research that seems to focus more on the process than the product. Artists cannot start their creation process with set methods for concocting creativity; creativity and creation must emerge naturally out of a thinking-feeling process of drawing upon inspiration. If an artist were to start their creation through predetermined methodological steps, then the product would look the same every time, thus, the arts-based, post qualitative researcher must always remember that they should first start with the concept (theory) and creative inspiration, not method. In this way, research based in the arts, and particularly research creation projects like those described by Manning (2016), seem destined to be paired with post qualitative inquiry, and although I did not take an arts-based or research-creation approach, I did utilize similar creative and emergent strategies for my research by not pre-planning the steps I would take, instead letting my research tell me where to go next. With post qualitative inquiry, I have learned how to become comfortable with uncertainty and instead of trying to force my research into a

mold of what I think it *should* look like, I have attempted to allow the research and theory to guide me.

Research in the field of general education and art have used Deleuze's theoretical concepts in conjunction with one another, including the event, assemblage, the fold, the encounter, the body without organs, and others. It is common to see cross-sections in theoretical concepts of Deleuze because all of his concepts live in a rhizomatic plane of imminence. However, it is not always the case that Deleuzian concepts are used correctly, especially in the case of a study using multiple Deleuzian, post-structural theories, while also attempting to follow conventional methods of humanist qualitative inquiry. Alicia Jackson (2010), however was able to accurately and flawlessly think through and apply the Deleuzian *event*, *becoming*, and *difference* in her research with adolescent cheerleaders. In her article, "Deleuze and the Girl" (2010), Jackson returns to the research and field notes from her doctoral dissertation, after re-reading Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Her re-reading of this text, and in particular chapter ten (on 'becoming-') caused Jackson to rethink an interaction with a student named Jess from her research and apply the Deleuzian concepts of *becoming* and *event* to her reading of the interaction. Here, Jackson (2010) uses becoming as a becoming-different, "away from sameness" (p. 581), which stands apart from the Deleuzian concept of *difference*, which is more so, "difference-from-the-same" (p. 580). This is to say that a becoming is an entirely new, nonlinear progression of change, while difference exists on the same linear plane as its previous relations. The becoming that Jackson (2010) writes about here is of the girl, Jess, *becoming-woman*, not to be confused by becoming *a* woman, in this case, becoming-woman is the fluid process of Jess navigating life between the boundaries of school, cheerleading, girl/womanhood, and all other assumed identity categories. Jackson (2010) states,

"she is not becoming a woman; she is always a becoming-woman'" (pp. 582). This becoming-woman then leads Jackson (2010) into seeing the *girl as an event*, meaning that the becoming of the girl has become the event itself. Ultimately in this article, Jackson (2010) theorizes the ways in which Jess's becoming-body navigated the molar gaze of a high school and led her to the event of the girl performing an unexpected backflip. This event, Jackson (2010) argues, is the movement through and expression of the becoming-woman.

This article is significant because of the ways Jackson (2010) uses the Deleuzian concepts of *becoming* and *event*, in a manner that allows them to be understood within an ethnographic study, a typically humanist qualitative methodology, while also allowing for a non-linear, rhizomatic reading of a young girl's becoming-woman. Even though Jackson (2010) was years removed from the field work of this study, the event's ability to exist in its future-pastness allows the theoretical works to retain its significance. This is because Deleuze's ontology does not exist within a linear temporal plane: "Deleuze's events are much more than an actual thing happening in a limited space and time" (Williams, J., 2008, p. 31). For Deleuze, the event takes place in a nonlinear plane of space-time, but this does not mean that the event precedes time and space, but rather that "events *create* time and space" (Manning, 2009, p. 7). Jackson (2010) provides an excellent example of how Deleuzian concepts can be "plugged-in" to folds of a remembered *event*/*experience* to transcend linear conceptions of time and form new meanings.

In an article by Boulton-Funke (2014), post qualitative inquiry is used as a way to challenge the traditionally humanist qualities of arts-based research through a Deleuzian view of the event, the encounter, and duration as well as a non-linear time entanglement (St. Pierre, 2013b). This author uses these Deleuzian theories to critique narrative inquiry and its place in arts-based-research, arguing that for arts-based research to reach beyond the typically narrative

production of knowledge, new conditions must be created to provoke thought and difference. One particularly interesting point that she makes within this article is her move away from the event as a major occurrence, preferring instead to attend to the mundane. I think this is significant because it reminds me of Manning's (2016) description of the *minor gesture*, but her conception of this attendance to the mundane took place two years before the publishing of Manning's book. This article can also serve as an example of how both post-structural theoretical concepts and post qualitative inquiry can be seamlessly woven throughout a body of research.

Another piece of research that demonstrates the intersections between arts-based-research and post qualitative inquiry is McKnight's (2016) "Swimming Lessons." This article presents a type of arts-based research in which poetry is used as a research strategy to attempt to understand how the "posts" can be used in curriculum and pedagogy. Poetry is used as a type of post qualitative inquiry here because it does not have a predetermined structure; it flows and uses language in unexpected ways, allowing the author to go beyond traditional research methodologies and simply *be* with the emerging theories in education. These poems offer a way of re-thinking typical data and presenting it in a way that is more attuned to the complexities and instabilities of research. "Swimming Lessons" (2016) was very deeply grounded in the new-materialist theories of Karen Barad, specifically her idea of intra-action, and McKnight (2016) was able to use Barad's theories as a way to rethink the traditional humanist education structure, and instead think about how this might look from a post-humanist view. McKnight describes this, writing:

> Barad (2007) rejects reflection, and the illusion of an essentialized, fixed position from which we may see perfectly. Guided by this, I am not seeking to reflect on what we learn

> at the pool, but to use poetry, to read experience through poetry as genre, to respect entanglement, rather than ignore or overwrite it, as I might if I conducted, say, a corrective curriculum audit of what is learnt at the pool, or merely reflected on my practice

McKnight (2016) also attempts to break down binaries and rethink education and curriculum in a less prescriptive way, which is a major principle of both poststructuralism and post qualitative inquiry.

A final article I would like to examine for its intersection of post qualitative inquiry and arts-based-research is "De/signing Research in Education: Patchwork(ing) Methodologies with Theory" (Higgins, Madden, Berard, Lenz Kothe, & Nordstrom, 2016). This article is built upon Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) book, *Thinking with Theory*, and within the article the authors offer a "method" of patch-working various theories and methodologies together in a way that breaks free from the prescriptive barriers of traditional humanist qualitative inquiry, in favor of a post qualitative inquiry. The article is broken up into threads with separate sections in which each author talks separately about the theories and methodological considerations that shape their individual research. This stringing together of each author's ideas and words also creates a type of patchwork within the article itself, thus demonstrating how their theory of patch-working might be used. At first, I was hesitant reading this article because as the authors described their "method" of patching together already existing methodologies, I was unsure that this would truly be a post qualitative study, but as I read on, I could tell how they were moving away from the traditionally structured view of conventional humanist qualitative methodologies, and instead creating something completely new. At the beginning of the article traditional humanist methodology was described as an already finished garment, but post qualitative inquiry is bolts

and pieces of fabric that must be put together, without a single corrective fix. This analogy offered an interesting way of looking at post qualitative inquiry as something that comes together through a mixture of theoretically based research. Seeing research as a patchwork quilt offers a very visual way of thinking about how these seemingly unrelated pieces of data can come together and form something beautiful.

While post qualitative inquiry is still a very new way of doing research, I believe that the structure, or perhaps, lack thereof, lends itself most excellently to the arts and those researching within them. The abstract qualities of post qualitative inquiry allow for new conceptual ways of thinking through issues in the arts and museum education. With post qualitative inquiry, I have made an effort to become comfortable with uncertainty. Instead of trying to force my research into a mold of what I think it *should* look like, I have tried to allow the research and theory to guide me. For me, post qualitative inquiry at its most basic function differs from conventional humanist qualitative methodology because it attempts to move away from epistemology (knowledge) and instead focus on ontology (being). So, throughout my research and investigation into post qualitative inquiry and the adjacent post-structural theories, I have attempted to concern myself less with what I can and should know and instead become more aware of all that is happening in a particular space.

CHAPTER 5: Plans are Futile

Method-less De/sign

In this chapter I describe my journey through a non-methodological approach to research utilizing post-qualitative inquiry to conduct research and while the main topic for my research came to me easily and early on, the rest of my research decisions came by way of trial and error. At the start of my Ph.D. I had very little knowledge of theory and research methods, so like most students I went with what I knew, and I began digging into critical theories, where I quickly felt at home among the likes of Judith Butler, Paulo Freire, and John Dewey, but by the spring semester of my first-year things began to change. I started off my second semester by taking a class on Affect theory where I explored post-structural theories and post-qualitative inquiry and suddenly everything that I once thought I knew began to fall apart. Post-structuralism and post qualitative inquiry sparked something in me that was simultaneously terrifying and exciting; I no longer knew how to define basic structures and functions because language as I knew it was falling apart, but I was excited about the possibilities for this new, open, and unencumbered way of viewing the world.

In the article, "De/signing Research in Education: Patchwork(ing) Methodologies with Theory," the authors develop the concept of "de/sign", inspired by Derrida's deconstructive practices, which "can be understood as a simultaneous working within, against, and beyond the tailoring of methodological garments" (Higgins, Madden, Berard, Lenz Kothe, & Nordstrom, 2017, p. 17). As this study lacks a predetermined method under which it was conducted, analyzed, or written, I will utilize what I call a "Method-less De/sign" in an attempt to

reconceptualize the way research can be understood, performed, and lived. As I have detailed in previous sections, post-qualitative inquiry cannot have a method because it cannot be reproduced, as St. Pierre (2018), writes:

> Again, post qualitative inquiry is different each time it appears, produced by different contingent and unpredictable forces in experimentation with the real; that is, the conditions of its emergence cannot be repeated because they disappear immediately, and what one post qualitative inquirer "does" cannot serve as a model for others. For that reason— and I want to be perfectly clear here—*there can be no post qualitative research methodology or research methods, no post qualitative research designs, no post qualitative research practices, no post qualitative data or methods of data collection or methods of data analysis, no representations of a stable, sensory "lived" world, no post qualitative findings, no post qualitative research report format* because, again, post qualitative inquiry never *is*, it never stabilizes (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 10).

As explained thoroughly in earlier chapters, this study was based upon post-qualitative inquiry as viewed through a post-structural lens in order to explore the following research questions: "What relations exist and are generated at the intersection of rural adult populations and art museums, especially as they are experienced over time?"; "What are the complexities surrounding the notion of accessibility as it relates to art museums and rural adult populations?"; and "What potential relevance do art museums hold for rural adult populations?" Because post-qualitative inquiry is inherently abstract, the preconceived design of my study was extremely sparse. The research questions functioned as guides for where I should focus my attention, but I also did not allow them to blind me to any emergent relations that fell outside of their parameters.

Prior to my arrival in the last weekend of May 2019, I had never before visited the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, nor had I been to the state of Arkansas at all. The information that I gathered about Crystal Bridges before arriving was done through online research, as well as a short phone conversation in December 2018 with the former Head of School Programs at Crystal Bridges. Other than this nominal amount of research in preparation for obtaining an internship at Crystal Bridges, I did not really "design" my research study. Certainly, I had questions I was interested in learning about, but I did not yet know how I would go about answering these questions. As St. Pierre (2018) asserts, "Post qualitative inquiry does not exist prior to its arrival; it must be created, invented anew each time. For that reason, there can be no post qualitative 'research design' or 'research process'" (p. 9). To adequately understand how I did not have a "research design," I must describe my first day in Arkansas, but I will save that story for the next chapter.

I intentionally went into this situation without having thoroughly researched Northwest Arkansas because I did not want any preconceived notions or ideas to overshadow my understanding of rural life in the region. In hindsight can I say it was entirely the best decision I made? Absolutely not, but I also cannot say that it was the wrong decision either. You see, by entering into this research, somewhat underprepared, I was forced to think on my feet and act authentically, without the constraints of pre-determined methodologies that had to be approved by an institutional review board. In certain ways this is an "easier" way to *do* research because it does not require nearly the hours of preparation or labored transcribing and coding of hours of verbal, observational, and numerical data, but in those same ways, the lack of preparation leaves ample room for uncertainty and failure. This failure was no less disheartening, despite what might look like a lack of preparation. It should also be noted that while I did not have set

methods in Arkansas, other than my internship, I did have "ideas" or "hypothetical plans" about what I would do there and how and where I would go about gathering information. I am typically a person that loves to plan, so of course I had ideal routes that I thought my research would follow, but it just did not seem to happen that way. If I have learned anything in my time here on earth, it's that things rarely go as I have planned them. If I were still on my "plan" that I began this PhD program with, I would have graduated two years ago. So, methods are gone, and plans are futile, because ultimately, "The not-knowing-in-advance is part of the procedure. For knowing is always to some degree reducible to the already known" (Manning, 2016 p. 92).

In what follows of this chapter I describe the original intended site of my research, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and the doing of research within the museum that led me to change course in my original "plans." Dispersed among the research in this chapter are interludes featuring retellings of various experiences that further shaped the decisions I made in rural communities, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Interlude: Pleasantville

Have you ever been to a town so perfect, so meticulously designed, so clean, that you thought you were on a set for a movie? That was my reaction to Bentonville, but more specifically the downtown square of Bentonville and the area just outside of Crystal Bridges Museum. Downtown Bentonville is centered around a square grassy courtyard with brick walkways that lead to a fountain at its very center, which has a Confederate monument surrounded by flowers in the middle of the fountain. I was there in the summer and Arkansas had been experiencing a lot of rain at that time, so the grass, flowers, and trees in the courtyard and surrounding areas were very lush, vibrant, and green. If you are able to ignore the Confederate monument, it's honestly quite beautiful and peaceful. The downtown square has two lane roads, wide brick sidewalks and bricked crosswalks leading from the corners of the courtyard to the

surrounding buildings. Everything in this downtown square area is designed in a way that makes you feel like you have been transported into an old-fashioned town square. There are no stop lights, only stop signs, and all of the buildings and businesses have brick facades that have been so well maintained, it looks as though they could have been built yesterday. One end of the square is entirely dominated by the large, symmetrical, Neoclassical, Benton County Courthouse. Also, within this downtown square there are trendy shops, restaurants, a coffee bar, and the original Walton's 5 and 10, which has now been transformed into a Walmart Museum and old-fashioned soda fountain. Walking around downtown for the first time, I felt as though I had been transported to an alternate universe. There were droves of people walking and driving through the square, but yet without stoplights this also meant there were no pedestrian walking signs. Drivers proceeded slowly and cautiously, allowing pedestrians to leisurely walk across the crosswalks. There was a certain civility about walking and driving through this downtown square; cars always respected pedestrians, as well as the other vehicles, never honking, rushing, or speeding through intersections. Driving through the downtown, drivers seem to accept that they were on a leisurely drive to enjoy the scenery and idyllic nature of this picture-perfect town. Suddenly I was transported to the 1998 film, Pleasantville*, starring a young Reese Witherspoon and Tobey Maguire, in which the main characters are transported back in time into a black-and-white, 1950's, wholesome family sitcom "Pleasantville," reminiscent of shows like "Leave it to Beaver." In the movie, everything in the small fictional town is seemingly perfect, but it lacks color, until the main characters begin to introduce new ideas and contemporary concepts to the people in this fictional town, and slowly the town starts to come alive with color. In this scenario, the Crystal Bridges Art Museum, where I would be interning for the summer, was the catalyst that added color to Bentonville, through its progressive and inclusive programming and*

curation. But as was clear by the prominent place a Confederate monument still held in its downtown, there remained parts of Bentonville that had not been confronted with ideas in technicolor.

Just the Basics

The fieldwork for this research took place during the summer of 2019 as I lived and worked in the rural northwest region of Arkansas. The site of this research study is very significant to the purpose of this study for a multitude of reasons, one of which being that the population of Arkansas as a whole is highly rural, with 42% of the population living in nonmetropolitan areas (University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, 2017). This site was not chosen because it was particularly convenient in its location to my everyday life, but rather, it emerged out of much thought and research about what would make the most viable location for understanding the impact having access to an art museum can have on rural adults. The museum where I situated my research is Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, located in Bentonville, Arkansas. This museum opened its doors to the public in November 2011, and has quickly become a world-renowned art museum, both for its vast collection of American Art, as well as its innovative approach to programming and outreach. Crystal Bridges was founded in 2005 by billionaire Alice Walton, daughter of Walmart founder, Sam Walton. Through her private donations of art and funding, as well as funding provided by The Walton Family Foundation, where Walton also sits on the board, the museum was brought to life. Crystal Bridges is situated in the Ozark Mountains, in the Northwest corner of Arkansas in the town of Bentonville. The town of Bentonville has a little over 50,000 residents and has experienced 45% growth since 2010 (Sissom, 2019). Only recently, in 2018, has Bentonville crossed the threshold for classification as a metropolitan (having 50,000 or more residents) area(Cromarite, and Bucholtz, 2008).

Another factor that made Crystal Bridges ideal for my research is the fact that the museum's permanent collection is always free and open to the public, thanks to an endowed sponsorship provided by Walmart. Free admission to museums and other cultural institutions is a highly debated topic (Laskey, 2015), with advocates both for (Hester, 2016; Hunt, 2018), and against (Rushton, 2016; Langfield 2016). For my part, I whole-heartedly believe in the need for free admission. I believe that one of the largest barriers for access to arts programming in rural areas lies in the stark lack of funding provided to schools, museums, and other public agencies that might be able to assist in this type of rural outreach. For schools in rural and low-income communities, free admission to a nearby museum ensures that all students are afforded the opportunity to experience art offerings (Blunt, 2020), but I believe this could also be a significant benefit to rural adults. As mentioned in the introduction, Jung (2014a) identifies a belief held by many blue-collar rural communities--that the arts are a frivolous and nonessential expense--which would likely mean that these individuals would not be very enticed to pay (the sometimes high) admission costs to visit an art museum. By providing free admission to the permanent collection, Crystal Bridges and other museums like it are able to allow people of all ages to experience their art offerings on a recurring basis. Membership at different levels is still offered at Crystal Bridges, and this provides free admission to temporary exhibits, which otherwise cost a nominal fee to experience, as well as a few other member perks, but this membership is not a required expense for visiting the museum. I appreciate this model and believe that if free admission to an art museum can spark a person's interest to experience something new, then it is well worth it.

Figure 1:

View of Crystal Bridges through Fred Eversley Sculpture

Interlude: Arkansas Art Pilgrimage

When I first heard about Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, it was 2011, and I was working toward my bachelor's degree in Art History at the University of Georgia. I chose to focus much of my studies on American Art, with a particular interest in American Modernism, so when I heard that "The Walmart Daughter" as I referred to her at the time was buying up all of these seminal American artworks and moving them to Rural Northwest Arkansas, I was a bit perturbed. At this time the only thing I knew about Arkansas was that it was Bill Clinton's home state, a fact I learned from a 5th grade report on a president of my choosing. Thus, when I heard about the museum's eventual opening, my first thoughts were, where is Bentonville even located and why would anyone want to go there? It's not particularly close to any large metropolitan area and it did not seem like it would be an easy trek to get there. This was also a tough time for

both art markets and billionaires (such as Alice Walton) because of the Occupy Wall Street movement, which criticized the lack of transparency and snobbery in the art market that allows millionaires and billionaires to invest and grow their fortunes through unregulated, often inflated, art investments. Alice Walton and Crystal Bridges were receiving a large amount of criticism for her close ties to Wal-Mart and the lack of livable wages and benefits the superstore giant provides to its many employees (Dobrzynski, 2011). The artworld's elite were also critics of Walton as they "characterized Alice as an exorbitantly wealthy heiress whose aim was to snap up icons and display them as kitschy Americana: Wal-Art" (Mead, 2011). Of course, Walton was not met with criticism alone, as many defended her for providing access to canonical American artworks to a portion of America's population that previously lacked opportunities to do so, as well as the increased jobs and tourism the museum brought to the Northwest Arkansas area (Dobrzynski, 2011). After Crystal Bridges opened in 2011, it seemed that much of the negativity was subsiding as critics and art lovers alike made the pilgrimage to the museum to experience what Northwest Arkansas had to offer.

By August 2013, just under two years after opening, the museum saw its millionth visitor, and at that time Bentonville had only 35,000 residents (DeBerry, 2013); by 2015, the museum had welcomed their second millionth visitor, for an average of about 500,000 visitors per year in its first four years (DeBerry, 2015). These numbers are continuing to grow, with the museum seeing an average of 600,000 visitors per year by 2019 (Lamy, 2019), but the population of Bentonville remains far below this number at just over 51,000 residents as of 2019. Even if we do take into account all of the residents of the entire Northwest Arkansas area, spanning over 3,000 square miles, that amounts to a population of under 600,000 residents (Northwest Arkansas Council, 2019). This means people were traveling, deliberately, to see Crystal Bridges,

not just people in close proximity of the museum, but people from all over. To put this into perspective, the High Museum of Art, located in Atlanta, Georgia, a metropolitan area with a population of almost 6 million people (Metro Atlanta Chamber, 2019), sees just 400,000 visitors annually (High Museum of Art, 2020). The High has been open since 1926, a whopping 85 years longer than Crystal Bridges, and Metro Atlanta has a population more than 10 times larger than the entire Northwest Arkansas area. Furthermore, Crystal Bridges also boasts abundant outdoor sculptures along walking trails on the grounds of the museum and throughout the town of Bentonville, all of which do not require that a visitor check in, thus potentially expanding the visitor numbers substantially, if unofficially. So, how do they do it? Perhaps it's the free admission, or the collection containing everything from historical American masterworks to contemporary art heavy hitters. Perhaps credit is due to the hardworking marketing and public relations teams or the inclusive programs for all ages and abilities. But mostly, I think this all comes down to money: without Crystal Bridges' substantial bankroll, the free admission, the world-renowned collection of art, the vast public program offerings, and the ability to hire a highly qualified team of staff (who are also willing to relocate to Arkansas) would not be possible. This is not to say not that other art museums in the United States do not also have adequate funding, but that many of these museums are located in largely populated, tourist heavy cities, and many require ticket purchases or "suggested" donations for entry.

At the time of my fieldwork, this museum was not even eight years old, but it had already contributed to major economic and population growth in the Bentonville area. According to Della Rosa (2020) of the Northwest Arkansas Business Journal*, "Between July 1, 2010, and July 1, 2019, the population of Bentonville rose 53.1%." and ranked as "the fifth fastest-growing U.S. city with at least 50,000 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau." People are moving to*

Bentonville and the surrounding areas of Fayetteville and Rogers because of the increase in culture and commerce that has accompanied the opening of Crystal Bridges (Vranovci, 2018). Crystal Bridges has created an art destination out of Bentonville because its reach extends beyond the immediate campus of the museum. The museum has more than 4 miles of trails through the town, lined with outdoor art and sculptures that can be explored on foot or bike. Crystal Bridges has also recently opened a satellite, contemporary art space in downtown Bentonville, called The Momentary, offering a selection of visual, performing, and culinary arts experiences. And for those who even want to get the feeling of staying in a museum during their Art Pilgrimage to Northwest Arkansas, they can spend the night in the 21c Museum Hotel, with art covering the walls and thousands of square feet of gallery space featuring rotating exhibitions, all of which is just a short walk from the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. With the steadily increasing art attractions it is no wonder why people are willing to travel across the country to see this museum and the town it created. So, watch out Prada Marfa, there's a new destination for the quintessential art pilgrimage: the unlikely locale of Bentonville, Arkansas.

The Oldest Intern

Prior to moving to Arkansas for two months, I secured an unpaid internship at Crystal Bridges in the Access and Inclusive Programs (AIP) department. This internship allowed me to become familiar with the workings of Crystal Bridges, as well as be in contact with museum staff, allowing me to understand the institution on a more holistic level. Although the internship at Crystal Bridges was within AIP, this department's goals differ substantially from my research: I was looking into geographical access, while the AIP department works mostly with persons with disabilities or special needs to make the museum more accessible and inclusive to those groups. Nonetheless, this internship did afford me the opportunity to become involved in the

museum's structure, meet and speak with fellow employees, and interact with guests on a level that felt natural. During my internship I primarily worked on creating two "touchable paintings" that are now being used by the museum to help visitors who are blind, visually impaired, or have other sensory related disabilities, to experience paintings in their permanent collection on a deeper level. I very much enjoyed making the touchable paintings and strangely enough, they are the source of my first glimpse of viral internet "fame," which happened after Crystal Bridges posted pictures of me and my touchable paintings to their Instagram and Facebook pages. This then led to an interview with a local Northwest Arkansas news station and an interview for an NWA travel and leisure website. All of this "fame" happened after I had returned to Athens, Georgia, so I did get to live a life of anonymity while I was there. I will also say that the recognition was nice but getting paid would have been nicer. Hopefully this dissertation ensures I never have to work for free again, but who am I kidding? I work in the arts.

