



Toward a Methodology of Death: Deleuze's "Event" as Method for Critical Ethnography

Sophia Rodriguez, College of Charleston

Abstract

This article examines how qualitative researchers, specifically ethnographers, might utilize complex philosophical concepts in order to disrupt the normative truth-telling practices embedded in social science research. Drawing on my own research experiences, I move toward a methodology of death (for researcher/researched alike) grounded in Deleuze's philosophy-as-method and his concept of event. I approach ethnographic research with this concept in mind in order to unpack the experiences of Latino immigrant youth activism during a critical ethnography in Chicago. I suggest that new ways of thinking with Deleuze in qualitative inquiry might offer a breakthrough/breakdown and death of systems of thought that position research subjects in limiting ways, ultimately arguing that Deleuzian "event" offers the possibility for the birth of new selves.

Keywords: *Deleuze, youth identity, urban education, poststructuralist critical ethnography*

We were arrested. The handcuffs felt tight on our wrists. We claimed that space. I do activist things even though I'm nothing.
–Youth Activists, Amelia and Penny

Introduction

Koro-Ljungberg, Carlson, Tesar, and Anderson (2014) recently argued, "philosophy as method is an engagement, an ethical relationship with thought. Philosophy as a method brings theory into the practice and ontologies into the research processes" (p. 5). This ethical dimension of philosophy is also documented in ethnography. For instance, Stich, Cipollone, Nikischer and Weis (2012) claim, "qualitative research, ethnography in particular, is deeply personal" (p. 463). The deeply personal aspects of qualitative inquiry, and ethnography specifically, raise philosophical questions of method that are the "conceptual epicenter" of research (Smagorinsky, 2008). Further, Tamboukou and Ball (2003) have posited, "the status of the ethnographer is a major epistemological concern" (p. 2), suggesting the philosophical underpinnings that guide qualitative inquiry be considered.

In this article, I examine the relationship between ethnography and the philosophical and theoretical dimensions of qualitative inquiry, and offer an example of how to engage with theoretical concepts in meaningful ways. Further, I agree with the comments in this special issue that, "to be *critical* one must work towards truth-claims that disrupt the normative flow of common-sense;

critical work cannot replicate what is already known” (Kuntz & Pickup, 2015 *CFP*). Given this challenge, as a critical ethnographer who engages with post-structural theory, I wish to explore *how* one actually disrupts the normative truth-telling mechanisms that are so often promoted in social science research (Rodriguez, 2015a), and to problematize what Patti Lather (1991) has called the normative, and thus limiting, ways of “knowing” subjects in the research process.

Problematizing the *Critical* in Critical Ethnography

As I journey through the experiences of being a critical ethnographer, and consider what it means to engage in the inquiry process, I often gravitate toward poststructuralist theory for a few reasons. First, I have grown to understand that research is a process of knowledge production where the researcher retains power over that which constitutes “truth.” This means that voices are heard and can go unheard in the research process and in the final product (i.e. narrative or publication), which is important to reflect upon as researchers make decisions about selecting interview participants or the passages that form the narrative. As I explain in the article, part of what it means to be *critical* is to consider the voices of marginalized groups and the power structures that operate in society so whose voice is included and excluded in a critical ethnography is of value. Troubling me most is the way in which the word *critical* is often used without considering what it might mean in terms of researchers participating in the process of knowledge production and Foucauldian “truth-telling.” That is, in my own research I reflected heavily upon my role as the researcher as I gathered data, listened to the stories of my participants, and constructed the narrative. Thus, to be *critical*, necessitates our willingness as researchers to de-stabilize our own position of power and to recognize that knowledge and its production are contingent, historically situated, and relational. In other words, to be critical, in a poststructuralist (Foucauldian) manner, is to problematize our *critical* stance.

Second, research and its phases of data collection and representation are problematic engagements. Regarding *critical ethnographic research*, the power dynamics engendered in the research process and the challenges of representation, highlight a crucial tension; to break this tension, I want to disrupt the normative and often superficial social science processes such as collecting data, providing a framework, and coding data for themes, in order to reveal something *new*. We researchers need to ponder epistemological stances and experiment with *new* concepts in a way to take on theorists like Gilles Deleuze and set “mobile” philosophical concepts (Masny, 2013) in motion.

Purpose and Argument

This article begins with the question: How do we think about critical methodology and inquiry, particularly in ethnographic research? I argue that to move beyond saying we do “critical work,” researchers need to take new epistemological stances and reconsider knowledge production. I argue here that re-thinking notions of identity, subjectivity, and power through philosophical and theoretical concepts is a necessary first step. The second step is to pursue open-mindedness to experimentation in our thinking. Following these steps, we can then begin to theorize data in order to understand ethnographic spaces as sites of experimentation, contestation, and negotiation, where the breaking down of boundaries and of systems of oppression can occur (Deleuze, 1990; 1992; 1995).

In this article, I consider the work of poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1990; 1994) and his concept of *event* in order to theorize the ethnographic data from a study on youth activism in Chicago public schools during the historic school closures in 2012-2013. I argue that Deleuze's philosophy-as-method enables us to re-envision the purpose of research and its encounters as a disruption of normative knowledge production. I also argue that Deleuze's concept of *event*¹ enables us to break away from essentialist paradigms that govern our understanding of identities within marginalized groups. I finally offer an example from my own critical ethnography for how we might open up new spaces of thinking about ethnographic data collection and analysis.