Figure 2:

Mallory holding touchable painting in front of Fitzwilliam Tait's A Tight Fix – Bear Hunting, Early Winter

Figure 6:

"Touchable Painting" made by Mallory

Figure 7:

"*Touchable Painting" made by Mallory*

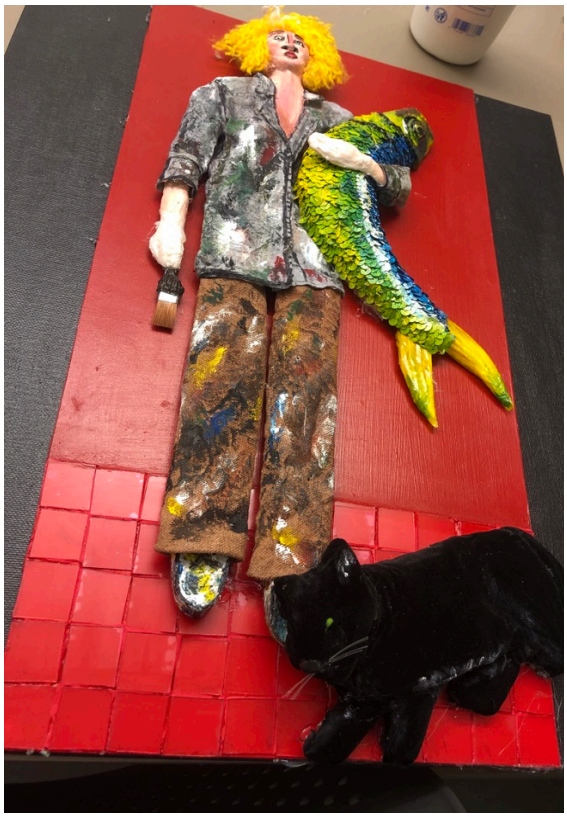


Figure 8:

Mallory holding touchable painting in front of Joan Brown's Self Portrait with Fish and Cat

In addition to creating these touchable paintings, which was more of a solo endeavor, I also helped at a few "Multisensory Saturdays," "Preschool Playdates," and other inclusion-focused programs both inside and outside of the museum. At these events I spoke to visitors, but I noticed that the majority of the visitors at the family and young children- centered events were from the Bentonville/Fayetteville/Rogers area, rather than the more rural areas near the museum. When I assisted at the Multisensory Saturday, I noticed that there were a large number of visitors from faraway locales. I spoke to a group who had chosen to travel to Bentonville for their family reunion all the way from Louisiana-- the group of 20-plus people were all wearing their matching family reunion t-shirts. This was the first time I really realized how much of a "vacation destination" Northwest Arkansas apparently had become. At the same Multisensory

Saturday, I spoke with people from Chicago, Missouri, Texas, and Oklahoma. It was the middle of summer so many people were on vacation, but when I realized Crystal Bridges' *destination* status, it became clear why I was having such a difficult time finding rural people inside the museum.

Doing the Damn Thing…I Guess?

If you're wondering what I actually *did* and how I *did it* as *it* pertains to my research, well, I just followed St. Pierre's (2017) advice and "did the next thing" as she writes: "The post qualitative inquirer who has prepared herself must trust herself and do the next thing, whatever it is—to experiment—and to keep moving" (p. 3). This constant movement in and through research is similar to the concept of prehension, taken up by Manning (2009) via Whitehead (1929/1978). Prehension is used to denote a perception of something, but not necessarily an actual cognition of that thing. In her text *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, and Philosophy*, Manning (2009), connects this prehension of something yet to happen to movement in the form of dance. She calls this prehension of dance, preacceleration, which is "a movement of the not-yet that composes the more-than-one that is my body" (Manning, 2009, p. 13). The hyphenated terms she uses here, "not-yet" and "more-than-one" make reference to the yet-to-come of the virtual/potential movement and the multiplicity of our becoming-selves. In the case of dance, preacceleration is the gathering of potential as we begin to take our next step. For example, imagine that you and a partner are waltzing, this preacceleration comes as you move between steps, subconsciously willing your bodies to move together in sync to the music. It is that in-between-ness of movement from one step to the next that is the event of preacceleration. So, as I confronted my failures, I just cried a little bit and then carried on with the next thing. I was always thinking about my next step, but I never knew what it would be or how it would go until I began. I know this sounds extremely vague, but so were my plans.

For this research, I traveled between Benton, Washington, Carroll, Madison, and Boone Counties, all located in the northwest corner of Arkansas. In this list, the counties of Benton and Washington are the only two counties which are not wholly rural, but I still included them within my research area because many of the cities within these counties are very rural. This concentration of rural cities and communities in the northwest corner of Arkansas made Bentonville and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art an ideal location for my dissertation research fieldwork. Deciding what rural communities to visit varied based on my time, research, and proximity to other rural areas. I would often travel to more than one rural community per day, so I would pre-plan my routes as I was frequently without data on my phone in the middle of these rural expanses of land. Finding rural communities and people to talk to within them presented its own challenges, but I will expand on these challenges further in the next chapter.

At the start of my fieldwork, I expected to spend an equal amount of time researching inside the museum and rural communities, but this quickly shifted as I began to realize it was impossible to actually find rural visitors at the museum. This is not to say they are wholly absent, but the large numbers of people would have literally required me to go up to visitors at random and ask if they are from a rural area…and then if they were not, would I then just walk away? Clearly that was not going to happen. I did not have the time in my two short months to attempt to blindly guess which visitors were from rural areas and which were not. So, the majority of my time in the museum I spent completing various tasks for my internship, but an added bonus of my hours in the museum was being able to talk with other staff members about my research.

Interlude: You Get a Number; You Get a Number… Everybody Gets a Number!

While working at Crystal Bridges as an intern, my supervisor set up a meeting for me to talk with the Director of Audience Research and Evaluation, in an attempt to help me out with my research. Unfortunately, my supervisor was a bit too far in the institution, so she did not fully

understand the whole "post-structural" or "post-qualitative" part of my research, so the fact that numbers and traditional data collection were not part of my research "design" was lost on her. Regardless, I was incredibly thankful for her interest in my research and her attempts to help me in whatever way she could, so I met with Jenny in the Crystal Bridges restaurant to ask her about her job and the museum's rural visitors. Prior to this meeting I had already reviewed the Guest Experience and Motivation Study (GEMS) reports for 2017 and 2018. The GEMS reports were the brainchild of Jenny and include data about museum visitors' experiences, demographics, and motivations for visiting. The reports are very positivist, focusing on numbered data points and statistical values, even describing in the reports that, "Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics" (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, 2017, p. 13). Admittedly, I am not fond of statistics, I find them boring, difficult to understand, and at times irrelevant to the real issue at hand. Statistics often ignore the person and instead turn them into a number, and they cannot account for an individual's thoughts, feelings, and needs, because an individual's mental and emotional capacity extends far beyond answers to multiple-choice and sliding scale survey questions.

That being said, I met with Jenny and learned that she actually started the department of Audience Research and Evaluation after noticing that Crystal Bridges was not keeping track of who was coming to the museum and why they were visiting. The museum, however, did already record zip codes of visitors as they arrive at the museum, but they only require one zip code for an entire group, so if members of said group live in different zip codes these would not be recorded. Furthermore, when I asked if she had the data containing these visitor zip codes taken at the front desk, she informed me that this data was separate from the GEMS report data because they collect information at random intercept points in the museum, thinking that the

information would be more accurate because it is more representative of people visiting the museum. If I am being honest, her thought process here lost me a little—perhaps she could just ask the front desk to record zip codes for each person if that was the concern, or she could have requested access to the zip code information that already existed, but apparently this is held in a different department (I noticed the museum seemed to have a bit of a communication disconnect between departments). Also, I was already made aware that students on field trips received a free coupon to revisit the special exhibition with up to four adults, and many of these field trips served schools in rural districts, but they were not tracking if the students did in fact return with their family to use the exhibition coupon. This to me seemed like a major misstep. They seemed to spend so much time tracking data points and trying to entice return visitors, but they were not using this opportunity to understand if their school field trips spurred any other family trips to the museum? This was a disappointing development for my research because I was quite interested in knowing if parents/grandparents/guardians of any of the local rural schoolchildren who had received a free exhibition coupon had used it. The GEMS report discusses using Falk's (2009) motivation framework, which includes "facilitators", aka guests, who come to a museum for or with someone else, like a parent bringing a child, so it seemed natural to me that they would want to know if parents were returning with their children after their child's school field trip. I was perplexed by some of the choices made in recording and tracking some data points, but not others. Wouldn't a museum want to know if their outreach/field trips were actually enticing people to become repeat visitors of the museum? I began to question why the data was being collected in that manner. Was it done to prove their worth to investors…to obtain grant funding…to understand their visitor base? Why is some data considered important and other data not? This exemplifies why I do not like statistics: things are always left out and you are

never given the full picture, because the full picture is too complicated and messy to put into a few visually appealing graphs and charts. I know I will ultimately lose my (imaginary) battle with the overly quantified direction pursued by many museums, such as Crystal Bridges, because the money is in the numbers and money runs the world.

What Makes *Good* Data?

Like many museums and cultural institutions, numbers and statistics are crucial (or at least thought to be) to the everyday business functions of the museum. Of course, keeping track of numbers are essential for finance operations, departmental budgeting, and other data points needed to apply for governmental grants, but I have begun to question the need for recording numerical data points at every possible moment in a museum's day. The fervor with which Crystal Bridges collected data made it seem as though the institution felt it had something to prove. To whom? I am not sure. Perhaps they want to prove their place as a "world renowned art museum" or prove that the money Alice Walton has spent is worth it, or maybe they are just trying to prove that art is cool, and that all people should have access to art museums. My favorite thing about dedicating my life to art is the fact that as a dyslexic individual, I have been able to largely avoid numbers for most of my adult life, but I also understand that good numbers get good money and money makes the world go round. Still, I could not seem to get past the fact that the museum was collecting data that they were not even using. Moreover, the only data they seemed to not be using was the only data I actually cared about. This was and will remain mind boggling to me, but it also only further proves (to me at least) that data is contrived. Statisticians record data that they deem important, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is the "truth" or the "whole picture" because decisions like what data to include are being made by thinking-feeling beings and what is important to one person might go overlooked by another. The Director of Audience Research and Evaluation at Crystal Bridges told me that anything could be

quantified if you just assign a number to it, and for her this included the awe of a work of art. When I heard her say this, I thought I was going to fall out of my chair. To me, this statement only further illustrates the bias and instability that exists in all of this *brute data* that individuals and institutions insist on collecting and holding as truth. What is the point? How will knowing a numerical average of the "awe" for each work help the museum in their mission? Will this "awe" scale bring in more visitors? Probably not, because people do not go to museums often with the expectation of rating each work of art based on how much awe it provokes at a given moment. But it might bring in money, and I guess that is the real point here. Data is only *good* data if it can prove its worth and Crystal Bridges seems like it has something to prove.

This is an Institution. Period.

In my time at Crystal Bridges, I was enamored by their forward-thinking, innovative, and inclusive programming and curation, as well as the sheer amount of diverse works of art in their collection. The staff seems truly passionate about their jobs and seem to enjoy working at the museum. On the surface it seemed like the perfect place to work, and for some people I am sure it is. If it were not for its location in a state that I now have some very mixed feelings about (which I will explore further in the next section), I might even consider seeking future employment there. The museum itself is massive, but the staff that it takes to run a museum this size is even more impressive. At the time of my internship and fieldwork the museum had more than 40 people in their education department alone. Each department is broken up into smaller teams, take for instance the education department: this department includes public programs, school programs, access and inclusive programs, family programs, and teacher programs. Having a staff this large, with this many moving parts and different departments, also presents issues with cross department communication. In fact, that seemed to be the only issue I heard any of the staff members complain about (in my eavesdropping).

The museum is very much run like a business, which should not be that surprising considering it was borne out of immense, inherited capitalist wealth. The hierarchy in the museum's staff structure is apparent, regardless of how "democratic" the museum may want to appear. This was the first time I have ever seen a museum refer to their department heads, not as curators, but as Chief ____Officers (CEO)--for instance the education head is Chief Education Officer, the head of HR is Chief People Officer, and the head of Diversity and Inclusion is the Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Curators are no longer the top of the totem pole in this museum, rather, the title of curator seems reserved for "lower level" curatorial staff. It was honestly very confusing compared to the typical museum structure I was used to. In addition to this very business-like format, there were also large company logos on the walls in one wing of the museum, which again is not surprising. They have to advertise their sponsorships, but nonetheless, this business-first model that it seems Crystal Bridges has been unlike anything I had ever seen. I am not saying that a hierarchy does not exist in many (or most) art museum structures, but the stratification of staff into so many different departments, and different parts of the museum, presented a literal, visual chasm between the education staff and the rest of the staff of the museum.

Inside the museum the curatorial, research, and business departments were all in the staff offices wing of the museum, which was on a higher level, on the entire opposite side of the museum, near the staff entrance. The education staff, however found themselves on the lowest level of the museum, nearest to the pond/courtyard and classrooms. To get from the education department to the interpretation department (which works to bridge education and curation), it takes an approximately 5-10 minutes-walk depending on whether one takes the elevator or stairs and walking pace. I understand why they would place the education department near to the

classrooms, but it did also present a stark visual emblem of how education departments are treated in museums (and society). It seemed that there was not much interaction between the education staff and the curators during the planning of exhibits; rather, the education aspect seemed like a bit of an afterthought. This is not to say that great curation decisions were not made, but rather that at times education staff literally found out about an upcoming exhibit only a few days before it was announced to the public. This could reflect the fact that I talked to the lowest-ranking education staff members about this issue, but the interdepartmental communication was definitely lacking.

Ultimately, all of this further solidified the institutional status of Crystal Bridges. All of these little instances of hierarchal imbalance combined with the museum's love for data collection demonstrates how ultimately non-democratic the museum is. But, at the same time, art museums *are* elitist institutions that by design exclude socially economic and disadvantaged people (Jung, 2014a), so it is not surprising that even though this is a new museum, they are still perpetuating the same tired elitist tropes. Education is rarely privileged in a museum, and the recent pandemic has only made this fact clearer as museums across the country have laid off their education staff in droves. This lack of institutional respect for educational departments in museums is a topic I explored in my master's thesis, but this was not the goal for my doctoral dissertation. So, while I did notice these evident imbalances, I did not focus on this in my research because this does not enhance my understanding of how and why rural populations might access Crystal Bridges. Crystal Bridges is and will always be an institution. If I were more confident in my understanding of the Deleuzian Machine, I might make some connections here, but I do not feel it necessary. I cannot change the institutional identity of Crystal Bridges and it is this institutional identity that lies behind many of the decisions that are made by the museum.

Instead, I will now move on to what I actually did while I was in Rural Northwest Arkansas, because it was through the interactions in rural communities that I experienced and learned the most.

CHAPTER 6: Encountering Relations

Plateaus in Arkansas

Deleuze (1994) wrote, "Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter"* (p. 139). Encounters are spontaneous and unknown, they are a "shock to thought" (Massumi, 2001); encounters fail representation and recognition. The most succinct description of encounter's failure of representation that I have read comes from O'Sullivan (2006):

> An object of an encounter is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed. We, and the world we inhabit, are reconfirmed as that which we already understood our world and ourselves to be. An object of recognition is then precisely a *re*presentation of something always already in place. With such a non-encounter our habitual way of being and acting in the world is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place (p. 1)

These *encounters* of Deleuze are the things, the relations, the moments, that we do not recognize and cannot name. They cause ruptures in our thought, as we begin to see and think beyond our own representational understanding. In this chapter I discuss encounters with and in rural relations of Northwest Arkansas that caused me to think *otherwise* and see beyond the representations of rural that I thought I "knew."

This chapter includes personal narratives that I have decided to call "encountered relations," which detail experiences I had in rural Northwest Arkansas. Following each "encountered relation" I include a discussion of the encounter, in which I begin to bring in other

Deleuzian concepts in an effort to understand these relations through theoretical connections. The Deleuzian concepts explored include difference, ethics, and affect, just to name a few, but a brief definition and explanation of each concept will be included before a new concept is introduced. I felt it necessary to first provide a narrative of these encounters as I experienced them, because I was not acting and thinking through these experiences in the same way upon reflection as I was during their initial occurrence. As I reflected on the rural encounters, I began to think *with* Deleuze (Jackson and Mazzei, 2011), and through (seemingly endless) reading, writing, and contemplation about these encountered relations, new ideas began to emerge. During this process it became apparent that it was not only Deleuzian external relations that were significant in the thinking through of my Arkansas experience, because the field of external relations is always already connected to the other concepts on Deleuze's rhizomatic plane of immanence.

Thus, I turned to what Jackson and Mazzei (2011) call "plugging in" as a way to "apply" theoretical concepts to a particular "data set," whatever that may be, and then think through this data set by plugging it into the chosen theoretical concept, but, as Jackson and Mazzei (2011) note,

> Conceptualizing the process of plugging in is the easy part. Putting it to work requires much more acumen. Plugging in to produce something new is a constant, continuous process of making and unmaking. 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 I re-read and thought back on my experiences of encountered relations in rural northwest Arkansas, I realized that different Deleuzian and post-structural concepts were shaping my

interpretation of my encounter. It was not only the external relations in the locations that produced these encounters. The relations also produced instances of *difference*, *minor, ethics,* and *affect* (among other concepts). The plugging in of these concepts, therefore, arrived differently at my consciousness each time, based on the impression of each of my experiences and how these experiences came to be shaped in my memory.

As Colebrook (2010) explains, "Just as life can only be lived by risking connections with other powers or potentials, so thinking can only occur if there is an encounter with relations, potentials and powers not our own" (p. 4). Thus, what you will read about here are the connections that I have made based on my thinking *with* Deleuze through these "encountered relations." Just as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) frame their book *A Thousand Plateaus* as a series of plateaus with no set linear order, the encountered relations I have detailed here can be read in any order. I have alternated discussion of the encountered rural relations with the encountered museum relations as a way to juxtapose these different relational zones, but chronology is only significant here in the sense that I learned something during one encountered relation that later impacted my experience with a different relation.

Encountered (Rural) Relation - *An Arkansas Arrival*

Prior to planning my trip to Arkansas for the summer, I arranged housing at a cabin I found on Craigslist. From the pictures the cabin looked rustic, but up until I actually arrived in Arkansas, I had not yet seen pictures of the inside – I was soon in for the surprise of my life. Now, it is not that I did not ask for pictures of the inside of this cabin, but I was entirely too trusting and allowed myself to be swayed by a man who I did not know to believe that the inside was nice and comfortable. I was a little bit hesitant of this situation, but prior to seeing this cabin my biggest worries of this place were that it might not have a full-length mirror – I was naïve about the disappointment to come.

Now there is no way for me to describe this experience without making myself sound both a little pretentious and shallow. As I arrived at the road that this house was located on, my true fears set in. The house was located at the end of a mile-long dirt and gravel road, which didn't bother me much. However, Arkansas had recently experienced major flooding and there was more rain in the forecast, which made me scared that my little Ford Focus might get stuck without 4-wheel drive. Furthermore, the cabin was a small A-frame structure, and it was the only "real" house located on the entire road. As my boyfriend and I drove down this road, I noticed neglected and abandoned cars, trucks, and trailers with overgrown lawns and piles of discarded objects in the yards. Eventually, we came to the cabin, and I was doing my best to hold it together emotionally. The outside of the cabin was familiar from pictures, but yet seemed much worse in person. There was an old couch with all sorts of clutter on the porch. In the ceiling of the porch there were assorted hunting knives with their blades stuck between the molding and the ceiling. I was still hesitant but optimistic, so I found the key that Bill (the owner) hid before he left, and I walked into the house. I opened the door, and I was hit with a stale, musty, odor and a small, cramped, space filled with clutter on every surface. I immediately burst into tears. The room was filled with deer heads, hunting paraphernalia, clowns (yes, clowns), and old, miss-matched furniture. At this moment, we heard a knock on the door, and it was Bill's neighbor, who was watching out for the house until I arrived. I knew I could not face her with a face full of tears, so I sent my boyfriend to talk to her while I composed myself in the bathroom. After I got my shit together a little, I exited the bathroom and talked with the woman about the house, careful not to say anything negative or offensive. She (Leah) was extremely nice and welcoming, and I felt calmer with her talking me through the area and the house. I was still trying to convince myself that I could "do this." That's when Leah began to tell me about the

neighbors on the dirt road, some of whom seemed nice, until she got to the neighbors, she told me to "not bother with." She went on to explain that I shouldn't bother getting to know those neighbors because they were brothers who recently made national news after they got arrested for putting on bulletproof vests and going into the woods by their house to shoot at each other. Looking back, I am honestly shocked that I was still trying to convince myself that I would be able to stay in this cabin after hearing that story, but when Leah left, I grabbed my things to take them into the cabin.

Figure 9:

Arkansas Cabin Exterior

Figure 10:

Arkansas Cabin Interior

Figure 11:

Arkansas Cabin Interior

Figure 12:

Arkansas Cabin Interior

Figure 13:

Arkansas Cabin Interior

Up a ladder-like staircase was the "master" bedroom, and much to my chagrin there were even more clowns, clown figurines, clown themed art, and clown marionettes hanging from their strings. I was absolutely horrified. I had truly had no idea that was what was waiting for me at my summer get-away. Thankfully, during this whole debacle my boyfriend was there supporting me. As I tried to convince myself that I could be a person who "roughs it," my boyfriend helped me cover up and hide some of the décor (deer heads) that I couldn't even bring myself to look at, let alone touch without bursting into tears. I spent more than an hour trying to convince myself that I could turn this into a livable, comfortable, place, but then I realized that this place also had no Wi-Fi connection and terrible cell service. It then occurred to me that not only would I have to deal with this terrifying décor, but I also would not be able to focus on my research and studies, the entire reason for my trip to Arkansas. The lack of Wi-Fi was the literal straw that broke the camel's back. Up until this point I had been crying on and off, but I had not yet hit that point where my spirits truly broke. I began to cry so uncontrollably and panic to a point that I felt as though I could vomit, and I did the only thing I knew to do in this situation – I called my Dad.

Figure 14:

Arkansas Cabin Ladder view from Upstairs

Figure 15:

Bedroom Marionette Clowns

Figure 16:

Bedroom Clown Figure Collection

As I began processing all that I was experiencing, I began to feel guilty. If I could not bring myself to stay at this place, how could I do my research and try to relate to a population that might also live in this way? I was so confused because, technically, I was staying in the town of Rogers, Arkansas, which has a larger population than my hometown of Valdosta. But this felt more rural than my extended family's hometown of Dixie, Georgia. I was not in Rogers proper, but rather in the more mountainous outskirts, and it was nothing like the mountainous areas of Mineral Bluff, Georgia that were so familiar to me. All of my family lives in rural areas, and yet they do not decorate with clutter, deer heads, and clowns. My family's houses do not smelly musty and dirty. Was I unaware of how rural, blue-collar Americans lived, or was this cabin in Rogers as bad as I thought it was? I was left wondering what it really meant to be rural? How could a town have a metropolitan population but yet seem more rural than the "unincorporated" area where my family resides, with a population of under 1k? Why was it that the town and city center of Rogers felt smaller and more rural than my hometown? Was rural more about infrastructure than population?

Going into this, I was already primed to challenge the idea of rural, but I never expected how much I would be challenging the idea of rural I held within my own self. At the end of my first day in Arkansas, I decided that I couldn't and wouldn't be staying at Bill's cabin in Rogers, and instead I searched for a sublease in the college town of Fayetteville at a student apartment. I booked a hotel in Bentonville for the night and my boyfriend, and I headed into downtown for dinner. Immediately upon walking through downtown Bentonville while searching for a place to eat, I noticed my own relief as I began to see more diverse faces. I realized that I was used to seeing diverse faces in the rural areas of Georgia, something I was not sure I would find in NW Arkansas. I still was not quite sure what rural Arkansas had in store for me, but I was certain

that I would learn a lot about the many different complexities of rural locations and populations that I was not yet familiar with.

Discussion of Encounter

This first encountered relation in Arkansas was my first realization of *difference*, although at the time I could not yet explain this in the Deleuzian terms that I can now. You see, coming into this fieldwork, I assumed that because I was familiar with the rural communities in South Georgia, I would find the same sense of familiarity in rural Arkansas. I thought that I had prepared myself for "new" and "unexpected" experiences, and I did research on the many complexities of rural populations prior to my arrival. But it was only when I arrived and experienced the shock of the cabin that I realized I was not as open to new possibilities as I had insisted, I would be. This is when my perception of what it means to be rural began to be upended. I was experiencing what Massumi (2001) might call, "A shock to thought." Massumi (2001) uses the phrase "a shock to thought" to describe the way that his (along with other theorists') thinking changed after reading Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical texts. As Dale (2001) writes, "a point of change is the sudden shock when thought realizes itself in the body" (p. 91). This encounter at Bill's cabin terrified me at the time, but it also allowed me to become awakened to the complexities of rural populations.

Where I expected difference of the same, I instead experienced an encounter of difference-in-itself. I expected rural as I knew it to be from my Georgia experiences, but I was shown instead something truly dissimilar and unexpected. Before this move, when thinking about the yet-to-come experiences and encounters I would have, I never fathomed the actuality that any of these experiences/encounters would completely jolt me to my core, but this was a much-needed awakening. I was finally asking the right questions because I was forced to think in terms of a new relation. If I had completed this fieldwork in my own hometown area, the comfort

and familiarity of my surroundings would have likely blocked me from encountering something, as I had in Rogers, so outside of my regular experiences. The difference-in-itself emerged because I was able to realize the bias I felt towards my own past experiences of the rural and the discomfort I now felt as those ideas began to collide. I might not have fully understood why at the time, but I was beginning to realize that I could not compare the rural of my former life to that of Northwest Arkansas. The relations of Dixie, Rogers, and Mineral Bluff all have internal differences that make it impossible to compare them, and premature to assume they are similar simply because of their population size. By assuming these communities existed within the same thought pattern, I had been reducing them to their stereotypical attributes only, looking for small similarities, but not acknowledging the unique relations of each area that contribute to their differential relation. As asserted by Bryant (2008),

> In contrast to the spatial relations, we find in empirical experience, the relations belonging to the whole are differential relations. Unlike spatial relations which are premised on negation and contradiction, differential relations are not born of oppositions, but rather constitute a properly internal difference (p. 200).

Thus, it was not that Rogers differed from Dixie, or Mineral Bluff, or any other rural town with which I was familiar because of a comparison or contradiction between the areas, but that the difference I experienced in Rogers was a pre-existing, internal difference that could not be accurately described through negation.

Again, like all Deleuzian terms/concepts, difference cannot be assumed to share a denotation with the term one would find in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, because Deleuze (1994) does not use the term difference as a means of "difference of the same" (p. 25). Such a usage assumes a negative based on a contradiction of an identical representation. Meaning,

difference could only be different if we maintained an original representation or identity to which it was compared, but Deleuze's (1994) concept of *difference in itself* removes the problem of identity and representation. Thus, we must "think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative" (Deleuze, 1994, p. xviii). The negative that Deleuze (1994) refers to is a contradiction, it is a difference to or from a thing or relation, not a *difference in itself*. To more clearly relate this concept to the research at hand, comparing urban and rural requires that one relation pass through a negative contradiction, as one is classified as the opposite of the other; but the difference that reduces relations to the same would be akin to comparing rural to rural, based solely on population numbers, and equating these areas to stereotypes of sameness. Difference-in-itself is therefore not a comparison of things that appear externally similar or dissimilar, and difference cannot be gathered from a comparison between things or relations, but rather, difference is in itself internal, and difference can only be gathered if we, "set the concept aside and focus instead on the singular, and the unique circumstances of its production" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 76).

Difference became apparent on the first day of my research, but I was not able to put into words the difference I was experiencing until much later, after extensive reflection. These "encountered relations" as I call them, allowed me to see beyond what I had already assumed to be "true" by shocking me to thought (Massumi, 2001).

Encountered (Rural) Relation - *Wealthy and White in Bella Vista*

Bella Vista, Arkansas was the first rural town I visited. I decided on Bella Vista because it was one of the closest towns to Crystal Bridges and it has a population under 30,000 residents—rural, but not too rural. I thought this would be a good town to help me "get my feet wet" in my research. Upon arriving in Bella Vista, I was greeted by a lush green sprawling golf

course, followed by signs directing me to mountain biking trails, lakes, more golf courses, and a sign that read "Bella Vista Churches Welcome You." As I continued to drive through the town, I saw many golf course communities, neighborhoods with large houses and minimal multifamily housing units, such as apartments, condos, or townhomes. After driving around looking for a restaurant, store, or coffeeshop where I might be able to stop in and talk to passing residents, I decided to pull into the parking lot of a local bank to do a little research on my phone, something I should have done before driving there. I quickly realized that Bella Vista was not like the rural communities that I was used to; no, Bella Vista was an upper and upper-middle class retirement community and recreation destination, a resort town. There were very few businesses and most eateries were located on one of the complex's eight golf courses.

Figure 17:

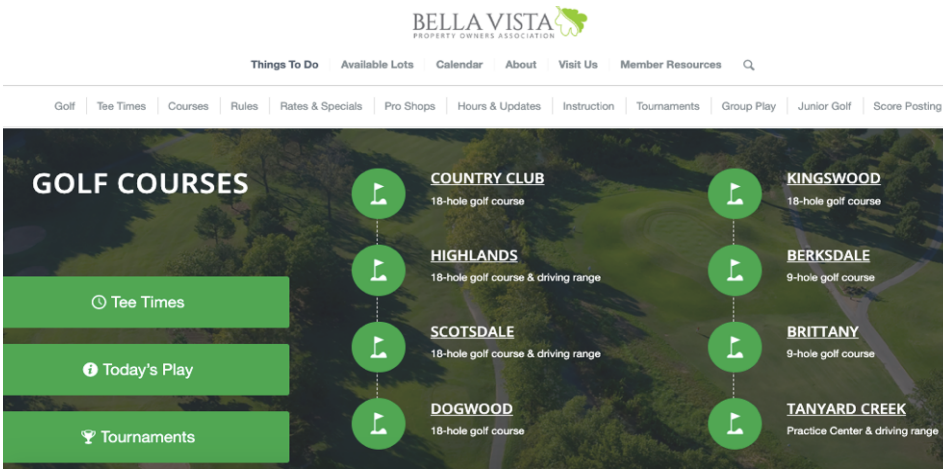
Bella Vista Welcome Sign

Economically thriving resort communities filled with upper and upper-middle-class white people do not fit typical stereotypes of rural communities in the United States. I was honestly baffled. I felt as though I had been transported into a twilight zone of Wealthy Trump

America. As I sat in the parking lot of the bank, I researched the demographics for Bella Vista, learning that 95% of the people in Bella Vista were White, with an average age of 51 and a mean household income of close to $80,000 per year, almost $20,000 higher than the average household income for the entire United States. Quite honestly, I was shocked. I am not sure that I have ever been to a less diverse town in my life. I quite literally had a breakdown in my car in the parking lot of a tiny Bella Vista Bank. I did not know what I was doing here. If the people who lived in this town wanted to come to Crystal Bridges, they probably already would have because they clearly had the means to get there, and wealthy White folks are arguably the most comfortable people in a museum setting to begin with. I began to wonder if this is what all rural Northwest Arkansas towns would be like. Were these rural communities just resort destinations for wealthy Walmart, Tyson, and JB Hunt executives and their interested business counterparts? I was not sure of the answer to these questions, but I was sure that I was not going to get much facetime with any potential research participants in this sleepy golf course community, so I headed home with the knowledge that I had to do more research on the surrounding towns before driving forty minutes to another dead end.

Figure 18:

Bella Vista Golf Courses



Discussion of Encounter

This was an extremely frustrating encounter, both because of what I did and did not find in Bella Vista. I had speculated that I would find some wealthy areas and properties in Northwest Arkansas because I knew that many Walmart executives, as well as other top-level executives from other companies that do business with Walmart, live in the area, but I assumed most of that wealth would be spread around the Bentonville area. I cannot actually say for sure that the people who lived and pursued recreational activities in Bella Vista worked (or had previously worked) for one of the big three corporations in NW Arkansas (Walmart, Tyson, and JB Hunt), but I can say that this was a very wealthy rural town. I have never seen so many golf courses in a forty-five-mile radius in my life, although I am probably not the most well versed on what the average number of golf courses per mile radius is in the U.S. Even still, eight seems excessive. My point here is that Bella Vista was not what I thought it would be. Perhaps I should have known that it would be an upscale town just by its name, which literally means "nice view." To me it just sounded like a phrase that someone would say while dressed in an evening gown, holding a glass of champagne, while admiring the view from some swanky Italian resort. I was not far off with the Italian resort correlation, it turned out, because according to the Bella Vista Historical Museum, the town was originally planned as a summer resort destination in the early 1900s, but in the 1960s the town transitioned into a vacation-retirement community. At the time of my visit, the town classified itself as a "bedroom community primarily for the Walmart Home Office in nearby Bentonville and Walmart vendor companies in the Bentonville/Rogers (Benton County) area" (Bella Vista Historical Museum, n.d.), thus upholding my initial assumptions as correct. In addition to these eight golf courses, Bella Vista also boasted seven manmade lakes for fishing and boating, along with other recreational offerings including hiking and biking trails, fitness centers, swimming pools, a gun range, and tennis courts. Of course, all of these

recreations, with the exception of the walking trails, came at a cost to the participant, ensuring a wealthy customer base.

The "encountered relation" that I described above was drawn from my research notebook and field notes, but it is an edited, and thus far more cohesive, representation of what I was actually writing/typing at the time. I wrote about my thoughts and feelings while in Arkansas, and unfortunately my thoughts and feelings also contained a large number of expletives, hence my need to edit for clarity (and propriety). One thing I will share—that I wrote in my field notes but did not include in the above encounter—is that I noticed "a lot of vacation type destinations and white people activities (i.e., hiking, mountain biking)." You might be thinking that I was being a little reductive or discriminatory by calling hiking, mountain biking, and golfing "white people activities," and I would not blame you for thinking that. Outdoor activities certainly do not belong to a single racial group, and I, being a white person, do not actually enjoy any of these types of activities. In fact, I actively avoid hiking, biking, and golfing, or any activity that requires me to be away from civilization where I might die alone in the woods. So, why would I call these activities "white" if I, myself a white person, would not do them? My use of the phrase "white people activities" was actually sparked by popular media and in particular a series on Fuse hosted by comedian Keraun Harris, called *That White People Shit* (2019). In this series, Harris, a Black comedian, attempts to understand why white people enjoy certain activities by immersing himself into "white culture" such as paranormal hunting, camping, LARP-ing (live action role play), aerial yoga, and rock climbing. This stereotype of white people enjoying and dominating outdoor activities is not just the topic of a popular culture comedy television docuseries, but has also been explored in academic contexts (Lee, Scott, and Floyd, 2001; Shinew, Floyd, and Parry, 2004; Child, Kaczynski, Sharpe, Wilcox, Schoffman, Forthofer, and

Barr-Anderson, 2015). Regardless of this noticeable trend of outdoor activities being enjoyed by majority white populations, it does not make it any less of a stereotype, and I do acknowledge the damage it can have on people of color as they are seen as "not belonging" in these spaces. The stereotype, however, holds true in this city, especially considering this town is comprised of 95% white residents. It seemed to me as though the activities in this town were simply pandering to the white elite. I began regretting my decision to do research in NW Arkansas because I no longer felt like the rural towns in this area of Arkansas could be very representative of the rest of the rural areas of the country. I wanted more diversity: diversity in racial makeup, diversity in income, diversity in social class. Something, anything, more than this white-bread town full of Walmart executives and shareholders. I simply could not wrap my mind around this town because I had never experienced anything like it.

The thing that I missed at the time though, was that I was given a glimpse of Deleuzian *difference* and "Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 222). By this, Deleuze means diversity is the difference between two things, but, as explained earlier, difference is not a contradiction or negation between two things, difference is internal and exists in-itself. As Bryant (2008) clarifies, "Difference is the condition for diversity" (p. 146). Ultimately, what I thought I was looking for was an empirical diversity, but what I found was a transcendental difference. The true *difference* lay in my experiences in the rural. I was looking for concrete, objective differences, but what can be considered concrete? Rural as a concept of externality defies the categorizations that I was looking for and attempting to wedge Bella Vista into. Rural can only be known and defined as it is lived and experienced, not in advance of its encounter. Yes, this rural town of Bella Vista is unlike the rural towns I grew up in, in a number

of categorical ways, but it is the relations (both external and internal) that exist in rural communities (like Bella Vista) that create these fields of *repetition* and *difference.*

Encountered (Rural) Relation - *Rural People Go to Church, Right?*

Before arriving in Arkansas I came up with a plan to try to meet people in rural areas, given that I had no prior familiarity with these towns and communities I was visiting. One plan that I initially came up with was to attend various church services on Sunday in these small and rural communities. This idea sprung out of my own familiarity with the rural community my maternal family lives in, Dixie, Georgia, which has no businesses or local gathering places other than a small post office branch and two church houses. Church is an important part of life in Dixie, as it is in many rural communities across America. My personal history with religion, however, makes this a bit more complicated than it appears on the surface. In certain aspects I grew up in the church, attending Episcopal services in my hometown every other Sunday and Christian holidays, as well as regular attendance at Dixie Baptist Church with my maternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The opposite weekends, when I was not at church, were spent with my father, an Ashkenazi Reform Jewish transplant from New Jersey. On these weekends, I was for all intents and purposes, Jewish. I regularly attended Friday night Shabbat and all High Holy Days, as well Wednesday afternoon Hebrew School at the local synagogue. You see, my parents married and subsequently divorced before I was a year old, and while my mother converted to Judaism before marrying my father, after the divorce she converted back to Christianity. Thus, I was raised simultaneously as both Christian and Jewish, depending on the day of the week or who I was spending time with. In my life I have been both baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal Church, in addition to the B'Not Mitzvah I shared with my sister. Growing up, I knew this was unusual, especially considering that I was the only Jew(ish) kid in my grade spanning two public and one private school system in my hometown, but to me this was

life, and I was used it. As I grew older, I attended religious functions less of my own volition, but still celebrated holidays of both religions with both sides of my family. And while it has been years since I have stepped foot in a synagogue, I still attend church service with my mother during my visits home. Currently, I do not subscribe to any religion, but rather see my participation in these religious events as a way to appease my mother or spend time with aging family members. Regardless of my personal beliefs, I retain great respect for others' religious beliefs, and I very much understand the significance that prayers and services hold for people of all religions.

This brings me back to my original idea to attend Sunday church services in rural Arkansas communities. You see, when I thought up this idea, I only took into account the rural church services that I had attended in Dixie, where I am in some way related to almost half of the congregation (the full congregation is likely under 60 people total). Attending those services, I was welcomed and embraced by family and longtime acquaintances. They knew about me and me about them, the stakes were low, and acceptance was guaranteed. This is what I did not take into account when I decided to attend rural Arkansas Sunday church services. Upon settling into my apartment in Arkansas, I decided to find a rural town and church to attend on my second Sunday there in hopes to find "participants" for my research study. At this service I was welcomed warmly by kind congregants, as it was starkly apparent in this small congregation that I was a newcomer. Along with the congregation, I participated in the service, and chatted a little afterwards, but during this service I came to the realization that I could not use these people for my research. As I sat there while they prayed, I recognized that I had come under false pretenses. I was not an interested new visitor to join their congregation, I was there to gather information about their views of art museums, not to talk about religious beliefs. I immediately felt guilty for my actions,

as I almost inadvertently took advantage of their sacred time for religious contemplation. I left the Arkansas church that Sunday without gathering any information relating to the "data" of my research, but what I did gather was a new insight into how I should proceed in the coming weeks.

Discussion of Encounter

The problem that I faced during this encounter was an issue of ethics versus morals, but this ethical issue should be read and understood through a Spinozist-Deleuzian conception of ethics, not ethics as a dictionary would define it: "a set of moral principles; a theory or system of moral values" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The difference here lies in the equation of ethics with morality, because for Deleuze,

> Morality is a way of judging life, whereas ethics is a way of assessing what we do in terms of ways of existing in the world. Ethics involves a creative commitment to maximising connections, and of maximising the powers that will expand the possibilities of life (Marks, 2010 p. 87-88).

Deleuze touches on this ethical/moral dilemma in many of his texts, often by way of other philosophers, including Hume in his book *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991), and Spinoza in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988). In both cases, Deleuze makes distinction of the difference in the moral problem and the ethical problem, for the moral problem is a problem of judgement, not judgement of oneself, but a judgement from God (Deleuze, 1988). Morality sets up a binary that requires something to be either good or bad: "It is the essence of moral conscience to approve and disapprove" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 37). Ethics, on the other hand, resists these transcendental values and rests in the immanence of the unconscious (Deleuze, 1988). Deleuze (1988) explains this immanent/transcendental problem through Spinoza, saying,

> Spinoza's ethics has nothing to do with a morality; he conceives it as an ethology, that is, as a composition of fast and slow speeds, of capacities for affecting and being affected on

> this plane of immanence. That is why Spinoza calls out to us in the way he does: you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know before hand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination (p. 125).

Thus, the ethical problem is that which we are not able to think of beforehand, it is not that we have come to a crossroads questioning what we *should* do, but rather what we *could* do (Jun, 2011, p. 4).

In the case of my dilemma at the church in rural Arkansas, this was not as issue of whether I was evil or morally wrong by talking with congregants at church about their views on art museums. I did not know for certain what would happen if I did ask about their relationship to Crystal Bridges, but it is precisely this uncertainty that caused my "moral" problem. Talking to congregants about art does not inherently take up the place of a moral problem, but I still felt this tinge of guilt. A self-created guilt that I could not escape and ultimately caused me to change course. Deleuze (1994) offers insight into my moral dilemma: "Morality alone is capable of persuading us that thought has a good nature and the thinker a good will, and that only the good can ground the supposed affinity between thought and the True" (p. 132). Thus, by retreating, I was giving into a moral image of thought, where I should have, if I were bolder and more Deleuzian, "Oppose repetition to moral law, to the point where it becomes the suspension of ethics, a thought beyond good and evil" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 6). By assuming and fearing moral law, I closed myself off to the possibility of new connections, because I failed to understand the ethics of the situation. As Deleuze (1988), explains

> But Ethics overthrows the system of judgement. The opposition of values (Good-Evil) is supplanted by the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad). The illusion of

> values is indistinguishable from the illusion of consciousness. Because it is content to wait for and take in effects, consciousness misapprehends all of Nature. Now, all that one needs in order to moralize is to fail to understand (p. 23).

By moralizing my research, I had in turn misunderstood the ethics upon which my research is built, because "Ethics admits the idea as a factor only of the relevant circumstances and accepts the association as a constituted element of human nature" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 34). I failed to make connections across the wider field of rurality due to a misunderstanding of moral law, but failures in research are inevitable, and as will soon become evident, I experienced many of them while in Arkansas.

Inventing New Platforms for Relations - *Plan D*

At this point I am but one week into my summer of research in Arkansas and I have encountered one failure after another: at the rural mountain shack, in Bella Vista, and at the church. My next step was to formulate what I will refer to as Plan D. Plan D is not something that you hear very often, but there I was, again, starting from scratch with no connections forged and no closer to answering my intended research questions. I will not sugarcoat the despair I was quickly spiraling into. I was very unsure that I would be able to do this for seven more weeks. I am not inexperienced with failure or changing directions, but at this moment, it felt harder than before as I was alone and unfamiliar with the life and culture of Northwest Arkansas. I felt like an unprepared child who was all of a sudden being forced to live with the consequences of their poor decisions. Until a week ago, I had never before even stepped foot into the state of Arkansas, and for some reason I decided it would be a good idea to up and move here with zero connections or understanding of the area and its people? My spirit was shattered, and I could feel myself slipping into a depression that would later end up overshadowing much of my stay in the state. Even still, I knew that this was what I signed up for and this is what I had

to do. So, I began to research every town and community within a two-hour radius of Crystal Bridges. I looked at town demographics, studied Google Street View images, searched for shops and restaurants and events in these towns, and sought out anything and anywhere that would allow me some facetime with these rural residents. But I soon realized this too would be more difficult than I had anticipated.

Figure 19:

Snapchat message sent June 7, 2019

Interlude - A Fear Runs Through It

Here's something that you should know about me before understanding many of the difficulties I encountered while researching: I hate talking to strangers. For people that are just getting to know me, they might think that I am very outgoing, extroverted, and talkative, and while this can be true, it has not always been the case. I am good at talking to people if they talk to me first, but I have never quite mastered the art of the conversation-starter. Talking to strangers causes me so much crippling anxiety that I once continued to pay an extra $15 a month for almost a full year for a subscription service I no longer needed because I was afraid to call and cancel--I knew the salesperson would try to convince me otherwise (ultimately my friend called the company for me, so no battle won there on my part). Another time I got hired to do door to door sales for business interested in office supplies, but only lasted one week because on my first outing by myself someone yelled at me, which prompted me to spiral into a panic attack that left me crying and vomiting into a trash can at a gas station in Villa Rica, Georgia. I quit the job right after. Growing up, my older sister functioned as my voice. She is loud, strong willed, and bold in all the ways I am not. As I grew older, I found my voice in places where I felt comfortable, around friends and family and in academia. I thrived in academics and I was not afraid to speak up because I was confident in what I had to say. In certain ways I am still very much like this. I am good at speaking in a small classroom setting on an agreed upon topic where my thoughts and opinions are welcomed, and I fare well in presentations on topics that I am knowledgeable and passionate about, but I struggle with networking. I have a tendency to overthink interactions, both before and after they happen. I worry about what people will think of me mostly: will they like me…will they think I am intelligent, or not intelligent at all, that

I am annoying, or my accent is too Southern? The list goes on, but it always leads back to a crippling fear of interacting with new people in unfamiliar places. At this point you're probably thinking, "why on earth would you come up with a study that has talking to strangers as a main component?" and after my failed church research experience, I was thinking the same thing. I was in a full-on panic actually. I Google searched "how to talk to strangers," which led me to articles, TEDtalks, and YouTube videos about starting conversations, being vulnerable, and fleeting intimacy with hopes of training myself to let the fear go.

Back to the Plan (D)

I came to the realization that if I was going to talk to people I did not know, I needed to do it in environments where I felt most comfortable. Not in a church or fancy golf course restaurant, but at farmers markets, retail shops, restaurants, and bars. Places I would willingly frequent anyway, without feeling guilty about the false pretenses of my being there. These are also places, where, to a certain extent, I did not have to start the initial conversation, and at some places, it would actually be the workers' job to interact with me, which for me was a major bonus. My main problem does not lie in my ability to keep a conversation going, but rather my inability (fear) to initiate it in the first place.

Discussion of Platform for Relation

This section is one of the hardest for me to write, because it requires that I recall some of my less than happy memories. Living in Arkansas was an extremely isolating experience for me, more so than I could have even expected or prepared for, and in my recollection of my time there I am once again left feeling a certain type of inexplicable sadness. It is a sadness that reflects on the shame I felt/feel due to the repeated failures I experienced during my first weeks in Arkansas. "This is key to memory," Manning (2009) writes:

> Remembering a feeling involves activating relation by bringing into appearance a feltness in the present passing. A memory is not an unfolding of the bottled past in the neutral present. Remembering is the activation of a contrast that inflects the differential of experience unfolding such that the then is felt as an aspect of the nowness of experience. This is a relational event: it foregrounds the presentness through the past, emphasizing the quality of difference in their contrast. The event of the memory is how it takes form in the present, its hue activated through the contrast past-present, then-now (p. 80).

As this passage illustrates, remembering is not an isolated event, rather it is felt in the new relation of the present. This is also why it was necessary that I include an interlude in the middle of "Inventing New Techniques for Relations," because in coming up with "Plan D" I was forced to realize the many moments in the past that have also led me to where I am. Remembering the depths of my fear and social anxiety is central to the plan I ultimately devised. In my formulating of "Plan D" I was faced with the realization that every one of my initial plans for meeting and interacting with rural Arkansas residents did not work, and I was no more confident in my ability to talk to strangers than I had been at any point in my life. Ultimately, by choosing to visit places where I felt comfortable, I was able to *do* the research I had actually set out to do. By going to restaurants, shops, farmers markets, flea markets, and any vendor or retailer that was open, I was finally able to step up and have conversations because these were places in which I did not immediately feel like an outsider. At the very least, I could purchase something to establish my reasoning for being there (which I did a lot). I wanted so badly to be accepted in these towns. I made sure to wear casual, approachable clothing, often in lighter or brighter colors, something that was a little difficult for a girl who regularly finds herself in all-black outfits. I also would listen to local (mostly country) radio stations, in an effort to get myself into the mindset of local

rural residents. I liked local bars and restaurants the most, as I could usually sit at the bar and find the bartender, along with a few patrons, to start up conversations with, but I also frequented local libraries to talk with librarians and look through local newspapers. I bought more zucchini at farmers markets than I can count. Gradually I began to get more comfortable in each of the towns that I visited, and I noticed that the more I went back to the same town, the more comfortable I felt talking with residents there. I was learning to establish a rapport and eating a lot of zucchini in the process.

The isolation I felt in Arkansas also reflects on the need for community support and social interaction, especially in these rural areas. I moved to Arkansas knowing no one and nothing substantial about the area, and I underestimated how difficult it would be to move to somewhere new without a concrete way to establish connections. It is not just that I felt isolated in the rural communities that I visited--rather, this is a growing problem for many residents in rural communities. Social isolation and loneliness have become prevalent public health issues for rural residents, who find themselves at a higher risk of declining emotional well-being (Holt-Lunstad, 2017). For residents living in these rural communities, their neighbors and community members must rely on each other for socialization and friendship and without this network of support, residents can be secluded by the sheer lack of infrastructure and population density. And although “rural communities often have stronger social networks than urban ones” (Chatterjee, 2019), the strength of these social networks is declining as infrastructure changes and younger generations move away. While it might be an overused stereotype that rural residents know everything about their neighbors and gossip spreads like wildfire (such as in movies like *Steel Magnolias*), relationships and community support are indeed a necessity to survive in a small town.

This interconnected web of community socialization also means that it is extremely easy to spot an outsider, such as myself, because the residents in these communities are already familiar with each other. It has been thoroughly documented that there is often a disconnect between researchers and rural populations that stems from a pervasive suspicion or distrust of outsiders among rural residents (Dibartolo & McCrone, 2003; Milligan, 2016; Tieken, 2017). This mistrust of outsiders does not only include researchers like me, but also businesspeople, politicians, and even newcomers to the area. As Campbell and Gordon (2003) describe, "Close ties are a basis of trust for community members, and 'outsiders' are a potential threat to those close relational ties. Residents may speak of how outsiders have hurt the community in the past or have brought harmful changes" (p. 432). This fear of change is a common view of many in rural areas, but it most often comes from the older generations. Wuthnow (2018) explained how it can take up to two decades for new residents to rural communities to feel accepted:

> Many of the people who lived in their communities for less than two decades said they still didn't feel like they quite belonged. Small towns are not exactly gerontocracies. But it can feel like they are. The old-timers set the norms that newcomers feel compelled to accept if they want to fit in. This is one of the reasons the norms seem to change so slowly. Inertia takes hold. What seems right is what has seemed right for a long time (p. 29-30).

Knowing this, it is very clear to see why I felt like an awkward spectator in many of the communities I visited: I *was* an outsider, and I would always *be* an outsider. I was too new even for the designation of 'newcomer': I had no stake in the social network of these communities, and at best I could be seen as a brief but welcome visitor, at worst a suspicious stranger. Ultimately, I had to get past my fear of an awkward encounter, and I needed a way to create

opportunities to build connections. I needed to "Invent Platforms for Relations" (Manning & Massumi, 2014). These platforms for relations entailed what I described above: simply going to already populated areas, shops, restaurants, and markets, to talk to the workers and patrons that were readily available. This is likely not what Manning and Massumi (2014) originally had in mind when they described the process of inventing platforms for relations, because their relations are much more collaborative and required outside participation, but for the sake of my research, this was less necessary. Instead, I saw the platforms for relations as the jumping off point to start conversation and to build connections.

Three Encountered (Rural) Relations in Siloam Springs*: If I Had Ever Been Here Before I Would Probably Know Just What to Do*

These next three sections describe three separate encounters I had in the town of Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Each of these encounters happened on a different day and time, but I have decided to group these encounters together and describe them chronologically to help better understand how this town emerged in my exploration.

Encounter One - Liberals and Townies and Bikers, Oh My!

Siloam Springs was one of the more interesting rural towns I visited, and with a population just under 17,000 people, it was also one of the largest. I visited Siloam Springs on three separate occasions, and I was struck by how closely I identified with the residents and people I spoke to in this town. The town is home to John Brown University, a small, private, Christian college, which likely accounted for some of the comfort I felt in the town. I am most accustomed to college towns, as I was both raised in a small college town and have essentially been immersed in a college atmosphere for the majority of the last decade of my life. This college population also accounted for the median age of the town being around 29 years old, a rarity in rural America as many of the younger generations are moving to metropolitan areas and leaving

rural America overall older on average than urban areas (Rural Health Information Hub, 2020). This town felt "hip," with cute shops, restaurants, and a small local pub in its quaint historical downtown. Siloam Springs even boasted its own local brewery adjacent to a coffee shop where I noticed several students working on computers. I mention this "hip" quality because it is not thought typical to many rural areas. Additionally, Siloam Springs was the first rural town in which I noticed some racial and ethnic diversity among its residents, although the town was still 83% white.

My first trip to Siloam Springs was on a Sunday, and if you thought finding people to talk to in a rural town on a random weekday was hard, try going on a Sunday, when the entire town seems to shut down, especially in the summer with a large portion of its student population gone. This is something that I was not prepared for, as I had originally planned on attending a yoga class I found on a local studio's website. What I did not realize, however, was that during the summer the yoga studio did not offer Sunday classes. So, in lieu of Sunday afternoon yoga, I decided to park downtown and walk around, hoping to find a restaurant or shop that would be open. I hated that I was wearing my workout clothes because I am generally not someone who wears athleisure in public, but I was not going to drive the hour back to my summer apartment without exploring the town a little, and hopefully talk to a few residents. I settled on grabbing a beer at Creekside Taproom, a local craft beer pub where I noticed a group of middle-aged adults playing instruments and singing folksy songs on a back-patio area. This was my kind of place. The inside of the taproom was much smaller than the patio area, but there was a few "biker" type people joking along with the bartender and watching baseball at a volume louder than I felt necessary, but sports aren't really my thing. I grabbed a beer and opted for the outside ambiance. Seeing the motorcyclist was no surprise to me, because even though I had only been in Arkansas

for a week at this point, I had already realized that biker culture was a big deal here. What did surprise me was the group of middle-aged "hippie" types on the patio, because they reminded me of my dad's friends. As I sat and listened to them play music and sing, I wondered, what brought them to Siloam Springs? Were they affiliated with the university? Were they from here originally? Sadly, this will remain a mystery to me as I was not able to gain the courage to talk to them because I did not want to interrupt their "jam session".

By this time, someone who had been sitting at the bar decided to leave, so I took my chance, decided to brave the possibility of sports talk, and sat down at the bar. I began chatting casually with the bartender and a nearby patron, they asked me where I was from, perhaps assuming I was new, or a student at the local university, and I asked them a little about the town. I told them how I was interning at Crystal Bridges and they shared positive sentiments about the museum. I did not get much information about the frequency at which they go to the museum, but all three people said they have been. I would often avoid the question of how often people go to the museum as I was worried it could come across as judgmental if they felt I was insinuating that they should go more often. There certainly is no "right" number of times a person should visit an art museum, and I understand that life gets in the way far too often--I was just pleased that they had been. After finishing my beer, I asked them if they knew of any local restaurant where I might be able to get a casual bite before leaving town and they pointed me to Park House Kitchen and Bar, just around the corner from Creekside Taproom. At Park House Kitchen and Bar, I opted to sit by the bar, as I was a solo diner, and one of only four patrons in the restaurant. I began talking with the bartender, waitress, and one other patron sitting at the bar, all of whom were females in their early to mid-twenties. Our conversation started around the episode of Family Feud that was playing on the TV behind the bar and then migrated to discussion of the town. I was surprised to

learn that both the bartender and patron moved to Siloam Springs from California: the bartender, because her parents moved to work for Walmart, and the patron, because she inherited her grandmother's house after she died the previous year. They remarked on how there was very little to do in the town, especially on Sundays, as everything tends to shut down by 8pm, but they were growing to like the small-town atmosphere. The fellow customer told me a story about how a neighbor came to check on her after a particularly bad storm a few weeks ago, and she thought it was strange at first because she was not used to that kind of neighborly attention while living in California but remarked that it was nice to have people care about her here since all of her family was still back home. This customer was just becoming acquainted with small-town life, and admitted she missed In-N-Out and Carl's Jr., but said she was enjoying the slower pace of life. I spoke with the girls about the museum and learned that the patron loved to visit the museum and was an artist herself, but that she worked at a local bank to pay the bills. The waitress and bartender also enjoyed visiting the museum and the bartender mentioned that she had attended a recent Pride Night at the museum the previous week. As you can imagine, I was very excited to learn about their enthusiasm and interest in the museum, but I did wonder if the two women's past, living in larger cities, with easier access to art museums as well as a younger introduction into them, had influenced their interests. After eating my burger, I thanked the women for their conversation and left Siloam Springs with a brighter outlook for the remainder of my summer.

Encounter Two – Different Strokes for Different Folks

My later visits to Siloam Springs took place on weekday afternoons, with the hopes that more people would be around, and shops and restaurants would be open. During my second visit, I ate lunch at a seemingly upscale southern restaurant called 21 Springs, which was actually recommended to me by the women at Park House Kitchen and Bar. The restaurant was large but fairly empty for a Thursday at prime lunch time. As I arrived, I noticed one woman finishing up

her meal at the bar, and a couple sitting in the corner. I opted for the bar seating as well, since I was again dining alone. I ended up talking with a millennial-age bartender about how he ended up in Siloam Springs and I learned that he was originally from Fayetteville (only a forty-five-minute drive away) but moved to Siloam Springs to attend John Brown University on a golf scholarship. He was taking a break from school for a short period when I met him. When I asked him about his views on Crystal Bridges, he said that he really enjoyed the museum and had been several times before, although he did mention that he had not been in the last year or two. He told me that he had studied architecture in school and that he loved the design of the museum, and especially the Frank Lloyd House (located on the museum grounds after relocation from New Jersey in 2014). He continued by telling me that he would like to go to the museum more, but when he has free time, he often chooses to fill it with golfing or fishing. This was a sentiment I often heard from people when they told me that they did not go to the museum very often--it was not that they did not like the museum, they just had other things they preferred to do more. One of the more interesting things I learned from this bartender was that the John Brown University has actually recently added a Museum Studies minor in response to Crystal Bridges' opening. I thought that this was fascinating because it shows a growing interest in museology resulting from Crystal Bridges' success. This seemed in some respects to parallel my own journey in museum education, as I did not even consider a career in a museum until I started interning at the Georgia Museum of Art during my undergraduate studies. Having easy access to the museum and getting to know what type of work exists there opened up new career possibilities that I had never before considered.

Encounter Three – Feast and Famine in Northwest Arkansas

On my third and final visit to Siloam Springs, my most memorable interaction happened at the local brewery, Ivory Billing. There I met one of the brewers, the manager of the taproom,

and various customers who were all local residents. From the time that I first came to Siloam Springs, I wondered why it looked so different from some of the other rural towns I visited, and I had assumed it was because of the small private university, which likely brought in more commerce than typical rural towns receive, but I soon learned this was not the only factor present. As the brewer and taproom manager told me, Siloam Springs was home to Simmons Foods, a leading supplier of poultry and pet food products, amassing well over a billion dollars in revenue each year. So, this town has money, maybe not Tyson Foods or Wal-Mart money, but money, nonetheless. I was beginning to see a theme in Northwest Arkansas of feast or famine, haves or have nots, corporate workers or factory workers. People in the area often worked for similar companies, but wages varied widely and the ones at the top of the corporate ladder were much better off than their blue-collar counterparts.

Discussion of Encounters

The most interesting thing about each encounter experiences in Siloam Springs was that I felt surprisingly comfortable being in this town. This level of comfort is without a doubt what kept me coming back to this little town while in other rural communities, one-time visits sufficed for my research. In certain ways Siloam Springs reminded me of my hometown of Valdosta, Georgia. Perhaps it was because both towns are homes to universities, or because both are *"*big" small towns in relation to their immediate proximity to other more rural areas. But in these same subtle ways the town reminded me of my hometown, it also differed in many of its relations, which sustained my intrigue and made perceptible the *plurality* of life. Siloam Springs felt eerily familiar, like I had been there in a past life or dimension – I was having *déjà vu*. Deleuze (1997b) draws on the concept of *déjà vu* from Bergson, writing,

> The present is the actual image, and *its* contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror. According to Bergson, 'paramnesia' (the illusion of *déjà vu* or already

> having been there) simply makes this obvious point perceptible: there is a recollection of the present, contemporaneous with the present itself, as closely coupled as a role to an actor. Our actual existence, then, whilst it is unrolled in time, duplicates itself along with a virtual existence, a mirror-image. Every moment of our life presents the two aspects, it is actual and virtual, perception on the one side and recollection on the other. . . Whoever becomes conscious of the continual duplicating of his present into perception and recollection...will compare himself to an actor playing his part automatically, listening to himself and beholding himself playing (p. 79).

Thus, in Siloam Springs I was at once experiencing the virtual and actual of its relation. I could recognize the newness of the present encounter, but there existed a layer of unconscious awareness that kept bringing my mind back to Valdosta when I was in this town. In *Semblance and Event* Massumi (2011) describes the way this *déjà vu* is felt:

> The "uncanniness" of the way in which the object appears *as* the object it is—as if it doubled itself with the aura of its own qualitative nature—disappears into a chain of action. We live out the perception, rather than living it in. We forget that a chair, for example, isn't just a chair. In addition to being one it looks *like* one. The "likeness" of an object to itself, its immediate doubleness, gives every perception a hint of déjà vu. That's the uncanniness. The "likeness" of things is a qualitative fringe, or aura to use a totally unpopular word, that betokens a moreness to life. It stands in the perception for perception's passing. It is the feeling in this chair of past and future chairs "like" it. It is the feeling in this chair that life goes on. It presents, in the object, the object's *relation* to the flow not of action but of life itself, its dynamic unfolding, the fact that it is always passing through its own potential. It's how life feels when you see it can seat you. In

> Antonio Damasio's terms, it's the "feeling of what happens," that back-ground feeling of what it's "like" to be alive, here and now, but having been many elsewheres and with times to come (pp. 44-45).

I kept coming back to Siloam Springs because for the first time in my rural adventures I felt as though there was a seat for me there. However, the problem I found in trying to understand Siloam Springs was that I kept comparing Siloam Springs to Valdosta. I was indeed looking for similarities and differences in relations to degree and kind, but I was not looking for *true difference*, *difference-in-itself* because I was stuck in the circular thought of recognition without a source or end. In *Bergsonism* (1997a) Deleuze explains this circular thought of *déjà vu* as "past in general," writing,

> We place ourselves *at once* in the past; we leap into the past as into a proper element. In the same way that we do not perceive things in ourselves, but at the place where they are, we only grasp the past at the place where it is in itself, and not in ourselves, in our present. There is therefore a "past in general" that is not the particular past of a particular present but that is like an ontological element, a past that is eternal and for all time, the condition of the "passage" of every particular present. It is the past in general that makes possible all pasts. (p. 56-57)

This feeling of having already been in Siloam Springs was thus drawn from my "past in general," and not just my past in Valdosta, but all lived (actual) and dreamed (virtual) past relations. These are sensations of memory coming together. Massumi (2011) describes this sensation of semblance as,

> The feeling of perceiving perception's occurring to itself stays with you. There is something a little odd about the perspective of the street. You are aware of thinking-

> feeling the depths of the city as you walk and look. The constitutive collaboration between vision and proprioception is still reflecting itself in an ongoing of its event. There is an odd feeling, like a very faint déjà vu, that you are double-experiencing the world. You are consciously experienced the semblancing of experience—its double order; your double existence—that normally remains in the nonconscious background of everyday life. Perception feels itself renewed. Because your experience is tarrying in its nascency. This is powerfully suggestive, but nonspecifically (pp. 166-167).

What Massumi (2011) means by this is that as we are experiencing a *déjà vu*, we are double-experiencing the world in its actual and virtual forms simultaneously. As I experienced Siloam Springs, I was at once confronted with my identity as an outsider, while simultaneously finding comfort in the seeming familiarity of my surroundings. As Massumi (2011) continued, "This *should* make a difference. *Could* make a difference. But *how? Which* difference? Could/should: *speculative*. How/which?: *pragmatic*. Walking down the street has rebecome speculatively pragmatic, in a way that is immediately thought-felt" (p. 167). In Siloam Springs I tried to actively look for *difference,* but this is a *speculative-pragmatic* noticing, not a noticing of speculating and pragmaticism, as they are thought in axiom. Massumi (2011) explains,

> The speculative aspect relates to the character of potential native to the world's activity, as expressed eventfully in the taking place of change. The pragmatic aspect has to do with how, in the taking-definite-shape of potential in a singular becoming, the relational and qualitative poles co-compose as formative forces. Pragmatic doesn't mean practical *as opposed to* speculative or theoretical. It is a synonym for composition: "how" processual differentials eventfully play out as co-composing formative forces. This pragmatic playing out is always speculative in the sense that what will come of the

> process is to some degree an open question until its "final characterization" of itself at its point of culmination. En route, it is speculatively anticipating what it will have been. That speculation is entirely active. It is the "how" of the experience getting where it's ultimately going with itself. The co-composing of formative forces constitutes in each exercise of experience a novel *power of existence*: a power to become (p. 12).

Thus, it is significant to understand that noticing a *speculative-pragmatic difference* cannot be reduced to the differences between what is speculated or theoretically proposed *and* what is practical and pragmatic, in a theory versus practice sort of opposition, but rather, *speculative-pragmatic difference* is related to the *how* I experienced Siloam Spring *becoming* as a *power of existence.* Thus, as I encountered Siloam Springs in its various relations, I was experiencing its *becoming,* and this was a *becoming-more-than--more-than-rural*. Siloam Springs has been experiencing steady change and growth alongside Bentonville, and the establishment of Crystal Bridges. Siloam Springs is moving in the direction of growth, like Valdosta and Bentonville, expanding, attracting younger residents, making room for *speculative-pragmatic difference* (Massumi, 2011).

As I thought back on my experiences in Siloam Springs, I was reminded of a song by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, titled "Déjà Vu," from their 1970 album of the same name. *Déjà Vu* is Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's second album and my favorite album of theirs, but the title track was never released as a single. The track is jazzy and rhythmic; what it lacks in lyrical length it makes up for by drawn-out singing of words and phrases, and as always it has the group's classic harmonizing and instrumental breakdowns. This song, like Siloam Springs, is simple on the surface, in its most basic relations, but each holds a deeper "*power of existence*: a power to become" (Massumi, 2011, p. 12). The power of "Déjà vu" lies in the song's ability

to capture that feeling of a fleeting familiarity but failing recognition, and so too, Siloam Springs, continues to create "disturbances of memory and the failures of recognition" (Deleuze, 1997b, p. 55). So, before I move on to my next encountered relation, I will leave you with the lyrics to "Déjà Vu":

If I had ever been here before I would probably know just what to do
Don't you?
If I had ever been here before on another time around the wheel
I would probably know just how to deal
With all of you
And I feel
Like I've been here before
Feel
Like I've been here before
And you know
It makes me wonder
What's going on under the ground
Do you know?
Don't you wonder?
What's going on down under you
We have all been here before
We have all been here before
We have all been here before
We have all been here before
(Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young, "Déjà Vu", 1970)

Encountered (Rural) Relation – *A Minor Gesture and a Major Asshole*

I spent a lot of time going to farmers markets throughout the Northwest Arkansas area, and although many of the "farmers markets" in these rural communities had only a handful of vendors, I was grateful to just be able to find people to talk to in these rural towns. So, this brings me to the Huntsville Farmers Market, located in Huntsville, Arkansas, about an hour

southeast of Bentonville. Huntsville was one of the smaller farmers markets I went to, but I had two of the most memorable interactions there. As I previously mentioned, I find it easier to converse with strangers in transactional relationships, like when making a purchase, so when I went to these farmers markets, I would first scope out the vendors to see what all was available. In small farmers markets like Huntsville, with only four or five vendors at most, I had a goal of buying something from each person and hoping for the opportunity for a brief conversation. As I began to scope out the tables, I noticed that there was an artist in my presence! This surprised me because it was the first small-town, weekday farmers market that had an artist booth! I seemed to usually find the non-food booths more at weekend farmers markets, or markets in Bentonville or Fayetteville, which are not technically rural communities.

I obviously went to the artist's booth first because I like to keep things in my comfort zone – plus, I thought it would help me start off on the right foot. Which it most certainly did. I met a wonderful female artist in her senior years of life, whom I will call Cindy. Cindy was retired and now spent her time exploring photography and creating beautiful, polished stone jewelry and accessories. I bought a few really pretty photographs and turquoise stone hair pins, and some earrings I bought to give to my mom during her upcoming visit. As I talked with Cindy she told me how she loved to go to Crystal Bridges with her grandchildren, and then she showed me pictures of her and her grandchildren in front of the sculpture/installation, Fly's Eye Dome (1981) by architect Buckminster Fuller, which sits on Crystal Bridges' North Lawn. As I spoke to Cindy she told me she had a studio at Terra Studios, a gallery, art-park, and art-space for a variety of activities and classes, located on the outskirts of Fayetteville. I was jazzed about exploring the outdoor fairy art garden, see the wizard cave, and walking the labyrinth as she told me all about Terra Studios. Cindy was cool. I was so excited and energized after talking to her,

but unfortunately this excitement and joy wouldn't last long, and this brings me to my second memorable experience at the Huntsville farmers market.

Things were about to take a turn, but I did not yet know it. I left Cindy's booth to go about my way buying vegetables. I will also mention that in the summer in the south, everyone *seems to grow zucchini and I ate a lot of it in a two-month span. I had to be strategic about what booth I would buy different vegetables from because I I didn't want to overload myself with the same item from each table. So, I arrive at the zucchini man's booth, or at least the man from whom I have decided to purchase this day's zucchini. He is an older, white, grey-haired man, wearing a white t-shirt and denim overalls, which reminded me of what my grandfather used to wear during his farming years. As we exchanged pleasantries, he asked me where I am from--considering everyone else at this market seemed to already know every other person who walked by, I am assuming he figured I was a visitor. I told him about my internship and how, on Tuesdays when the museum is closed to the public, I often liked to visit other Northwest Arkansas towns and farmers markets. He asked me where else I had visited and unfortunately this is where the conversation took a turn for the worse. After I mentioned Eureka Springs, he exclaimed, "ugh, too many 'homos', up there for me." And I will tell you, for as bad as I am at starting conversations, I am equally as bad and even more awkward at finishing them. I was simply baffled. So here I was, holding the zucchini, mouth agape, unsure what to say next, so in true Mallory fashion, I just leave. The conversation ends with me just saying "OK. Well thank you for the zucchini. Bye." Then I just walked back to my car and drove around the corner, parking in the Harps Foods parking lot to question what had just happened. I had just had such a great start with Cindy, was this karmic retribution? Am I just terrible at "reading the room"? Why*

was it that interactions like this seem to happen to me more often than I am prepared for? Why am I never prepared???

You see, the thing about being a petite white girl with a thick southern accent in a rural Southern town is that people are ready to assume that I am your typical god-fearing, gun-loving, Trump-loving, conservative Southern Belle. I appear familiar and nonthreatening, and in all honesty, I am non-threatening. I am at times painfully shy, self-admittedly socially awkward, and in general entirely too empathic of a human than is mentally or emotionally healthy. People cannot tell by looking at me that I am an atheist of Jewish descent with progressive ideas, gay friends and relatives, and a mind of my own. I would say that I am a wolf in sheep's clothing in these scenarios, but given my inherently sheepish nature, I am probably more of a sheep in wolf's clothing. Fitting in and appearing familiar was all part of the plan (D) after all. I needed to gain the trust of strangers enough for them to want to have a conversation with me, so I cannot blame any incorrect assumptions about my character and morals on people's perceptions of my appearance and accent alone. I did attempt to tone down both my dress and my academic/political rhetoric when visiting these rural communities, because I needed their trust and acceptance. So maybe it's my fault for creating such a trusting persona, or perhaps people like this man think nothing of these transactions because they are nothing out of the ordinary. I am sure he would call me a "snowflake" for the offense that I took at his words, but more than anything this experience made it apparent that this research that I was doing would be likely be less safe for someone who does not look like me or identify within strict cis-normative bounds. As I look back on this experience, I am ashamed I did not attempt to challenge his views, but at the same time, I know there probably isn't anything I could have said to make him change his word

choice or blatant homophobia. The man had never visited Crystal Bridges Museum, and I can only assume by the way that our conversation ended that it might not be his cup of tea.

Discussion of Encounter

For a long time, I was not sure what to make of these two interactions in Huntsville. I actually was planning on leaving out the part about Cindy, because my experience with her was so overshadowed by my awkward interaction with the zucchini farmer. You would think that after almost thirty years of life living in the South, I would have developed some sort of numbness to the spontaneous outbursts of bigotry, but I think it's better that I haven't. I have heard sentiments like this all my life, yet this time seemed different—it was confusing and troubling. I could not figure out what was different about this situation, because I was only looking at the *event* as the *encounter* with the farmer, but I was missing the *minor gesture* (Manning, 2016) of the artist. Manning (2016) draws the *minor gesture* from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) (concept of concept of the minor, which deterritorializes that of the major. The major can be better understood as being the normative, dogmatic image of thought, and the minor is what problematizes this preexisting major structure. When describing minor or major in relation to the event, the major can be understood as the presumed, identifiable causes of events, and the minor is instead the subtle changes or shifts that create the conditions for change in the event. The major is not capable of making change, because it is structured and predestined. Manning (2016) clarifies this blind-belief in the major,

> The unwavering belief in the major as the site where events occur, where events make a difference, is based on accepted accounts of what registers as change as well as existing parameters for gauging the value of that change. Yet while the grand gestures of a macro- politics most easily sum up the changes that occurred to alter the field, it is the minoritarian tendencies that initiate the subtle shifts that created the conditions for this,

> and any change. The grand is given the status it has not because it is where the transformative power lies, but because it is easier to identify major shifts than to catalogue the nuanced rhythms of the minor (p. 1).

Both the major and minor gestures are unknowable in advance of their actualization, but the major, being the *grand gesture,* is easy to recognize because it is bold and casts a wide shadow. Meanwhile, the *minor gesture* often goes unnoticed in its actualization, as Manning (2016) goes on to describe:

> The minor thus gets cast aside, overlooked, or forgotten in the interplay of major chords. This is the downside of the minor, but also its strength: that it does not have the full force of a preexisting status, of a given structure, of a predetermined metric, to keep it alive. It is out of time, untimely, rhythmically inventing its own pulse. (p. 1-2).

With this easily overlooked quality of the minor, it is no wonder why it took me almost 18 months of thought to see the *minor gesture* in the subtle, quirky, kindness of Cindy. I have now realized that it was *because* of my interaction with Cindy that I had such a visceral, affective reaction to the farmer. Can I really say that I was shocked by a homophobic farmer? Probably not. Instead, I realized what caused this rupture to thought was not the farmer's predictable bigotry, but the unpredictable encounter of a *minor gesture*. Manning (2016) writes, "In making felt the event's limit, the operational interval where the event exceeds the sum of its parts, the minor gesture punctually reorients experience" (p. 2). Therefore, when I said it was *because* of my interaction with Cindy that my interaction with the farmer stood out more, I mean that, *because* of the *minor gesture* (Cindy), I felt the limits of the *event* (farmer). The minor gesture is not a rare occurrence, because it is always counter to the grand gesture in the event, as Manning (2016) writes:

> And yet the minor gesture is everywhere, all the time. Despite its precarity, it resurfaces punctually, claiming not space as such, but space-of-variation. The minor invents new forms of existence, and with them, in them, we come to be. These temporary forms of life travel across the everyday, making untimely existing political structures, activating new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues (p. 2).

In that tiny Arkansas farmers market, it was Cindy who created the space for the minoritarian of the event to occur. She activated a new mode of perception that deterritorializes the major. If it were not for Cindy's kindness, the bigotry of the farmer would have seemed almost predictable, not because I could have expected the interaction, but because the mindset and field of relations through which the farmer's comments were made are the major, and the farmer was speaking the *major* language pervasive throughout many rural communities. The major is all that has been designated "normative".

The *minor gesture* is at the heart of the event because it leads the event elsewhere, it creates change and continuation that rejects confirmative notions of being. The *minor gesture* in this scenario of my retelling both made apparent the limits of the event and moved the event forward. Whereas before, I incorrectly thought the event ended at the *grand gesture*, the event was actually still in continuation even as I left the farmers market and drove to Terra Studios, a suggestion of Cindy's during our conversation. The event did not stop when I left the farmers market, because the event is not tied to a single individual, or moment in time. Because the event is pre-individual and impersonal, it proceeds as a series and is distinguished by Aiôn and Chronos. The event occurs in the present, but in a time without which we have relation to the present. Life and death are events, but we do not will these events to happen. For Deleuze, the

event takes place in a nonlinear plane of space-time, but this does not mean that the event precedes time and space, but rather that "events *create* time and space" (Manning, 2009, p. 7). Thus, the event runs through and beyond the encounter. My encounter with Cindy allowed me to recognize the limits of the *event* at the farmers market and in response propelled the event across "spatiotemporal" relations from Huntsville to Terra Studios.

Figure 20:

Picture of Cindy's Studio at Terra Studios

Figure 21:

Barbie Shoe tree in Cindy's Studio at Terra Studios

Encountered (Museum) Relations – *Facilitators Open Doors*

In a recent conversation with my mom, I asked her about the first time she ever went to an art museum and when that was, and much to my surprise, she responded that my stepfather, Ron, had taken her to her first art museum when they were dating. She was thirty years old. Thirty years without having ever stepped foot into an art museum. Soon, I will be turning thirty, and this really stuck with me. I couldn't imagine having never been to an art museum at this point in my life, but I also have my mother and stepfather to thank for my first art museum experiences. If my mom hadn't met and dated my stepfather, when would she have gone to her first art museum? Would this have affected my own history with art museums? See, in this scenario, Ron is what Falk and Dierking (2013) call a 'facilitator.' For facilitators, "their visit is primarily focused on enabling the learning and experience of others" (Falk &Dierking, 2013, p. 47), which is not to say that the facilitator does not also enjoy the museum's offerings, but rather that they are the initiator for new visitors, the ones who open the door to new experiences.

I had the chance to be a facilitator for my own parents when after a month and a half alone in Arkansas, my mom and stepfather flew in from Valdosta, Georgia (via Atlanta) to Fayetteville, to spend a long weekend with me. My parents travel a lot (especially now that they are empty nesters), and my mom doesn't like to go more than a month without seeing me. Usually, I tend to be ok with longer periods of solitude, but in this particular moment I was very lonely and grateful for their company. I have had the opportunity to be a facilitator for my parents at various museums in my life, but these were never museums that I was simultaneously researching. I was eager to see what they thought of the museum's collection, curation, and the sheer volume of diverse works on display, both within and outside of the physical museum space. Unsurprisingly, Mom and Ron shared similar sentiments as I did when viewing the museum grounds: it's extremely impressive to say the very least, but what they also found surprising, like

me, was how a museum this good ended up in some random Northwest Arkansas town. Also like me, my mother had never even been to Arkansas, and they both acknowledged when planning to come see me that they probably wouldn't have a reason to go to Arkansas again so they should do it while I was there. I was an inevitable catalyst for their visit to Crystal Bridges, but would they have made it there had I chosen a different research path or site for research? I cannot say yes or no for sure, but it would seem very unlikely.

Figure 22:

Mom and Ron with Marina Abramović Sculpture

Discussion of Encounter

Falk and Dierking (2013) describe five visitor motivation categories for people visiting art museums: Explorers, Facilitators, Professional/Hobbyists, Experience Seekers, and Rechargers. Falk and Dierking do not subscribe to the post-structural theoretical use of language, so it is safe to assume that each category is defined along representational identity categories. These categories for visitor motivation are often used and referenced in museology research and data collection. In fact, the Crystal Bridges Research and Evaluation Department utilizes this visitor motivation model in their Guest Experience + Motivation Study. Research and data based on identity categories are far removed from the post-human writings of Deleuze, so, why would I bring this identity-based schematic into my post-structural study? The answer is because this is not about the personhood of the facilitator, but rather the action that the facilitator sets forth. The facilitator is a *catalyst* for the visitor's experience in the setting of art museums; the facilitator is a *catalyst* for the *event*.

Events are responsible for introducing change. This event-change is not a change that creates a historical break from a groundbreaking new occurrence, but rather, a change in direction that moves the proposition forward in a different way. Because the event exists within and runs through a series, it cannot, therefore, be thought of as a completely new entity outside of a series. The event simply alters the relations within a continually occurring series. To relate this to my mom's first art museum *event*-experience, it is not that Ron facilitating her first art museum trip changed the entire course of her life, because life is like the Deleuzian series.

Again, if we think of Deleuze's Aiôn and Chronos time distinctions in a series, the event cannot be the cause of changes in the course of time, in the way that a historical break might be, because the time sequences of Aiôn and Chronos do not have definitive breaks. The event actualizes because of a change that occurs, but the event is not what causes the change. The

event is better understood as the *effect* of said change, as Deleuze (1969/1990) stated: "Concerning the cause and the effect, events, *being always only effects*" (p. 8). In the case of my mother's first art museum experience, the cause of the *event*-change is the facilitator-catalyst, and the effect of said *event*-change is my mother's continued interest in art museums. These event-effects, however, are not exactly the same as the actual event. Event-effects can present themselves as "something that happens to something else" (Williams, 2008, p. 31), but "Deleuze's events are much more than an actual thing happening in a limited space and time" (Williams, 2008, p. 31). Deleuze does present event-effects, however, as a real example of an event-type situation as he gives us the example of the wound and the scar, the wound being the cause and scar the effect, but this cause-effect relationship is insignificant without the known effect. The event in its event-effect form answers the question of "so what?" in relation to the cause. The event, therefore, demonstrates the value or significance of the cause-effect relationship. For example, in the causal relationship between a facilitator and their companion in an art museum, we ask what the significance of the facilitator is, and the "so what?" answer would be the companion's experience. We can also work backwards here with a technique Deleuze refers to as the counter-actualization of the event: we can instead start at the event of a new museum visitor relation and come to understand how it came to be (facilitator).

Massumi (2011), like Manning, also connected the event to art, but he did not do so through the Deleuzian concept of the minor, but rather through descriptions of semblance and the occurrent arts. The occurrent arts, for Massumi (2011), are art practices that are "relational and event-oriented," including, "interactive art, ephemeral art, performance art, and art intervention" (outside back cover). Massumi (2011) claims that "all arts are occurrent arts because any and every perception, artefactual or 'natural,' is just that, an experiential event" (p. 82). These

occurrent arts are events because they are both art-events, when something actually happens, and when something new emerges. This new emergence of the art is also a one-off event-experience. Massumi (2011) gives the example of a relational, interactive art experience in which the art "takes you. You're in it. It's not in you. You live in it, rather than living it out. You don't go anywhere with it. It stays where it happened, as its own event" (p. 72-73). This being taken up by the art and becoming one with the art is the eventfulness of the art's perception. The art has created its own space-time field where you exist within the art and within the relation of the art event-experience. Even the non-relational arts, including object-based arts like painting or sculpture, can become capable of this experiential event. The act of viewing art can captivate and create new occurrences within event-time of its viewing experience. Thus, the event of art can happen in a multitude of different variations, but regardless, in order for art to occupy this realm of the event, it must have an affective quality that allows it to transcend distinctions of space, time, and the human subject.

Encountered (Rural) Relation – *Taking a Walk Down Memory Lane*

Berryville, Arkansas is a tiny town of less than 6,000 residents about an hour and change east of Bentonville. Depending on how you look at Berryville, it might conjure up adjectives such as quaint, historic, charming, and for those a little more cynical, "stuck in the past." Downtown Berryville seems like something out of an old movie, with a grassy square surrounded by historic brick buildings adorned with new murals of vintage advertisements on the sides. This homage to history and the past is intentional; in their welcome video on the town's website they claim that "by building on the past, Berryville is setting the stage for a bright future." The small town boasts three museums: the Saunders Museum, featuring rare guns and Wild West memorabilia, the Carroll County Heritage Museum, holding artifacts from the history of Berryville and

Carroll County at large, and finally, the most interesting of the three, The Memory Lane Museum, a collector's private museum.

Figure 23:

Entrance to Memory Lane Museum

Unlike the other two museums, the Memory Lane Museum has nothing to do with the town of Berryville. In fact, this "museum" is something of a little town in itself. Memory Lane Museum lies just on the outskirts of Berryville, and as I was driving up to this place, I in all honesty did not really know what was going on. I had never seen anything like it before. I wasn't sure if I was even at the right place. The museum is tucked behind a tow truck lot, down a dirt road surrounded by a number of small wooden buildings covered in vintage signs, which I later learned were all part of the museum! As I slowly pulled toward the house in the back of the lot, a dog came running out, barking, followed by a man holding a half-eaten hot dog with no toppings, which struck me because, why? How can a man with so many interesting things around

have such bland food tastes? Oh well, this was not my goal, so I pushed it to the back of my mind, where it stays, until I eat my hot dog (admittedly, I eat too many hot dogs and still think about this too much). As I parked my car, I rolled down my window to ask this hot dog eating gentleman if I was in the right place, because while there were hundreds of signs all around, there were none that tell visitors where to go or that even seem to name "Memory Lane Museum" out right, although it is possible, I missed it with the overwhelming number of objects to take in. I soon learned that the man holding the hot dog was in fact Terry, the owner of the museum, and after I paid my $8 admission (not advertised anywhere), he invited me into his house to begin showing me his collection.

The museum is both located inside his house and in the surrounding buildings he has built over the years. As I entered, he was still eating his hot dog while he showed me vintage collectables and other little trinkets in his living room before leading me into another room, where he had recreated an entire vintage soda fountain bar with Coca-Cola memorabilia. Terry then very enthusiastically spoke about the items in his house and was able to recount the years of their production at the drop of a hat. It was honestly quite impressive. It was apparent early on in my tour of Memory Lane Museum that Terry must have some hearing impairments and he likely relied on lip-reading, because there were several instances at the beginning when it seemed like he just didn't even realize I was talking to him. After noticing this, I tried to make it a point to make eye contact and use a louder voice when speaking with him, but the conversation was still a bit dominated by the need for repetition. The museum's collection had been amassed by Terry and his late wife beginning 15 years ago, although if you include his personal effects that are now on display, it's much longer. The museum itself has only been open for nine years, and Terry said that he did not open the museum until after his wife had passed away from breast

cancer. Before her death he had purchased an old Chevy truck painted bubblegum pink, and it now bears a decal with the name of the museum and the message "Support the American Cancer Society" on its back window. I got a little teary when he talked about the passing of his wife while showing me this truck he had painted in her honor.

Figure 24:

Breast Cancer Pink Chevy at Memory Lane Museum

Figure 25:

Panoramic View of Memory Lane Museum

The museum features a larger warehouse type building with a replica "Happy Days" diner in the back, vintage toys and furnishings, jukeboxes, pinball machines, and a plethora of things I couldn't even recognize from the 1930's -1960's. Following this larger room, Terry took

me to see a vintage replica barber shop he built, a small one-room jail, complete with a mannequin inmate, a schoolhouse, and a post office, each of which was housed in its own free-standing building. Memory Lane Museum resembled a movie set replica of a small town more than it did any museum I had ever experience before, but that doesn't make this collection of artifacts any less of a museum, I suppose. When asking Terry about visits to any other museums in the area, he told me about the Saunders Museum and the Carroll County Heritage Museum, but he did not mention Crystal Bridges. So, I asked him if he had ever been to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and he didn't even seem to know what I was talking about. Terry asked me what kind of things they have at Crystal Bridges and upon telling him that they have art, including paintings, sculptures, installations, etc., he seemed a little less interested. As I asked Terry more about his hobbies and what he did, he said he doesn't really leave Berryville that often, which I guess isn't a surprise--why leave when you have your own mini town in your front yard, built to your own specifications and preferences? I was fairly surprised he hadn't at least heard of the Crystal Bridges Museum before I spoke to him, but perhaps he had, and he had just forgot. The sheer number of advertisements placed by Crystal Bridges in the NW Arkansas area, in every avenue from billboards to TV and radio commercials, to local newspaper and magazine ads, and even in targeted online ads made it seem like Crystal Bridges was everywhere I turned, but maybe that was just because I was explicitly looking for these signs. Perhaps Terry had heard of Crystal Bridges, but like some disappointed online reviewers, expected it to be actual, physical bridges made of crystal, rather than an art museum. I am not really sure what it would take for Terry to visit Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. He is already a collector, curator, and exhibitor of American-centric pop-cultural objects and artifacts, so wouldn't a museum displaying the art and artifacts of America from past to present be of interest to him? If

for no other reason than to explore his "competition"? These are questions I will probably never know the answer to, but I do hold out a little glimmer of hope that maybe, just maybe, Terry will visit Crystal Bridges one day and think of me, just like I think of him every time I put toppings on a hotdog.

Figure 26:

Mallory in Memory Lane Museum "Jail"

Discussion of Encounter

What if the reason some people do not go to art museums is because they have no interest in their offerings? This is not a wild concept to grasp. All people do not share the same interests

and it cannot be expected that all people, regardless of where they live, will find enjoyment in art and the experience of it. Personal interests are generated through encounters and external relations throughout our lives, but the relations with which we come in contact also differ widely depending on a multitude of factors. Interests like art, philosophy, and science lie on different planes of composition, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994) explain,

> The three planes, along with their elements, are irreducible: *plane of immanence of philosophy, plane of composition of art, plane of reference or coordination of science; form of concept, force of sensation, function of knowledge; concepts and conceptual person, sensations and aesthetic figures, figures and partial observers.* Analogous problems are posed for each plane: in what sense and how is the plane, in each case, one or multiple-what unity, what multiplicity? But what to us seem more important now are the problems of interference between the planes that join up in the brain (p.216).

These interferences in these different planes of composition can be productive and allow for more affects, percepts, and sensations to arise, but there are also interferences that are difficult to name, and they take up the space of the "no" on each plane of composition. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) acknowledged that art (as well as philosophy, science, and music) needs their negatives. This negative is not the opposite in terms of binary opposition or hierarchical categorization, but rather, it is necessary as part of an art's definition and understanding. For example, how would we know what art is if nonart did not exist? The same goes for music, as classifications between chaotic sounds and melody diverge. Deleuze and Guattari come to these resolutions at the very end of their book, *What is Philosophy?* (1994), because, while they have long been describing what all philosophy *can do,* in order to understand the possibilities of philosophy (or art), one

must also know its nonphilosophical limits. These limits are the negative, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994) note:

> Finally, there are interferences that cannot be localized. This is because each distinct discipline is, in its own way, in relation with a negative: even science has a relation with a nonscience that echoes its effects. It is not just a question of saying that art must form those of us who are not artists, that it must awaken us and teach us to fed, and that philosophy must teach us to conceive, or that science must teach us to know. Such pedagogics are only possible if each of the disciplines is, on its own behalf, in an essential relationship with the No that concerns it. The plane of philosophy is prephilosophical insofar as we consider it in itself independently of the concepts that come to occupy it, but nonphilosophy is found where the plane confronts chaos. *Philosophy needs a nonphilosophy that comprehends it; it needs a nonphilosophical comprehension just as art needs nonart and science needs nonscience?* They do not need the No as beginning, or as the end in which they would be called upon to disappear by being realized, but at every moment of their becoming or their development (pp. 217-218).

Thus, perhaps, Terry and his Memory Lane Museum is the non-art, the negative that allows art's domain to thrive. The museum is very unlike an art museum, with its casual, hodgepodge collection of objects without succinct ordering, classification, or preservation strategies. Memory Lane Museum is the anthesis of the "typical" elitist museum structure. There is no security, unless you count his dog. There is no staff, other than the owner himself. There are no records of cataloguing or information that can be easily gathered by walking around and reading plaques, because there are no plaques. The only way to get around and know about the museum is to

follow Terry while he explains whatever he feels like telling you about, or you have to specifically ask him about the object of your intrigue. These objects are rare in that they are old and uncommon to see these days, but they are not "art," created specifically for aesthetic purposes. The collection of Memory Lane Museum is a one of cultural, capitalist artifacts, collected over time by one man. These are not artifacts from my memory and my mind never "took a walk down memory lane" while viewing them. In fact, many of these objects I had never even heard of, rather, they are objects from Terry's memory, and perhaps a collective memory of his generation. Thus, perhaps what I have been unable to understand about Terry, and his place in my encountered rural relations, is the non-art, non-museum, negative, because as Deleuze and Guattari say in their conclusion to *What is Philosophy* (1994):

> It is here that concepts, sensations, and functions become undecidable, at the same time as philosophy, art, and science become indiscernible, as if they shared the same shadow that extends itself across their different nature and constantly accompanies them (p.218).

Encountered Relation: *These Aren't the Reviews You're Looking For.*

Reading online reviews has been one of the more entertaining parts of my research. It reminded me of the "Rant & Rave" section in my hometown newspaper, the Valdosta Daily Times*. The fact that my town has a daily column wherein townspeople share in their grievances and accolades for various things (heavy on the complaints), should tell you a lot about both my hometown and my town newspaper. Namely, the town loves to gossip and gripe, and typically there was not a lot of other newsworthy content happening to contribute to the newspaper. To further reiterate the last point, I once made the front page of the town paper during a weekend trip home, when I helped my dad cook for a charity event at the local YMCA. I was not actually involved with the charity in question, I was just trying to be a nice daughter. I helped my dad*

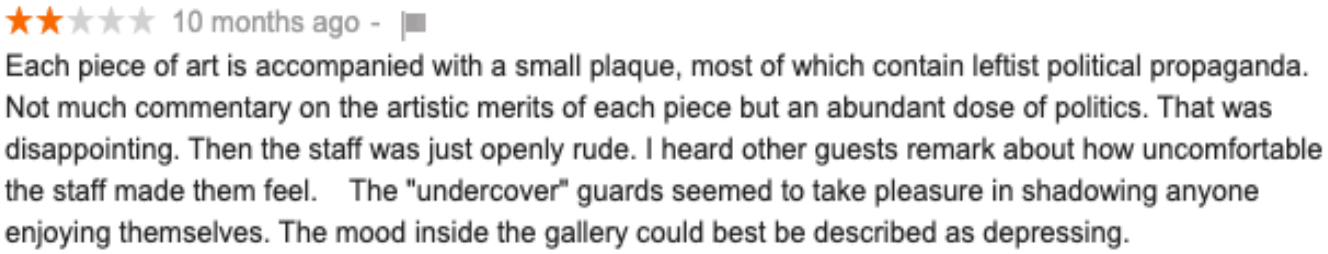
cook on a Friday, but the picture didn't make the newspaper until later the next week. Just a picture of me flipping burgers with a caption – my parents then proceeded to receive five cut-out copies of my picture mailed to them by other residents of the town. This was certainly not the first time I had been on the front page of my local paper, but I was 23 at the time and I had not lived in town for the past five years. I was no longer accustomed to having my picture plastered across a town's morning reading material at random, but some days are just slow news days. On those slow news days, a little bit of gossip, a few complaints, and nice pictures go a long way in terms of providing entertainment. Perhaps that's the source of my intrigue for reading other people's online reviews for various things…well that, and the fact that people are often much more honest with their opinions behind a veil of supposed anonymity, be it in the newspaper or on the internet.

In the age of the internet, it is not hard to figure out what a large number of opinionated people think about just about any business, Crystal Bridges, of course, is no exception. Gone are the days of sophisticated critics being the end-all be-all judge of what is good and bad, now every person with internet access is a critic. With companies like Yelp, Google, and Facebook, we no longer have to wait to see what professional critics and writers of local and national publications think of something; we can read and share opinions with the world in a matter of seconds. Reviews can mean life or death for many businesses, especially those in the service sector, but with so many competing views and opinions, it is hard to tell which online reviews should be taken seriously and which shouldn't. After all, with hundreds or thousands of reviews, do a handful of negative ones even matter? Are people (other than myself) actually reading them? Furthermore, who is writing these reviews, and why is it that people are so inspired by their experience at a place that they feel compelled to write a review? I have only ever written

internet reviews when incentivized by a coupon or gift card for later purchases. I also feel like reviews in general should be taken with a grain of salt because many people only seem to feel compelled to share their opinion of a place when they have an exceptionally bad experience (whatever that may mean to them). My sister is one of these people. I have never known her to want to randomly post a pleasant review of a business, but yet, I can think of a handful of occasions where she has left negative reviews, and even tried to convince me to write a negative review, despite my never having even been to said business (I declined).

Figure 27:

Google Review



Assuming that people are like my sister, it would seem then that there should be more negative reviews than positive, and yet for many places, like Crystal Bridges, the reviews are overwhelmingly positive. Crystal Bridges has 4.8/5 on both Facebook and Google reviews, and a 5/5 on trip advisor, very respectable ratings for any business or museum. The reviews are clearly overwhelmingly positive, but an interesting trend I noticed in many of the 4- and 5-star reviews that I did not see in the 1-star reviews is that 5-star reviewers often included a very short amount of text with several pictures of the artwork of in the museum or on its trails. The 1- and 2-star reviews on the other hand, ranged from short sentences to full multi-paragraph sagas, but the most interesting 1-star reviews have to be from the people who, in their 1-star review, admit that they haven't been to the museum. I have seen multiple examples of this. Why write a 1-star

review for a place that you haven't been to? And if you were to write a 1-star review for a place you haven't been, why not lie about why you gave the 1-star? Does the 1-star review reflect their inability to read proper business hours and thus they haven't been to the museum because they came outside of those hours? Do they just hate Walmart? Or Alice Walton? Or maybe they're just bitter and want to watch the world burn. I will never know. What I do know, on the other hand, is why people who actually have been to Crystal Bridges gave the museum a 1- or 2-star review, and it seemed to mostly come down to two main thematic reasons: the museum's collection and curation is too political/liberal, and/or the visitors felt unwelcomed or harassed by the security, especially if they had children (who seem to be unable to follow rules). I can't say that I was surprised by the negative reviews regarding security and basic museum rules, like no food or drink in the gallery, or not touching the art, despite the lack of a glass barrier (yes, one reviewer complained of this), because every museum gets these kinds of reviews. Unfortunately, museums are often intimidating institutions with invisible rules for how to conduct oneself and that alone can be a daunting barrier for many people, and as necessary as security is to a museum, it does often provoke some inevitable disagreements with visitors. Also, security and front-facing staff are subject to individual scrutiny via their visitor interactions, and this added scrutiny then reflects on the whole establishment. Thus, if a single employee has what is deemed to be an unpleasant demeanor by a visitor/reviewer, it could result in a 1-star review based on that one interaction alone. This is not to say that this is not significant, because staff should be trained to be cordial to visitors, but at the same time, if an employee is having a bad day, or their tone is misperceived, a minute-long interaction can live forever on the internet and tarnish a business' reputation. So, because negative security-related reviews are common at all

art museums and they often reference an interaction with a single employee, I do not really consider these reviews to be the most informative or significant.

I will focus more on the other thematic reason: the seemingly liberal and at times political works in the museum's collection and curatorial decisions. As is evident in the name of the museum, Crystal Bridges displays American art, both past and present, but the older American history paintings and other works are contextualized with plaques on the wall, to offer a more holistic view of what was happening in the world at the time of the work's conception. This, however, is where it seems that several visitors have found fault, because unlike the whitewashed history books of our collective past, the wall-texts do not romanticize the horrors of colonizers. There are numerous mentions of the museum "rewriting history" and pushing "political propaganda", but I fail to see how a museum could possibly have a collection at all if they removed each and every piece that could in some way be construed as political, especially if that museum collects contemporary art. The wall texts that have been labeled "propaganda" by unhappy reviewers provide adequate historical context and contemporary recontextualization of the events shown. An example of this is the painting of George Washington by Charles Wilson Peale, held by the museum in their collection, which bears wall text in which the curators acknowledge an American history that existed before colonization. Now, personally I do not even see anything that overtly political, but if theses disgruntled visitors are annoyed by the wall text of a historical work in Crystal Bridges collection, it would be this one, or something similar wherein the museum has acknowledged the truthful, albeit less Disney-friendly, Native American tribulations. If it is not the historical works, but rather the contemporary ones that these visitors have taken issue with, then they can't really claim that these works of art and their accompanying wall text are "re-writing" history, because the artist is living in contemporary

times, commenting on historical events, through a contemporary lens. One reviewer included a picture of both Titus Kaphar's 2017 work The Cost of Removal *and Nari Ward's 2015 piece* We the People*, both of which comment on American history, but to say that either piece "rewrites" history would be a stretch.*

Figure 28:

Painting of George Washington by CW Peale and subsequent wall text from Crystal Bridges

George Washington
Charles Willson Peale
ca.1780-1782

Charles Willson Peale portrayed George Washington as a relaxed, yet powerful military leader wearing the blue sash of commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. For many Americans, Washington symbolizes the early history of the United States. However, North America had a long history prior to colonization. Indigenous peoples were here centuries before President Washington took office. "America" is the product of a complex history of multicultural exchange, reflecting many perspectives, stories, and experiences, which cannot be embodied in a single painting or perspective.

Figure 29:

Google Review

★☆☆☆☆ 2 years ago

This place used to have art with unaltered history until they and ruined everything. Throwing out art, rewriting the biographies about certain historical figures, adding political propaganda to art for no reasons necessary! I used to love this place but now it is a political brainwashing center with the name "History".

There is no need to rewrite what has been done, instead people should learn from it.

Figure 30:

Titus Kaphar's The Cost of Removal and subsequent wall text from Crystal Bridges

The Cost of Removal
Titus Kaphar
2019

Titus Kaphar investigates historical subjects and national monuments through the lens of current events to call attention to who and how we choose to memorialize or forget.
In The Cost of Removal, Kaphar draws upon Ralph Earl's 1833 painting Andrew Jackson on Sam Patch to highlight issues of forced migration and our nation's current political climate. In Kaphar's work, Jackson's body is obscured from the nose down by torn strips of canvas with Jackson's own writings weighing the costs of removing Native Americans from their lands. While president, Jackson signed the document that led to the Trail of Tears, the forced migration of Southeastern tribes to lands west of the Mississippi River, which resulted in the death of thousands. The nails reference African fetish objects in which the number of nails indicate the number of people who put their faith in that particular object.

Figure 31:

Nari Ward's We the People and subsequent wall text from Crystal Bridges

Nari Ward
We the People
2015

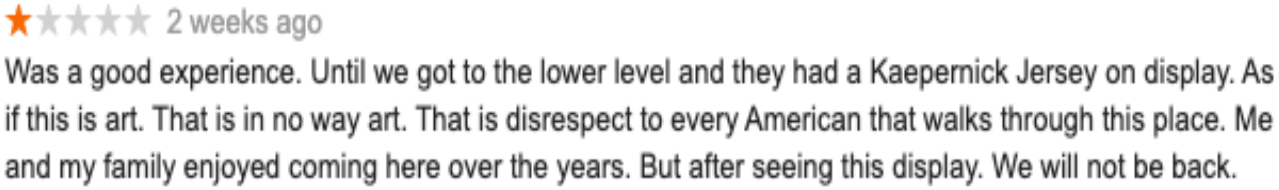
Nari Ward is known for his sculptures made from found materials discovered in and around New York City. The hanging multicolored shoelaces nearly obscure the words, "We the People," encouraging viewers to stop, study, and decipher the text. Ward asks us to reconsider the phrase. Has its meaning changed? Who are "the people"? How do these words apply to our society today?

In Kaphar's work there is not a rewriting of history happening, but rather a reillumination of historical events that does not heroize the actions of former president Jackson, who did sign the document that led to the Trail of Tears and the deaths of thousands of Native Americans. Likewise, in Ward's piece she is simply asking the viewer to think deeper about the diverse people who make up the American populace, but neither the wall text nor the piece alone seem to be the "leftist propaganda" that the critical reviews have made these works out to be. These works, however, might be a little less polarizing than the Colin Kaepernick jersey, which

is on display, which one reviewer apparently found very offensive…apparently enough to never return…gasp!

Figure 32:

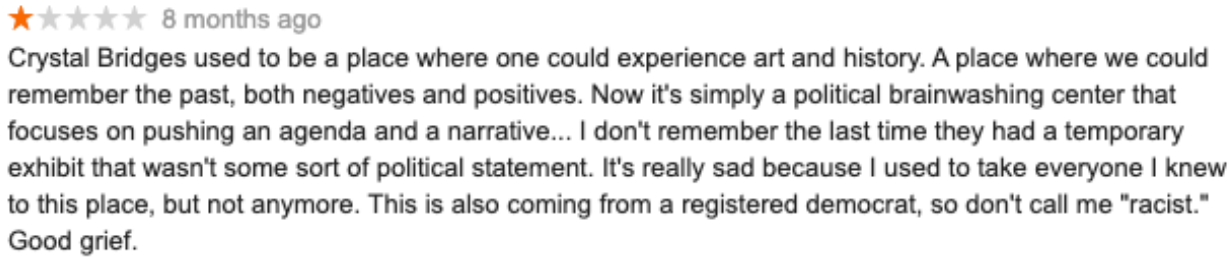
Google Review



These complaints of "political brainwashing" did not often come with examples of the specific works in question that the reviewer found fault with but given the often politically progressive themes in contemporary art, I can only assume that these are the works that draw the most disgust. As one reviewer mentions, their traveling exhibitions do often have a "political" or "social" narrative, like the recent Hank Willis Thomas: All Things Being Equal… *exhibit, but what surprised me about this review is that while complaining of the political agenda of Crystal Bridges, they also felt compelled to include their registration as a Democrat, so they wouldn't be construed as "racist," as if those things cannot coexist in the same person.*

Figure 33:

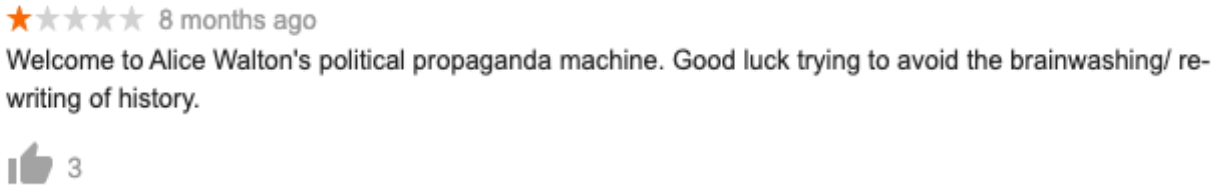
Google Review



Also based on the timing of the review, it is very likely that they were specifically talking about the recent Hank Willis Thomas exhibit, which showcases the Black experience. This does make it a little more suspect that they felt so compelled to write a negative review, but yet still think they hold the moral high ground as a "non-racist democrat" with very clear implicit biases? This quandary is honestly more to unpack than I have time for here, but this reviewer's main point--that art should not make political statements--is unrealistic because the making and displaying of art has always had political and social underpinnings, whether people have realized it or not. The history of the United States is not being rewritten by these artworks, rather, diverse narratives are finally being shared that have been hidden under the veil of white supremacy for the last two centuries. Ultimately, you can't please everyone, not even if you have Walmart heiress money, so does it really matter if these people think the collection and curation decisions are too political? In the grand scheme of things, not really. The museum will continue to pull in visitors from all over the country (and the world) and with these visitors will come more reviews, in a never-ending cycle. Most will be good, a few will be bad, but at the end of the day, you can't expect to please everyone, especially when visitors are stuck longing for time and "culture" of the past.

Figure 34:

Google Review



Discussion of Encounter

My first visit to Crystal Bridges was the Sunday before my internship started. I had read a lot about Crystal Bridges and seen many pictures but seeing it in person was truly a different experience. I was taken aback by how progressive and inclusive attitude shown by the museum's curation decisions. Throughout all the older America galleries, the wall text is all translated into English and Spanish, and I also learned that they are working on adding these translations to all wall texts for in their permanent collection. Tucked in the corner of the various galleries are tables with pencils and paper for children, along with prompts about the work in the room, as well as tactile interactives along the walls for children and visitors to engage with. I remember enjoying the fact that the wall texts did not engage with a reductionist view of history. I also remember being taken aback by how politically liberal the contemporary art collection was. It was at this moment that I realized I had to read the online reviews for Crystal Bridges, because I also knew that all of these things that I relished about my first experience would be repulsive to some of the more conservative thinkers I know.

Even without the museum's reviews, I suspected that there would likely be tension between the largely conservative population of Northwest Arkansas and the seemingly liberal collection, curation, and programming at Crystal Bridges. At the time of my research, the United States was a year and a half away from the 2020 presidential election, but as anyone who has driven down rural southern roads knows, Trump signs and flags were on frequent display throughout the entirety of his term, not just election season, As I drove around these rural towns, I did not have to wonder along what party lines many people voted because their proud display of Trump memorabilia was everywhere, from the side of the road to the backs of trucks, plastered on the infamous red hats and across t-shirts. Now with these supporters comes the

assumption of a shared belief system (at least to some extent), and last I checked this belief system does not support the most "inclusive" agenda to say the very least.

I arrived in Arkansas in June of 2019, which coincidentally is also gay pride month, and Crystal Bridges had several events planned to celebrate and commemorate the occasion. I even had the opportunity to walk in Fayetteville's Gay Pride parade alongside the museum's staff and other interns, with banners and handouts baring the museum's name and encouraging love and acceptance. The museum has several openly gay employees on staff and overall, they seem to encourage a very inclusive environment for LGBTQ+, staff, visitors, and this is reflected in their collection. In a recent exhibition at Crystal Bridges, "Men of Steel, Woman of Wonder", they displayed a work by Rich Simmons showing Superman and Batman in a passionate kissing embrace, a sight I can only imagine offended some men who suffer the aftermath of toxic masculinity (looking at you, Huntsville farmer's market man).

What I saw as I read the reviews, explored the museum, and traveled throughout rural Northwest Arkansas was an example of opposing Deleuzoguattarian micropolitics and macro-politics in tension: "micropolitics and a macro-politics that do not envision classes, sexes, people, or feelings in at all the same way" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 196). Also referred to as an "arborescent model of thought" (Massumi, 1987, p.xxi), macro-politics "designates structures and principles that are based on rigid stratifications or codings which leave no room for all that is flexible and contingent (Surin, 2010, p. 164). Micropolitics, on the other hand, allows for local, molecular connections to be made, it is not hindered by rigid structures. This is not a "micro"-politic because it is smaller in size or scale, "but by the nature of the system of reference envisioned" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 217). In this scenario, the Crystal Bridges Museum, with its progressive curation decisions and "politically charged" collection of contemporary art,

emerges as micropolitical, because the artworks in the museum and the curation decisions made are asking that the visitors *think otherwise.*

Visitors expressed sentiments that they would prefer the museum to remain apolitical, to continue perpetuating myths like manifest destiny and white supremacy. What these visitors seem to not understand is that "everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics"* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 213). Thus, by wanting a museum like Crystal Bridges to maintain the status quo of America's revisionist history through their curation decisions and collections, these visitors are what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) would call "near-seers" (p. 200), and Crystal Bridges, with its collection and curation, would be "far-seers" (p. 200). The near-seers have a "simple spyglass" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 199), meaning they can see only the oppositional binaries that uphold hierarchies in our society, but they are blind to the undercurrents, the assemblages, the multiplicities that make up the objects of their categorization. The far-seers, however, see

> a whole microsegmentarity, details of details, 'a roller coaster of possibilities,' tiny movements that have not reached the edge, lines or vibrations that start to form long before there are outlined shapes, 'segments that move by jerks.' A whole rhizome, a molecular segmentarity that does not permit itself to be overcoded by a signifier like the cutting machine, or even to be attributed to a given figure, a given aggregate or element (p. 201).

Thus, it is the near-seers of macropolitics that seek to uphold the arborescent, Kantian mode of thought, while the far-seers of micropolitics see the smallest, nonhierarchical, connectives of the rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) see these near and far seers as being on two separate planes of consistency, and their "lines of flight" do not intersect:

> One sees, speaks and thinks on a given scale, and according to a given line that may or may not conjugate with the other's line, even if the other is still oneself. If it does not, then you should not insist, you should not argue; you should flee, flee, even saying as you go, "Okay, okay, you win." It's no use talking; you first have to change telescopes, mouths, and teeth, all of the segments. Not only does one speak literally, one also lives literally, in other words, following lines, whether connectable or not, even heterogeneous ones. Sometimes it doesn't work when they are homogeneous. (p. 201)

Given this segment, it would seem that there is nothing that the museum can or should do to disperse this tension between the macro- and micropolitics of near- and far-seers, because the two do not even exist within the same plane of thought. The far-seer uses a telescope, while the near-seer uses a spy glass to look at the world. Their views are entirely different given the lens through which they see. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) go on to describe how the far-seers

> feel as though they foresee things and are ahead of the others because they see the smallest thing as already having happened; but they know that their warnings are to no avail because the cutting telescope will set everything straight without being warned, without the need for or possibility of prediction. At times they feel that they do indeed see something the others do not, but at other times that what they see differs only in degree and serves no purpose. Although they are collaborators with the most rigid and cruelest project of control, how could they not feel a vague sympathy for the subterranean activity revealed to them? An ambiguity in the molecular line, *as if it vacillated between two sides.* One day (what will have happened?), a far-seer will abandon his or her segment and start walking across a narrow overpass above the dark abyss, will break his

> or her telescope and depart on a line of flight to meet a blind Double approaching from the other side. (p. 202)

These far-seers are aware of the pain and suffering in the world, aware of the overlooked details of life's relations, but the far-seer cannot actually affect change because they too are within the apparatus of the State and will one day return to this macropolitical apparatus.

So, what does all of this mean? Crystal Bridges is and will always be an institution, which is inherently an apparatus of the State, and therein also macropolitical, but the art inside this institution, and the decisions of curators at Crystal Bridges, are capable of a micropolitics. The art and the curation can observe and point out difference and detail that others cannot, but this does not separate the institution of the museum from its larger state apparatus, which cannot help delineate and divide "data" for its supposed gain. Even still, Crystal Bridges has the opportunity to create *difference* through its micropolitical power, because:

> The power of the minorities is not measured by their capacity to enter and make themselves felt within the majority system, nor even to reverse the necessarily tautological criterion of the majority, but to bring to bear the force of the non-denumerable sets, however small they may be, against the denumerable sets, even if they are infinite, reversed, or changed, even they if imply new axioms or, beyond that, a new axiomatic. The issue is not at all anarchy versus organization, nor even centralism versus decentralization, but a calculus or conception of the problems of nondenumerable sets, against the axiomatic of denumerable sets. Such a calculus may have its own compositions, organizations, even centralizations; nevertheless, it proceeds not via the States or the axiomatic process but via a pure becoming of minorities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 471).

Thus, it is the responsibility of the curators, educators, and other staff at the museum to ensure that Crystal Bridges continue on this path of micropolitical becoming, because it is the diverse minority that has the power to create real change.

Encountered (Rural) Relation – *OKKK, I'll be Leaving Now*

As I drove to Harrison, Arkansas, I began to notice some Confederate flags, both the famous battle flag featuring the blue X with stars in the middle on a red background, which has become synonymous with hate groups such as the KKK, and the Flag of the Confederate States of America, which looks a little more like the traditional American flag, but only has 3 stripes and 13 stars in the left-hand corner. I noticed the flags hanging outside of residences, on the back-window tint of a truck, and even in the town square (although this was the Flag of the Confederate States of America, which people seem to find less offensive for some reason). In the town square, next to the Flag of the Confederate States of America, also stands a Confederate monument. This did not come as a huge surprise considering that in the seemingly more-liberal town of Bentonville, a Confederate monument still stands in its downtown square, but it was still a "red" flag (pun intended). I drove by aghast at the blatant display of Confederate symbolism, but it was not until I drove by a sign outside of a home that said "We Don't Call 911" flanked by guns on either side that things really started to click. And by "click" I mean, I called by boyfriend and asked him what it would mean if someone had that sign and he told me that the people would likely shoot first and ask questions later. So, with that I decided to find a (very public) place to park my car, which ended up being a gas station, so that I could do a little research on my phone into what is going on in Harrison, Arkansas. What I quickly learned was, not only is Harrison affiliated with the KKK, but it is current headquarters for the Knights of the Klu Klux Klan, a group claiming to be the largest KKK organization in the country. Yikes. In my entire 28 years of life, 27 of which have been spent in the state of Georgia, I had never encountered this level of racist extremism (although

*I do actively avoid certain places for this reason *cough* Stone Mountain *cough*). I was scared. I had to get out, fast.*

Discussion of Encounter

If you're thinking, "hey, didn't you say you would do more research about each place you were planning on traveling to after the Bella Vista debacle?," you would be correct. I clearly failed here to adequately prepare myself for what I would encounter in Harrison, Arkansas. Although, in my defense, "home to the headquarters of a nationally recognized hate group" is not something that is generally advertised on a town's website. In fact, the town is actively trying to dispel the bad press brought on by the group's current leader, Thomas Robb's, affiliation with the town. On the town website they do have a section dedicated to "Diversity and Race Relations" where they acknowledge this issue by saying,

> In our nation, it's hard to find any community without bigots and racists. We sure don't claim to be so fortunate or so virtuous. Our problem is that our town struggles with a wide-spread and long-lasting perception that we are *dominated* by bigotry and racism. The roots of that perception lie in our history and in unfortunate current associations. We can't avoid it. We can't pretend there's nothing to it or that it doesn't matter. History and circumstance have forced us to face up to it. Many decent people of this town have placidly accepted this handicap for many years, believing the image would fade in time as the racial divide in the United States healed. Instead, the impact of the internet and social media has magnified the negative message spread by small groups on our fringes (City of Harrison, n.d.).

This section of the website goes on to urge people not to see Harrison as the sum of its worst parts and discusses a Community Task Force on Race Relations, set up in 2003 "to promote and foster the image and reality of Harrison as a community where all people are treated with

warmth, dignity, and respect" (City of Harrison, n.d.). So, in part, I feel bad for those members of the community who share my sentiments of disgust toward this horrific group, but I cannot leave this detail out of my writing because this encounter, regardless of how brief it was, impacted the way that I understood this town. Sometimes the bad outweighs the good and it is not that those who are trying to do good are not succeeding, but that their voices are not loud enough, their actions are not bold enough, and their support is not strong enough. Unfortunately for the people of this Community Task Force on Race Relations, their job has become more difficult in the last four years as the bigoted views of groups like the KKK have become emboldened by the rhetoric of politicians and media outlets. It's difficult to claim that these white supremist views are the only ones to blame for the results of the 2016 election, but the rural vote was a major factor in the election being won by Donald Trump. As Wuthnow (2018) explained,

> The 2016 presidential campaign raised but left unanswered the question of whether anger was festering among people who feel left out and left behind to the point that bigotry against immigrants, Muslims, African Americans, and even women played a role in the election. The best evidence suggests that it did not, at least not on a large scale, but there seemed to be plenty of people who, given the chance, were eager to seize the opportunity to proclaim their concern that 'whiteness' was under attack (p. 142).

What Donald Trump was able to do was to incite fear into the hearts and minds of many Americans, by telling them that their jobs, families, and beliefs were in danger, but this is certainly not a new tactic in politics. Fear has the power to be both effective and affective. The effectiveness of fear is easy to understand, provoking fear can garner a desired result for those doing the inciting. For instance, to instill a fear of illegal immigrants, they have been painted as

"rapists", "drug dealers", and all around "bad hombres," and this fear-mongering tactic allowed for millions of taxpayer dollars to be spent on border wall construction and unnecessary immigration reform. Regardless of the truth behind these fears, they remain fears that many rural Americans hold.

The affective quality of fear is a little trickier to explain, because I do not refer to affects in the emotional use of the term. Massumi (2002) best explains this difference between emotion and affect in the excerpt below:

> Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that affect has waned, it is because affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable and is thus resistant to critique (p. 28).

Hence, affect cannot be considered the same as emotion because it cannot be quantified by degree or intensity and unlike emotion, which can be owned by a person and fluctuate based on feelings, affect is unrecognizable because affect is non-human and nonconscious. The fear-affect that (especially right wing) politicians utilize,

> produces fearful subjects in relation to fearsome others and secures the very boundaries between us and them. Fear creates boundaries between 'what I am' and 'that which I am not', through the very affect of *turning away* from an object that threatens 'that which I am' (Zembylas, 2009, p. 189).

This is a productive, bodily fear, not a reactive, emotional, individual fear. In the case of the 2016 election and the politics of fear that have surrounded Donald Trump's presidency, affective

attunement (Stern, 1985) has played a big role in his success. As Massumi (2015) informs us, "Politics, approached affectively, is an art of emitting the interruptive signs, triggering the cues, that attune bodies while activating their capacities differentially" (p. 56). Thus, although Trump has never explicitly supported white supremacist values, his affective actions allow his followers to stay attuned to his underlying message. If we look at Stern's (1985) analogy for affective attunement of a mother and a baby, the baby's behavior is the affective, nonverbal tool that the mother uses to be able to tend to the baby's needs; here, Trump's nonverbal communication, his underlying messages spread through fear and othering, have emboldened radical groups to speak and act on his behalf. But it is not just politicians, like Trump, who are responsible for this affective fear mongering, but also the media:

> The media affect—fear-blur—is the direct *collective* perception of the contemporary condition of possibility of being human: the capitalized accident-form. It is the direct collective apprehension of capitalism's powers of existence. It is vague by nature. It is nothing as sharp as panic. Not as localized as hysteria. It doesn't have a particular object, so it's not a phobia. But it's not exactly an anxiety either; it is even fuzzier than that. It is *low-level fear.* A kind of background radiation saturating existence (commodity consummation/consumption) (Massumi, 1993, p. 24).

The news is often filled with more bad news than good, sensational stories of the worst kind, stirring fear and speculation the more it is projected. However, this inciting of fear is not limited to the right-wing based media, but also engaged in by leftist and centrist news channels and sites. Viewers of leftist news have grown fearful of the right wing, just as the right wing as grown fearful of the left.

This now brings me back to Harrison, Arkansas. I was afraid in Harrison. I was afraid because I am of Jewish decent and because I am a liberal democrat, but mostly, I was afraid because I see/saw those people as different from me. This was an affective fear. This fear caused me to abandon my position as researcher, but perhaps those whom I was fearful of would have had a similar affective reaction to me. To them I am different, I threaten their "ideals", their Second Amendment right, and their religious values, but whereas my affective reaction was to run, I cannot say for certain that I would be as safe if I allowed myself to learn what their reaction would be (especially given the signs). This fear of "other" is also what is likely at the root of the divide between the Crystal Bridges museum and its rural external(ity). This affective fear produces a rupture in understanding between contrasting ontological planes, where each side seems closed off from the other, unable to communicate clearly because the languages are emerging differently. This is the battle that exists between the bigots that retreated into the rural foothills to espouse their macropolitical repetitions of white supremacy, and the enlightened, educated, micropolitical beings who are trying to cultivate a new *becoming* rooted in *difference*. The only regret I have of my brief time in Harrison is that I did not take any pictures to document what I saw, because I can assure you, I will not be going back anytime soon.

Concluding Relations

In all of these encounters that I have laid out, the only consistency was my consistent bewilderment in what was happening and confusion about what I "should" do next. These retellings of encounters are glimpses of "thought in the act" (Manning & Massumi, 2014) that are then discussed by way of "thinking with theory" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011). Thinking back and re-reading my journal entries and encountered relations, I feel as though I am watching a movie, a type of out-of-body experience of recollection. Perhaps this is because I am writing this conclusion 18 months after having experienced these encounters, but I cannot help but become

struck by the idea that all of these ideas, encounters, and retellings are contingent on my lived experience and retelling, and how this research could and would be much different in another time and space, or if it were perused by another researcher. These encounters are only mere glimpses into what it means to experience the rurality of Northwest Arkansas, and they in no way can be assumed to be consistent experiences with replicable results. So, what can be gathered from this hodgepodge of encountered relations? Well, the point lies in the "hodgepodge" quality both of the encounters retold here, but also, the hodgepodge of external relations that exists in each rural community. These external relations give each community its unique, nonreplicable "identity" – which is why each encountered relation was theorized separately, in accordance with that experience only. It is impossible to set up analogous comparisons between each of these communities, because they have internal differences, *difference in itself,* that defies this binary opposition. Each of these encounters forced me to see the rural in a new relation that I was unable to recognize from my past experiences in the rural. Even when I thought I faced recognition in Siloam Springs, I was presented with a failure of recognition, a insatiable *déjà vu*. Just as the body has come into being under a specific set of conditions (Manning, 2013), so too did these rural communities and my experience in them. These rural communities are ever-folding multiplicities that are in a constant state of becoming, a becoming that is dependent of a multitude of relations, ever changing, and growing. In order to understand the *more-than-rural,* I attended to the multiplicity that existed in each of these communities, not just the residents, the amenities, or culture that exists, but also, the non-human, "the phaseless excess" (Manning, 2013, p.16). I kept the field open for new possibilities and what emerged was a field of relational experience that has forever changed the way that I view rurality and all that comes with notions of rurality.

CHAPTER 7: This is Where it Ends for Now

A Post-Structural Conclusion

> **A cause may always be *thought,*** as something in itself, transcending all the analogies which provide it with a determined content, in the case of experience and knowledge. But the fact is that **philosophy, being a human science, need not search for the cause; it should rather scrutinize effects.** The cause cannot be *known;* principles have neither cause nor an origin of their power**. What is original is their effect upon the imagination**.
>
> The effect of association appears in three ways. Sometimes the idea takes on a role and becomes capable of representing all these ideas with which, through resemblance, it is associated (general idea); at other times, the union of ideas brought about *by* the mind acquires a regularity not previously had, in which case "nature in a manner point[s] out to every one those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united into a complex one" (Hume, 1896, p. 11), (substance and mode); **finally, sometimes, one idea can introduce another (relation). The result of the association in all three cases is the mind's easy passage from one idea to another, so that the essence of relations becomes precisely this easy transition.** (Deleuze, 1991, p. 25)

The goal of a post-structural, Deleuzian dissertation is not to give explicit answers to solvable problems, because the goal of philosophy is "not to *solve* problems, or to resolve questions, but to illuminate regions of thought through which problems-without-solutions can be intuited" (Manning, 2016, p. 10). This is a philosophical goal that Manning and Deleuze have drawn from Bergson (1946), who explained the connection of problems and solutions in his text *The Creative Mind*:

> But the truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of *finding* the problem and consequently of *positing* it, even more than of solving it. For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that I mean that its solution exists then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up: the only thing left to do is to *un*cover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing. (p. 57)

Thus, the philosophical goal of this study was not to find a solution to the lack of rural adult access to art museums, because the solution could be easily assumed to be a need for more art museums in rural communities. This mode of thought assumes that access is about proximity alone, the solution to which could be achieved easily, as Bergson (1946) writes,

> Do not expect this metaphysics simple conclusions or radical solutions. That would be tantamount to requiring that it be no more than a manipulation of concepts. That would also be leaving it in the region of the pure possible (p. 51).

What Bergson means by this is that if philosophical projects, like this dissertation, were to be reduced to a simple conclusion, it would only be achieved by misusing and misunderstanding concepts, like access, and assume their pure axiomatic definition. So, in this dissertation, I cannot put forward easily digestible answers, because "what emerges from study will never be an answer. What emerges will be patient experimentation. What emerges will be another mode of encounter, another problem, another opening onto the political as site as yet undefined." (Manning, 2016, p. 13).

In the sections that follow, I will return the original questions that I sought to address at the start of my research, but in returning to these questions, I am not seeking to give definitive answers. Instead, I will be discussing what has emerged as a result of this inquiry and provide insight as to how this research has shaped my understanding of the field of relations that exist between rural populations and art museums. I will end this chapter with implications for future research examining cross-sections of rural communities and art museums and propose new problems that arise as a result of this investigation.

What Relations Exist and are Generated at the Intersection of Rural Adult Populations and Art Museums?

In the previous two chapters I have described encounters with relations in a museum setting and in rural communities. In these encounters I noticed relations that created instances of *difference and becoming* as well as oppositions between *macro-*/*micro-politics*, and *majority/minority*. The field of external relations that comprises each rural community and every museum *differs* not just in kind and intensity, but *in-itself,* this *difference-in-itself* is an important point to bring up early on, because the discussion of what emerged in my encounters cannot be assumed to be productive of the same relations in other rural contexts. It is impossible to know what relations can be produced in advance of their actualization because, "the relation always presupposes a synthesis, and neither the idea nor the mind can account for it" (p. 100). Thus, the relations that already exist in rural communities and art museums are pre-individual and exist external to representations and associations. It is also important to mention that relations which have been generated within and outside of the context of both rural adult populations and art museums should also not be misconstrued to be a *cause* of their entangled relations, but rather the *effect.* This is to say that the relations that exist and are generated at the intersections of art museums and rural populations will always differ in their amalgamation, and the following discussion of relations pertains specifically to those relations that emerged out of my personal experiences in Northwest Arkansas.

Existent Relation: Major/Minor

Throughout my fieldwork, I noticed instances of varied relations between the *major* and the *minor*. These relations are "opposite," but also, fluid multiplicities, that make up part of a larger whole, not oppositions in the sense of a binary juxtaposition. It is important to know here, that when I speak of *major* and *minor*, as Deleuze and Guattari have defined them,

> They define minority in opposition to majority but insist that the difference between them is not quantitative since social minorities can be more numerous than the so-called majority. Both minority and majority involve the relationship of a group to the larger collectivity of which it is a part. Suppose there are only two groups and suppose that there is a standard or ideal type of member of the larger collectivity: the majority is defined as the group which most closely approximates the standard, while the minority is defined by the gap which separates its members from that standard (Patton, 2010, pp. 76-77).

Thus, the major and minor are not designated in terms of a numbered quantitative difference, but rather a difference in thought and being. I encountered the *minor* in the form of the *minor gesture* in my encounter with an artist at the Huntsville Farmers Market, but this was not the only place I noticed this *minor/major* opposition. This opposition can also be seen in an encounter at the Memory Lane Museum, where in this context, the Crystal Bridges Museum takes the place of the majority and the Memory Lane Museum that of the minority. This is not because Crystal Bridges has more money, works of art, or land, but rather because in this scenario, Crystal Bridges is the ideal/standard for a museum, and it is ultimately built around an institutional structure, while Memory Lane Museum serves as the antithesis of an "ideal museum." Memory Lane Museum calls into question all that is assumed to be "standard" in a museum. Both the Crystal Bridges and Memory Lane Museums are built upon private collections, but their conception and actualization produce oppositional relations of *major* and *minor*. These relations of *major* and *minor* are always intertwined, but neither can be known in advance: "the minor gesture emerges from within the field itself: it is a gesture that leads the field of experience to make felt the fissures and openings otherwise too imperceptible or backgrounded to ascertain" (Manning,

2016, p. 65). Thus, it is again no wonder why the *minor* gesture of my experience at Memory Lane Museum was so easily overlooked, and yet could not leave my mind. Manning (2016) goes on to describe the way research(-creation) can attempt to open up the field of perception to emergent minor gestures, writing:

> **Grand gestures carry with them a degree of the spectacular. They connect into concerns "of the day" in ways that further cement already existent stakes. They give us categories to separate out "good" work from "bad" work, the valuable from the overlookable. They connect to what is considered "current."** Both grand and minor gestures are active in and activated by the major languages that seek to frame them, such as the university and the contemporary art institution, and are often interwoven. Despite the ways the grand gesture overshadows the minor, minor gestures nonetheless course through all events. **It is therefore less a question of placing one gesture *against* the other than it is of exploring what kinds of conditions foster the capture of the minor by the major.** The focus here is not on how to "make" a minor gesture, or how to resist a grand gesture, but on how to develop techniques that allow the singularity of a gesture that opens the work to its workings to come to the fore, how to invent techniques that resist immediate capture by the major.
> **The minor gesture acts as intercessor to the major, for the major is never fully itself: it is continuously cut through by flows that expose it to its minoritarian tendencies** (p. 66).

Thus, as it relates to the fieldwork at hand, it is not that Crystal Bridges does not experience its own minoritarian cuts and becoming, but rather that in my experiences, it was Memory Lane Museum that opened up the field of relations that allowed me to *think-museums-otherwise*.

Existent Relation: Macro-/Micro-politics

Similarly, Deleuze identified *micropolitics* as the akin to the *minor*, and *macro-politics* as that which is related to the majority. Micropolitics is what exists in the minoritarian cuts in the majority/apparatus of the Crystal Bridges Museum. The micropolitics are the lines of flight that create cuts in the relational field of the museum-machine. These micropolitical relations arose out of the progressive curation decisions, and "politically charged" contemporary art pieces that challenge the macro-historical structures and notions of being. While the museum as an institution may function as part of the majority, it has its moments of minoritarian-becoming,

such as when choosing to display works by *minority* artists, addressing *minority* politics, and by offering programs geared toward a micropolitics.

During my fieldwork in Northwest Arkansas, I knew that I would encounter macro-political structures, these are, unfortunately, everywhere we turn, but encountering the micropolitical came to me in two contrasting relations. In the museum I encountered a liberal *micropolitics* of *difference*, which embraced LGBTQ+ staff, visitors, artists, and works of art; these micropolitics in the museum attempt to dismantle macro-political/majority notions of history by highlighting stories of minorities. By highlighting this *microhistory* in their collection of works curation decisions and wall texts, Crystal Bridges is not "rewriting history" as some visitor-critics have claimed, because "micropolitics is no less extensive or real than macro-politics" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 204). As visitors of Crystal Bridges are confronted with the micropolitical history on display, they are presented with a view that differs from those they are familiar with, because as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain, "In this sense, all history is really the history of perception, and what we make history with is the matter of a becoming, not the subject matter of a story" (p. 347). The macro-history of colonialism and white supremacy that certain visitor-critics were expecting to view at Crystal Bridges was instead transformed into an opportunity for an *encounter* with the microhistory of a minoritarian-*becoming,* but visitors were unable to resist the lure of the majority view, thus preventing them from experiencing an *encounter*. The visitors in this scenario were likely viewing the museum and its relations through a "simple spy-glass" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 200) which like the near-seers, does not let one see beyond oppositional binaries and known representations. The existing micropolitics of Crystal Bridges, therefore, generated relations of *becoming,* through their *minor gestures* that took the form of progressive micro-historical curation. Before I move on to discuss the

becoming-more-than relations that have been generated, I end with a quote by Surin (2010) that I believe perfectly sums up the potential of this micropolitics:

> **Micropolitics, therefore, creates an 'ethos of permanent becoming-revolutionary**', an ethos not constrained by a politics predicated on the now defunct forms of Soviet bureaucratic socialism and a liberal or social democracy. In this ethos, our criteria of belonging and affiliation will always be subject to a kind of chaotic motion, and **a new political knowledge is created which dissipates the enabling lie told us by those who now have political power**, with their love for nation-states, tribes, clans, political parties, churches, and perhaps everything done up to now in the name of community. At the same time, this ethos will create new collective solidarities not based on these old 'loves' (p.166).

Generated Relation: Becoming

As indicated above, a byproduct of these *minor* and *micropolitical* relations is a *becoming;* becoming-more-than; becoming-revolutionary; becoming-minoritarian; becoming-other; etc. This becoming is not to be thought of as progress or regress in the sense of movement or growth, it does not hold the goal of a final form that one will become, but rather this becoming is a constant movement, always caught in the middle, a line in-between relation. There is no end goal for this becoming, because "becoming is the movement by which the line frees itself from the point, and renders points indiscernible: the rhizome, the opposite of arborescence; break away from arborescence" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 294). Put more simply, "becoming is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 26). Becoming does not *produce* change, but rather is the *result* of change in events.

Crystal Bridges sprang up in the middle of a once rural community, and its establishment has further sprouted rhizomatic movements of becoming not only in the town of Bentonville, but also in surrounding rural communities and within their populations. It did this simply by bringing this world class art museum with its diverse collection of art to an unexpected rural location, one seemingly in the "middle of nowhere." The field of relations that comprises Crystal Bridges was

always already *becoming*. Similarly, the field of relations that makes up the rural communities surrounding the museum were *becoming-more-than* as a result of the introduction of Crystal Bridges into the field of relations, which produced revitalization and economic and population growth throughout the Northwest Arkansas area.

The external relations generated through Crystal Bridges' micropolitical curation decisions and the minoritarian works of art in their collection create the potential for a "*becoming-revolutionary"* (Surin, 2010, p. 166) as rural visitors experience the museum. With works of art like Titus Kaphar's *The Cost of Removal* (2019), Kerry James Marhsall's *Our Town* (1995), or Hank Willis Thomas's *Zero Hour* (2012), Crystal Bridges offers opportunities for encountering minoritarian-becoming that can build bridges to becoming-revolutionary, becoming-other, becoming-more-than, etc. If visitors are able to resist capture by the majority, deterritorialization will occur and they will experience an encounter, but if visitors are stuck in rapture with the majority and thus engage only in reterritorialization, they will miss the *becoming-event.* This is to say, that if visitors are closed off from challenging their inherited, majority, image of thought when encountering works of art that highlight micro-histories, they will fail to experience a *becoming,* because *becoming* is never possible in the *majority* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 106).

Generated Relation: Event (crisis)

"Unlimited becoming becomes the event itself" (Badiou, 2007, p. 33).

The *event* in art and art-making can happen at a multitude of different moments in the Aiôn-Chronos of its conception and coming to be. The making and creation of the art object can become the event, but this event-effect can also happen as a viewer participates or interacts with the work of art. A single work of art could embody both of these event relations, or perhaps even more, but every *event* with a work of art is separate and unrelated to those that happen

before or after. This is because every event is singular, meaning that every event is a culmination of unique occurrences of folding and unfolding that can only happen in that specific arrangement once. Thus, while it is possible that a work of art could spark hundreds (or more) *events*, no event will be a repeated relation because the relations that brought that event to actualization exist within a constantly changing multiplicity. An *event* with art can happen at any art museum, gallery, or anywhere art is displayed, but the *event* with art that Crystal Bridges is offering is not only an *encounter-event*, but also because of its positionality, a *crisis-event*.

I am drawing the *crisis-event* from the article "In the *Event* that Art and Teaching Encounter," wherein author Garoian (2014) uses the Deleuzian concepts of the event, becoming, body without organs, assemblage, and encounter, to examine pedagogical practices of teaching art in a world of politicized and problematized educational structures. Rather than leaving the educational system, which has become fragmented by programs like "No Child Left Behind," school choice, and charter schools, Garoian (2014) calls for teachers to stay in their classrooms and attempt to counter-actualize the event of students learning, away from the standardized, pre-existing structures of assessment. Here, Garoian (2014) is drawing from the *event of crisis*; rather than succumbing to normative standards of education, teachers should embrace the crisis events as "intensities that unsettle normative understandings and representations" (p. 389). Thus, the *event* here that Garoian (2014) talks about is an event that unsettles normalcy, as he says: "Art is not truly art unless a crisis occurs that unsettles the normalcy of representation" (p. 392).

It is this same *crisis-event* that I realized had been generated as a result of the intertangled relations of Crystal Bridges and its surrounding rural populations. Crystal Bridges is not yielding to the macro-politics of the majority by adjusting their curation and collections to appease the conservative online critics. Crystal Bridges's collection, programming, and curation do not shy

away from challenging social, cultural, or political norms, and they offer and highlight microhistories of minorities. Crystal Bridges has produced the event of crisis from its very conception, provoking crisis in the art world as cries rang out against the sequestering of "masterpieces" of American art to the "desolate" Ozark mountains, crisis as it openly touted a collection of works by "minority" artists, crisis as it displayed a micropolitical history, and crisis as it continued to challenge expected representations.

> ***"art is not truly art*** **unless a crisis occurs that unsettles the normalcy of representation"** (Garoian, 2014, p. 392)

Garoian (2014) calls on teachers to embrace their becoming-teacher, becoming-artist, becoming-other, that has led them to this crisis event and "exist not as a subject, but as a work of art" (Deleuze, 1972/1995, p. 5). He urges teachers, and especially art teachers, to embrace the event of crisis, not as an unwelcomed, unanticipated event of disruption, but rather an embraced event where true teaching-learning can occur. By embracing their roles as becoming-teacher and becoming-artist, "the immanent learning and becoming-other through exploration, experimentation, and improvisation during crisis moments…transforms the classroom and studio into a dynamic, generative space…that enables thinking and seeing differently than what is academically determined" (Garoian, 2014, p. 394). So too, Crystal Bridges and its staff must continue to embrace their *becoming-museum, becoming-curator, becoming-educator, becoming-minor, etc.,* because when they continue to challenge normative ways of being, they can transform the museum into a space that produces new thought and produces unlimited becoming. This *crisis-event* lies at the seeming divide between the conservative macropolitical, white supremacist image of thought and the liberal/progressive, micropolitical minority, but through the *crisis-event*, Crystal Bridges can cause ruptures to the dogmatic mindset of the majority.

What are the Complexities Surrounding the Notion of Accessibility as it Relates to Art Museums and Rural Adult Populations?

> **"It's not about accommodation. It's about treating everyone inside the room as whole people, with the dignity we all deserve"** (Simon, 2016, part 2.5).

Throughout this research I have come to see access very differently than I had anticipated. I have come to realize that as it relates to rural populations, the accessibility of art museums is often reduced to an issue of proximity alone. This leaves people to assume that access can be achieved simply by a museum existing in a close proximity to rural communities. A bonus access point might be when representatives from museums attend/set up tables at town fairs or other community events, posing as "outreach," while waiting for community members to come up to the table/booth and engage. The problem with this view of access is *proximity is not access*. Having proximity to the museum is one thing, but that does not automatically mean access is achieved.

When thinking about relations being external to their terms, this means that things/objects/people exist not as relations, but as an effect of relations. The people in various rural areas that I visited either chose to visit or not visit the museum because of their own personal wants/interests, generated through external relations. If a person in a rural area is now visiting the museum more, that is likely because of their already established interest in visiting art museums, but the close proximity makes it possible to explore this interest. On the other hand, for people who are not interested in visiting art museums and would likely not visit an art museum on a vacation, they are less likely to visit the art museum regardless of proximity, because they simply do not have an inherent interest in visiting an art museum. These people would need some other type of incentive or influence to seek out visiting an art museum, such as their children, loved ones, friends, etc. Such individuals may provide an incentive or interest in

the art museum and prompt an otherwise disinterested person to come along, but they are not the deciding factor. The relations in this sense are constant, people are who they are because of the relations through which they have emerged as persons. To reach people who might for some reason not have an interest in a museum because it is something out of their comfort zone, perhaps the museum should approach them in some way, and strive to create an environment in which they feel comfortable in their own community. This might allow for them to build new relations and have new experiences.

Access and comfort go hand in hand, but most often the comfort-factor of access is centered around ensuring equitable access for people of varying abilities and disabilities, but this ignores the fact that museums already have an elitist appearance that can cause discomfort along socioeconomic/class divides (Jung, 2014a). Furthermore, given that Crystal Bridges was literally started by a well-known billionaire heiress (who does not even actually *live* in Bentonville full time) with her own private collection of top-dollar masterpieces, the museum is perceived as inherently elitist. The physical structures of Crystal Bridges and its campus are massive, architecturally interesting, and difficult to navigate both inside and out. This intimidating structure is further amplified by overly intrusive security guards and gallery guides that make visitors feel as though they are being watched or followed at all times. The fact is, with its many seemingly invisible rules, museums can be minefields of potential uncomfortable interaction for novice, rural, art museum visitors.

In order to *actually achieve access*, there should be more focus paid to *understanding deeply* the communities that museums like Crystal Bridges are surrounded by. A deep understanding of rural communities is not going to happen while waiting on people to come up to a little table/booth a seasonal fair or one-time event. A deep understanding of rural

communities and their populations is only achieved by intention and reciprocity. By intention I mean, the intention the museum carries going into rural communities. This intention cannot be grounded in emancipation but must be attuned to the *becoming-rural.* This is to say, if urban is the majority, the staff and curators must learn to deterritorialize-urban and think rural differently than an urban-centered lexicon demands. This brings me back to my second chapter, wherein I defined, or perhaps, *undefined*, rural. If one's understanding of rural is centered around urban classifiers, then rural has not really been understood. Just as post-structuralism and post qualitative inquiry ask one to decenter the human in research and in understanding the world, so too should one decenter urban from one's understanding of rural. Once museum staff are able to deterritorialize-urban they will begin to see each rural community and its residents as the unique relational assemblages that they are. They will begin to see each rural community for its *difference-in-itself,* only then, will *becoming-rural* be achieved.

What Potential Relevance Do Art Museums Hold for Rural Adult Populations?

Art museums hold potential relevance for any audience if the visitors are welcoming of an *encounter*, but for rural adult populations specifically, finding this relevance can be a bit harder. As with any population of people used to being forgotten, rural adults are wary of outsiders bringing change. This hesitancy to participate on the part of rural adult populations is furthered by the intimidating perception of art museums as pandering to college-educated elites. According to the Walton Family Foundation website, "Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art was founded on the belief art should be for everyone." This is a view that I share with the museum, but I will also acknowledge that while art *should* be for everyone, *all* art *is not* for everyone. Navigating varied interests and tastes, combined with competing macro/micro-political views, presents challenges in reaching all populations of potential visitors. With their politically charged, contemporary works of art, acceptance of diverse minority populations, and

progressive curation decisions, Crystal Bridges is undoubtedly challenging to many rural adults in the Northwest Arkansas area. This is not to say that Crystal Bridges should reterritorialize their collection, curation, and programming toward the majority, but to acknowledge that Crystal Bridges (and many other museums) cannot easily and readily appease all visitor audiences. This quandary brings me back to the Deleuzoguattarian (1994) idea of a *nonart* (*nonphilosophy*; *nonscience*; *non-museum*), which is ultimately still an essential component of the ability to comprehend art (philosophy; science; museum). Just as *art* depends on *nonart* for its *becoming*, so too does the *museum* need the *non-museum* for its becoming. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) explain this *becoming:*

> We think and write for animals themselves. We become animal so that the animal also becomes something else. The agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other. This is the constitutive relationship of philosophy with nonphilosophy. Becoming is always double, and it is this double becoming that constitutes the people to come and the new earth. **The philosopher must become non philosopher so that non philosophy becomes the earth and people of philosophy** (p.109).

Thus, only in comprehending nonphilosophy can the philosopher conceive concepts, and only in becoming *nonart* can an *art* be created and thought. So too, only in *becoming-non-museum* can a museum begin to deterritorialize the museum and its institutional attributes as part of the majority apparatus of the State. This is because it is where the plane of *art* (*museum*) and the plane *nonart* (*non-museum*) collide that the greatest possibility for *becoming-minoritarian* occurs, because it is at the colliding of these two planes that chaos occurs. To better explain this, I will put *museum/non-museum* in the place of *philosopher/nonphilosopher* in the highlighted section of the quote above: The *museum* must become *non-museum* so that *non-museum* becomes the earth and people of the *museum*. This is to say that for the museum to understand the people of the earth, it must comprehend all that is-not-museum, in order to continually

challenge and deterritorialize the image of the museum. If the museum/philosopher/science does not become its "non" relation, it will continue in a circular pattern of thought and fail to produce new relations and generate becoming. To return to the idea of *becoming-rural,* the museum is already situated in the plane of *nonrural*, therefore, for the museum to deterritorize their non-rural image of thought, they must *become-rural* in order to understand the people of *rural.*

> **Inside-outsiders are like transfer students.** They are in the room. **They want to be there. But they don't speak the language perfectly.** Their prior experiences are different. They come from another place....**Most inside-outsiders can't trace the exact door that let them into the room**. It's not the job of inside-outsiders to figure out how they got in. **It's the job of insiders to welcome them, listen to them, support them, and see what can be learned about how to make the room relevant to more outsiders** (Simon, 2016, part 2.8).

But, what about those rural adults who are already interested in art and decide to visit a museum, or rural adults who find themselves at an art museum due to whatever motivating factor? Where is the relevance for them? Well ultimately, with a museum like Crystal Bridges that has a vast amount of artwork of all media and genres, indoors and out, visitors are likely to find relevance in a good number of places, depending on their interests. Guests can participate in public programs, tours, classes, lectures, or other events on the museum grounds, or they can explore the museum and its extensive art trails on their own. I spoke to rural adults who enjoyed going to the museum with their children and grandchildren, others who enjoyed going to the museum for an inexpensive date idea, another who enjoyed hiking and biking on the museum's art trails, and a man who studied architecture and gravitated towards the Frank Lloyd Wright house. These are just a handful of the people I spoke to about why they chose to visit the museum; most visitors attributed their attendance to leisure and entertainment (and perhaps a little edutainment). The rural adults who are already visitors of Crystal Bridges are what Simon (2016) calls "inside-outsiders." Inside-outsiders already have already found the relevance in

visiting the museum, but they still exist in the margins--they haven't been fully understood or accepted. Inside-outsiders can be key facilitators in opening up the museum to other rural adults who find themselves still on the outside, but in order to do this, the inside-outsiders must be understood fully and not tokenized for their "otherness." Nor should their experiences be trivialized. Museum staff can listen and learn from these inside outsiders to increase relevance and widen the door for more outsiders (rural adults) to become insiders.

> **Relevance is about making it worth it**. Flinging open the door to the treasure. **Bringing darkness into light.**
>
> **What does it feel like to unlock that door?** To find out, practice empathy. **Put yourself in the shoes of the outsider beyond the door.**
> Imagine yourself outside the door, unaware that it exists. Someone hands you a key and says, "this is a key to a room that holds a great treasure."
> You ask: "what's the treasure? Gold? Inner peace? The world's best pad thai?"
> She replies: "I cannot tell you."
> You put the key in your pocket. Maybe someday you'll use it. Maybe never.
> Now imagine someone asks you: "What do you value most in this world?"
> You think about it. You gather the courage. You answer honestly.
> And then she says, "I know of a room that holds a treasure that relates to that thing you most value. Here is how the treasure is connected to your values. Here is a key to the door to that treasure."
> **What do you do now?** (Simon, 2016, part 5.2)

This is What I Have Learned Thus Far

> **The question is no longer how to specify *the rule,* but rather how to provide it with the vividness which it lacks. The question is no longer how to distribute but how to *reinforce* and enliven justice.** It was not enough then to single out by means of the imagination the possible situations of the extension of justice; this extension must itself become now a real situation. In an artificial way, the nearest must become the most distant, and the most distant, the nearest. This is the meaning of government. Human beings "cannot change their natures. All they can do is to change their situation and render the observance of justice the immediate interest of some particular persons, and its violation their more remote" (Hume, 1896, p.537). We find here the principle of all serious political philosophy. **True morality does not address itself to children in the family but rather to adults in the state. It does not involve the change of human nature but the invention of artificial and objective conditions in order for the bad aspects of this nature not to triumph** (Deleuze, 1991, p. 50).

For far too long, rural adults have been overlooked, forgotten, and cast aside, they have been mistaken as inconsequential, their needs never a priority for the urban majority. In many art museums, the programming is directed towards school and children's programs, and that is even more of the case when it comes to rural "outreach." In a typical, pre-pandemic year Crystal Bridges would give tours to over 50,000 school students per year, providing transportation and lunch, at no cost to the school or its students. At the end of these field trips, they would give all students vouchers for themselves and up to four adults to visit a paid traveling exhibit for free at a later date. This is an effective use of their school programming budget, because I do believe that starting early is the easiest way to produce a lifelong museum goer. But in my meeting with the Director of Audience Research and Evaluation, I learned the museum was not even tracking if the vouchers were being used. This again seems to me like the kind of obvious "data" that a data-focused institution, like Crystal Bridges, would want to collect. This type of information would help them ascertain if their school programs *are* reaching rural adults, but rural adults seem to remain an afterthought. The only "data" that it seems is being gathered from adults in the museum is done at random by iPad-wielding Audience Research and Evaluation staff, asking visitors to fill out surveys upon leaving exhibits. This, however, is just general audience information, and in no way can be seen to represent rural populations because not all of the adults will be rural residents (in actuality, very few of them likely are). The museum does offer on-site programs (now largely virtual due to the pandemic) for adults or people of all ages, but again, this is still not directed to rural adults specifically, and it still does often rely on the physical space of the museum for its program site. What this all circles back to is the fact that, to my current knowledge, the *only* rural-specific programing Crystal Bridges (and many art museums) offer is geared towards K-12 children, which ultimately confirms the fears that I had

when I began this dissertation: Rural adults are being ignored, and moveover, they have been given up on.

There has been very little effort to understand the adults of the surrounding rural areas on their own terms. The museum has billboards, TV, newspaper, and radio advertisements that are distributed throughout the entire NWA area, as well as near the Arkansas border in neighboring states like Oklahoma and Missouri, so they have certainly made their presence known. But advertisements do not equal outreach. Advertisements are a marketing business tactic aimed at bringing in money, not bodies. Sure, these ads might try to appeal to human sensibilities, but the goal of any ad is to prompt people to buy in and, unfortunately for Crystal Bridges, many rural adults are not buying in. There is skepticism of newcomers in rural communities, and that skepticism is intensified toward big corporations who seemed to be coming in with new ideas and ways of being from far off places (Wuthnow, 2013). But ultimately the reason I think many rural adults are not buying in to Crystal Bridges is because Crystal Bridges has not bought into them. Investing time and resources into getting to know the local community on a deeper level will help draw new lines of flight between rural adults/communities and Crystal Bridges. Wuthnow (2013) explains the importance of this getting-to-know-deeper of small towns:

> **But in small towns it also matters to have locally specific cultural capital. Some of what is important to know is instrumental.** When resources are scarce and perhaps geographically limited as well, it matters to know who in town is best at welding together a broken trailer hitch and who to call when the septic tank overflows. **Cultural capital also consists of expressive information that is good for social networking. Gossip can be exchanged for instrumental information**. Knowing the town's history and being able to tell its stories serves similarly. An insider knows the traditions or who to ask. **Being an insider feels better than existing on the margins of a small community** (p. 192).

Ultimately, Crystal Bridges was established in a rural community, but the museum has always been on the outside, both in a physical and metaphorical sense. The museum might have been

started by a native of the Northwest Arkansas area, but that native (Alice Walton) is no more an insider of the surrounding rural communities than I was during my fieldwork. Earlier, I noted that Crystal Bridges seemed like it had something to prove, and it's true—the museum does have something to prove, it is just trying to prove it to the wrong audience.

What Can Be Done?

This problem is not unique to Crystal Bridges. Many art museums throughout the United States are consistently overlooking, or perhaps even ignoring, rural adults. This is an issue that has in some respects been deemed a lost cause, because ideologies are too different, distance is too far, or perhaps the miscommunications are too numerous, but I want to urge museums to rethink their approach to rural communities. If museums are truly interested in reaching rural adults, they need to start where adults *are*, in *their* communities. I do not mean a one-time, annual or semiannual, town event. I mean genuine, effective outreach, where connections can be made *outside* of the museum or the school. Outreach directed towards adults—not children, not families, but mature, tax-paying, thinking-feeing, rural adults. Rural adults are continually undervalued, but this misunderstanding of their needs only alienates them further, both from museums and the urban majority.

So how can museums (like Crystal Bridges) build this metaphorical bridge to rural adults that lie on the margins? Well, the obvious, broader answer I have already given is to meet them on their own turf. To return to an earlier concept I used in the *doing* of this field work, I believe that museums should try to create techniques of relations to catalyze new potential across the larger field of external relations. If museums are able to build trusting, reciprocal, relationships with rural community members within their own community, where they are most comfortable, then they can start to work toward getting rural adults in the door of the museum. Reciprocity is the real key here, because if a museum and its staff enter into rural areas acting as though they

are offering a charity service, assuming a hierarchical structure of being (liberator/liberated), a deep understanding of rural populations will not be achieved. Here are some ideas I have that could serve as possible starting points for building relationships with rural communities (in no particular order):

- Go to the local libraries and talk to the librarians. In my travels amongst rural NWA towns, if there was a library, it was likely my first stop. Librarians are universally kind, helpful, and extremely knowledgeable. Most I spoke to in these rural communities were middle-aged women, mothers, and grandmothers, and they were the group that seemed to most likely have already visited Crystal Bridges prior to our conversation. Librarians are quiet but effective resources for just about anything you need to know about a town. Also, as an academic (and a nerd), libraries have always been safe spaces for me, and assuming many in a museum share my academic, bookish tendencies, this is like dipping a toe in to test the water. I could write an entire dissertation about my love for libraries and librarians, but instead, I will just say that both library buildings themselves and library staff are powerful resources that should not be ignored in establishing relationships with rural communities.
- A good place to start when building reciprocity between museums and rural adults in the community can be town hall meetings, or round table discussions with leaders and residents of the rural community. Simon (2016) has explained the importance of meeting with community leaders and building trusting relationships through what she calls "community-first program design," which occurs in these steps:

    1. Define the community or communities to whom you wish to be relevant. The more specific the definition, the better.
    2. Find representatives of this community–staff, volunteers, visitors, trusted partners–and learn more about their experiences. If you don't know many people

in this community, this is a red flag moment. Don't assume that programs that are relevant to you or your existing audiences will be relevant to people from other backgrounds.
3. Spend more time in the community to which you wish to be relevant. Explore their events. Meet their leaders. Get to know their dreams, points of pride, and fears. Share yours, too.
4. Develop collaborations and programs, keeping in mind what you have learned (Simon, 2016, Part 3.5).

As Simon (2016) describes, once staff of the museum has gotten to know the community, they can then begin to design programming that is specific to each community's unique field of external relations. Townhalls or roundtable meetings should take place in community spaces that are familiar: churches, libraries, community centers, schools. Jung (2014b) also researched the connection between one art museum and its local community, where she also advocates for a deeper understanding of communities in which museums are situated, and more diverse participation and reciprocity between the community and the museum.

- Offer grants for local communities to set up a small exhibit in conjunction with the museum staff, at a place within the rural community. This could be a great chance to learn deeply about the town's collective interests and then begin to introduce non-museum goers to a museum-like experience in a less intimidating space. Many rural adults have not had much background in art/art history education, and this can cause them to fear judgement about their perceived lack of knowledge (Jung, 2014a). This is not unusual, as I have witnessed this hesitancy toward visual arts within my own extended family. The art world is elitist, and this is extremely intimidating for an outsider. This is a fact that cannot be denied. An adult who has never been to an art museum, and whose knowledge of art and the art world largely comes from the news, may equate art museums to the ridiculously expensive works of art and the snobby rich

people who purchase them. In over five years as a docent, the most frequent question I have received from visitors of all ages is, “how much do you think this is worth?” The answer I always give is something along the lines of “Determining price of artworks is done somewhat arbitrarily and it depends on ‘market fluctuations’ that are subject to zero transparency, so something is ‘worth’ as much as whoever is willing to pay for it ultimately…but this piece was a gift that is now in a museum collection, so it is priceless.” Now I might know more in this area than the average person because of my master’s degree, but what this antidote truly reveals is the fact that museum visitors know the art on the walls is expensive, but they do not know why, and that barrier alone can be intimidating. In truth, art is expensive for no reason other than because it is, and a work of art is probably going to be worth more if the artist is dead. Imagine you are a first-time museumgoer, and you know that for some reason, the works that are hanging on the walls are worth millions of dollars each, but you do not know anything else about this art, and, even more perplexing, what you might see might not even accord with your definition of *art.* You see a urinal sitting in the corner on a pedestal and learn that it cost more than your entire house and you find that infuriating. These kinds of situations alienate the apprehensive masses, who feel left out of an inside joke. Instead of throwing the art museum-newbies into the deep end of the pool, work *with* the community to cultivate an exhibit *within* it that displays works that are *relevant* to that specific community. Conversations between community leaders and museum staff are a natural starting point to generate new ideas about art that they could perhaps share with their communities. These exhibits need not be large, blockbuster museum exhibits, which might only serve to further drive a wedge between the two worlds. Allow guests to experience and learn

about art without the intimidating structure of the museum, and the distractions of works of art that they may not yet be ready to comprehend. Do not make the conversation about cost (of art, security, transportation, etc.), but rather focus on education and the enjoyment of the arts. A journey into the arts (and art museums) needs to begin where people are, with art that reflects their interests and identities as rural adults. Once a relationship of trust and reciprocity is achieved, new relations will be generated.

- Another way art museums can build relationships with rural adults in specific communities is to offer art classes or other "outreach" programming tailored to adults. Give the adults something, for crying out loud! Why are we always worried about what children do with their leisure time; children have camps, and classes, and just about anything else you can imagine, and meanwhile, rural adults are literally dying from loneliness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Curti, 2019). Art is literally a form of therapy! A lot of the adults in rural communities are empty-nesters, and many older residents, like my grandmother, are also widows (and widowers). Children and spouses keep rural residents busy and full of social interaction in their younger years, but as children grow older, fewer are choosing to stay in their rural communities after high school or return after college, leaving behind a large population of middle-age and senior residents. These rural adult residents could greatly benefit from programming offered by the museum, which could not serve only to increase socialization, but also offer an approachable step towards engaging with museums. Perhaps, were museums to offer programs within rural communities, residents would then be enticed to check out more programs at the actual museum, because they will then have an idea of what to expect. Furthermore, when thinking about what *type* of programming or classes to offer

> to these rural adults, I will again refer back to talking with community residents in a roundtable or town hall type format. Such meetings could also be a great chance to highlight and partner with local artists and help them design an art course around their specialty in their own town. I would absolutely love to take a jewelry making class from Cindy (whom I met at the Huntsville farmers market). These are the kind of program offerings that can bring the community and its residents together, as well as build trust between the community and the museum, because the rural community and its residents always remain at the center of the conversation.

Once there is a mutual respect and open lines of communication have been extended between a rural community and an art museum, then museum staff can begin to *do the work* that can turn art museum novices into museum goers for life.

Rural Adults Are in the Museum, Now What?

Once you have built a relationship with various rural communities, hopefully the residents will begin to come to the museum of their own volition. But it is important for museums to remember that once they have enticed rural visitors through the doors not to inadvertently slam it back in their faces by failing to adequately set expectations beforehand. The number one complaint I saw on the countless reviews I read for Crystal Bridges dealt with the ways that security or volunteer gallery guides treated visitors, or made visitors feel. This is undoubtedly a problem that every art museum faces--balancing the safety of the collection with the sometimes delicate and defensive tempers of visitors certainly presents its challenges, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the museum and its staff to ensure the comfort and therefore accessibility of its galleries. Having staff scold adult guests can be rather off-putting. This is true not only for rural museum visitors, but for all visitors regardless of geographical residence: being called out and scolded publicly makes many adults feel embarrassed, and many will

automatically take a defensive position. I consider myself an avid museum goer, and one very cognizant of museum etiquette, but that does not mean I have not also experienced these awkward interactions. While visiting Crystal Bridges with my parents on a Saturday, I was told to put my mini backpack on the front of my chest. This "backpack" is about the size of a grapefruit, but I still complied (and looked like an idiot) after getting scolded by staff. Now, don't get me wrong, I understand why I needed to move my mini backpack to my chest, but by the time I was told to do so, I had already seen three-quarters of the museum's permanent collection and passed multiple security guards. The problem is not that there are rules, but that no one seems to know what they are, or at least be able to agree upon which rules to enforce and which are of less importance. If the security guards are not even consistent in their own knowledge and enforcement of the rules, how can first-time or infrequent museum goers be expected to have foreknowledge of them? Not having the rules posted only furthers the image of an elitist, exclusive, art museum, where only those "in the know" know how to act. When an adult is called out (and singled out) by a security guard when least expecting it, it makes them feel like misbehaving schoolchildren subject to a scolding. It is hard to not feel a little bit embarrassed and resist the urge to get defensive, but more than anything it makes people feel uncomfortable, leaving them on edge and worried about doing something wrong by accident again.

The misstep many, if not most, art museums are making is not having the rules posted somewhere near the entrance of the museum. I think museums will find that the vast majority of people do not mind following rules if you explicitly tell them what they are! Stop leaving people to figure them out for themselves through some inscrutable security guard scolding initiation. The expectations of art museum etiquette should be clear and visible, from the moment people

walk in. Setting people's expectations not only makes them feel better and more comfortable in the museum, but it also means that security guards would have to approach fewer visitors. At a large museum with multiple entry points, such as Crystal Bridges, I would suggest very clear signage, preferably in multiple languages but unquestionably including infographics, at every entrance to both the museum *and* the individual galleries where work is displayed. In the case of Crystal Bridges (and probably many other art museums), I might also suggest a revamp of the security guard training, beginning with a redefining of their roles. Security officers in a museum are undoubtedly important to the safety of these priceless works of art, but they are also front-facing staff, and some of the *only staff* many visitors will interact with during their museum visit. The demeanor and hospitality of the security guards is much more important and a far greater reflection on a museum than I think many back-office staff realize.

In my own life, I can testify to this. I had a bad experience with a security guard at a museum in South Carolina a few years ago. I had driven up on a Saturday to see an Andrew Wyeth exhibit and was met with a security guard on a power trip whose behavior has since clouded my perception of that museum. Do not underestimate the power a grumpy, power hungry, racially biased, or just generally creepy security guard can wield over the experiences of museum visitors. I will be honest in that I do not know what advice to offer in retraining the security guards, because I do not know much about protection, but maybe this position should be thought of as less security-centered than hospitality-centered. Deeper racial sensitivity and inclusion training are also likely still needed, because I did notice a significant number of people of color complaining about racial bias in security attention and enforcement. It does not help anyone to ignore biases that have clearly existed since the museum's opening, so it is probably

best to interrogate that issue and work with the staff on the ground level to produce a more inclusive environment.

The second most common issue I noticed in reviews was visitor disappointment upon realizing that the museum was not entirely free, as they had thought before arriving. At Crystal Bridges, the permanent collection is indeed free, but the special exhibitions are paid ticketed exhibits. I noticed this complaint too many times to count, but this again goes back to properly setting expectations. Crystal Bridges advertises free admission, but it is not very clearly specified in advertisements that this free entry is not for the entire museum. Also, during my fieldwork I noticed that the price for the paid special exhibits was not advertised on the special exhibition billboards and marketing materials. Accurate information for admission details and costs is easily available on the Crystal Bridges website, but not all people will look at this website; transparency about costs and expectations prevents confusion and resentment before they even begin.

Imagine you are a first-time museum visitor to Crystal Bridges, and you come to the museum expecting that all exhibits at the museum are free because free admission has been advertised. Since you have never been to a museum, you don't understand why some art costs money to see and other art is free in this museum, and you feel a little bit swindled by the lack of transparency regarding the cost ahead of time. So now you make the decision to pay the fee for the special exhibit, because if it costs money, it must be even better than the free art, right? Now when you go to explore the galleries, security guards seem to be following you around, one has told you to move your bag, and another told you to stand back from the art, and this whole experience is starting to get a bit frustrating and overwhelming, but you paid to go to this special exhibit, so you better go do that. But the special exhibit is hard to find and by the time you figure

out your way to the exhibit you see a work of art that aims to challenge your beliefs or views of the world. This is the final straw, and when you decide this museum is clearly not for "someone like you." You have not felt welcomed from the start and now this museum, filled with art that is worth more money than you will make in a lifetime, is trying to tell you that the way you think and see the world is wrong, that what you were taught in school is incorrect, and you cannot take it anymore. You leave feeling mistreated and misunderstood, and these feelings will linger and only serve to further drive a wedge between the art museum and a member of the community. This is a hypothetical scenario, but one based on some very real reviews I read. People experience one barrier after another, and at a certain point, they become exhausted trying to maneuver these obstacles and simply give up. At that point, they have been thoroughly alienated. The museum has failed to make them feel comfortable and because of that some visitors will not even have the opportunity to deterritorialize their majority image of thought through art, because the field of relations at the museum only served to further capture the majority. If art museums are able to accurately set expectations for rural and first-time visitors, both in terms of museum etiquette and cost, then visitors will not preemptively be on the defensive, and could more easily experience an *encounter* with a work of art that might serve as a point of deterritorialization.

Finally, I want to encourage art museum curators and educators to embrace the *crisis* of the *event* (Garoian, 2014) as it happens in the museum. Continue to put forth exhibits that push the envelope of in terms of content and themes, continue to display wall text that challenges the macro-historical, macro-political, dogmatic image of thought. When museums push the boundaries of how they define art, and expand what types of art they display, and diversify who that work is created by, they will begin to set new standards for what is possible in the museum. By embracing the crisis of the event, museums can create openings for a *minoritarian becoming,*

including troubling normative representations and uses of language. Art museums have the tools for catalyzing techniques and platforms for relations (Manning & Massumi, 2014), they just need to understand how to use them to their fullest potential. As Garoian (2014) explains,

> The unruly modulations, lines of flight, and unsettling alliances and encounters of the event that is art constitute such a collective; a problematic agglomeration of disparate and disjunctive images and ideas that perpetually deterritorialize, reterritorialize, and mutate representational thinking, and from which erupts a crisis in knowledge and new ways of seeing and thinking (Garoian, 2014, p.393).

Museum staff, curators, and educators, need to lean into the crisis of the event, because the fields of relations that constitute art are capable of catalyzing new thought, severing the circular patterns that lead to reterritorialization of the majority, and allowing museum visitors to experience the event of *becoming-different, becoming-other, becoming minor, etc.*

In Conclusion...I'm Not Done Yet.

Throughout the research, fieldwork, analysis, and writing that went into this dissertation, I never sought to give a reason why rural adults deserve access to art museums, rather, I wanted to understand why rural adults might *want* to go to an art museum. In order to do this, I set out to deeply understand rural communities and their residents by (un)defining and deconstructing common notions of rurality. The outcome of this research presents the ontological divide between rural populations and art museums as rooted in a misunderstanding of rural communities, their residents, and their unique needs and complexities, which has only served to further alienate rural adult populations. In this research I propose that museums dismantle the hierarchical and categorical classifications that are reliant on dualistic binary oppositions, and instead embrace post-structural theoretical ways of being that do not privilege one form of being

over another. It is only when researchers and practitioners embrace nonhierarchical, nonhuman ways of being and thinking that one can begin to see and think beyond representational categories. Seeing/thinking outside of axiomatic representations is what is needed for museums to *become-rural*, because it is only when rural is seen not as the lesser part of the urban/rural dichotomy but as a part of a larger whole equal in relation on the same plane of immanence that this *becoming-rural* can occur.

In order for art museums (and its staff) to do this, they will collectively need to un-think the majority image of both *rurality* and *museums*. To re-think the structure of the art museum, they can no longer allow hierarchical binary opposition in any of the museum's relations, whether internally and externally. Jung (2011/2014b) discusses this idea of the dismantling hierarchies in two articles, wherein she calls for museums to become/think of themselves as ecosystems (2011) and through this practice they can challenge the hierarchical work culture to allow for more diverse voices to be heard (2014b). Thinking of a museum as an ecosystem or as a rhizome means that the internal hierarchy between the museum's departments, staff, and programming must be completely dismantled. The museum must see itself as a rhizome, existing as one interconnected and ever-extending root system, with no parts of greater or lesser importance, in order to *deterritorialize-museum* and *become-non-museum*. Once the museum has deterritorialized itself from the majority/state apparatus, the museum (and its staff) must un-think (deterritorialize) the majority image of rurality, and re-think rural in a way that de-centers the urban from its conceptualization, dismantling the hierarchies between the two concepts. Only then can the museum *become-rural.* Today, many (if not all) arts museums operate, not as rhizomes, but as trees, retaining hierarchies in the internal structure of the museum (staff/programming) that further elicit hierarches externally (elitism/lack of transparency of

rules/expectations). If a museum, like Crystal Bridges, truly believes that "art is for everyone", a dismantling of the arborescent system that perpetuates elitism and blocks visitors from potential deterritorialization is a necessity. The potential for deterritorialization does not only lie in the ability of Crystal Bridges to dismantle hierarchies, but also its audience, which must be open to deterritorializing the majority image. Crystal Bridges' collection of art (and architecture) is so vast and diverse that it is not hard to find a piece in their collection that may be of relevance to their rural audience, but so too must the audience (regardless of background) be open to resisting capture by the majority image of thought in order to remain open to the *encounter* of *deterritorialization*.

Going forward, there are many more possibilities left to explore when looking at art museums and rural populations through a post-structural, Deleuzian lens. Furthermore, very little research currently relates to art museums and rural adult populations, regardless of theoretical or methodological lens. This is an extremely underexplored area of research no matter how you chose to look at it, but more studies that look at museums and rural adult populations through a post-structural, non-hierarchical lens are needed in order to reimagine the possibilities that exist in the field of their emergent external relations. As to where I am going to go with this research, that is yet to be known. I am going to be honest; I want to be done with this work, but I do not think this work is done with me. This research, subsequent fieldwork, and writing has been arduous, bizarre, and at times a bit terrifying, but as a result I have grown as a researcher and a writer and learned more about myself in the process than I was prepared for. There is more probably to find here, more connections to be made, thoughts to be had, encounters to interrogate, but for now this will have to suffice. Maybe I too will be like Jackson (2010) and return to my doctoral research notes down the line with fresh eyes and new conceptual

realizations. That is the beauty of research, it never ends, because research is its own constant *becoming*.

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