A Genealogy of Ethnography

The first section of the article outlines my rejection of positivistic traditions in ethnography and provides a brief overview of how scholars define critical ethnography. I then explain how my critical stance was problematic and led me to disrupt the critical ethnographic paradigm by using the notion of event. To this end, I understand a relationship between ethnography and poststructural theory—that the two need one another perhaps. While I do not bypass classical ethnography, I begin with the assumption of classical ethnography's deeply problematic positivistic and modernist roots that speak of human activity through an *othering* process. Further, researchers have addressed the concerns of conventional ethnography in order to invent new *critical*² spaces, merging "critical theory," rooted in Marxist ideology, with the ethnographic context (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004, p. 3). From this perspective, definitions of critical ethnography expanded while remaining committed to "conventional ethnography with a political purpose" (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004, p. 4).

Classical or traditional ethnography was rooted in a positivist tradition that understood social reality as something that is "out there" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 47). In addition, classical ethnographers construct a story from the field that is considered an "objective" account of events as they occur in a discrete time and place (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This classical, traditional approach to ethnography was challenged by different paradigmatic approaches in qualitative research, such as the *critical* approach.

Next, I wish to define and then to problematize the *critical* in critical ethnography in relation to my own engagement with this methodological approach. To define it, critical ethnography adds a political or transformative angle to classical ethnography, a consideration of the researcher's positionality, and a consideration of representation of research subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Madison, 2012; Noblit, 1999; Quantz, 1992; Villenas & Foley, 2011). As a methodological approach, critical ethnography seeks an understanding of social life in order to consider power dynamics in society (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). What makes this methodological approach critical is that it allows researchers to investigate marginalized groups with the hope of effecting change through research. Moreover, Quantz (1992) argues, "critical ethnography's contribution to this dialogue lies principally in its ability to make concrete the particular manifestations of marginalized cultures located in a broader sociopolitical framework" (p. 462). The point is that the work of the critical ethnographer introduces the ability of researchers to critique the social world, or the "falsehoods" and inequities in society, as experienced by marginalized groups and expose the

1. Hereafter, I do not italicize event. I refer to it in the article and each time it carries with it the assumptions and definitions from Deleuze's work.

2. I italicize the word critical in this article in order to signal that I am problematizing the word and what it means in ethnographic research.

power relations that underlay institutions and social practices in hopes of revolutionary change (Kuntz, 2015, p. 97).

An important component of critical research is that researchers can acknowledge that representations of reality are *also* embedded in power relations. For me, the use of the critical ethnographic approach initially allowed me to ask questions of my participants while also considering larger social, cultural, and political contexts that may also influence the ways in which they interpret and perceive their realities. For example, my research on Latino immigrant youth occurred in the context of national and political discourses regarding immigration as well as the ways in which social science research had previously and poorly studied them through deficit models of thinking. My intention was to account for the power dynamics that are a part of their context, including the dynamic of my role as researcher. However as I engaged with this methodological approach, concerns emerged.

As mentioned above, I wish to problematize critical ethnographic research despite my engagement with this methodological approach. I explain how I initially engaged with the critical approach and what it enabled me to think about during fieldwork. In my early ethnographic research, I utilized the critical approach as outlined by Quantz and other scholars discussed above with rich cases in order to achieve the answers to the study questions and to account for researcher positionality—since researchers are also embedded in the power relations. This type of reflexivity and self-awareness of the researcher is imperative for qualitative projects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Madison, 2012) and for researchers interested in working the “hypens” and the “ruins” or contested spaces of research such as those with the minoritized youth I worked with (Dimitriadis, 2001; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2002; Weis & Fine, 2004). To elaborate, my use of the critical approach directly addressed issues of power, control, and the ways in which identities are/were shaped by institutional labeling of youth from racial and ethnic minority groups. Labels such as “regular,” “highly motivated,” and “at risk” were subjectively ascribed to youth from low-income, minority groups based on teacher perceptions of abilities. The institutional ascription process of identity set up hierarchies in the school and perpetuated the “deficit discourse” about minority academic achievement (Rodriguez, 2015a; 2015b). Thus, the critical approach allowed me to consider the power dynamics involved in minoritized youth identity formation and teacher perceptions of minorities’ abilities in school.

However, the critical ethnographic paradigms (e.g. Madison, 2012; Quantz, 1992) still operate in/through binary systems of reason and logic, positioning subjects as superior/inferior or dominant/non-dominant without attention to the layers of power embedded in particular contexts. For example, Madison’s (2012) work actually uses the phrase “Dialogue with the Other” in the discussion of how to research participants (p. 8).³ Viewing research participants as “other” as part of the methodological orientation is problematic and such an articulation of participants as “other” reifies the very ideologies that the critical paradigm seeks to break from. Further, the positioning of research participants as “other,” potentially limits our ability, as researchers, to question the “truths” that are produced about them by institutional labels. In my own research, I often failed

3. To contextualize, Madison (2012) urges, “As we recognize the vital importance of illuminating the researcher’s positionality, we also understand that critical ethnography requires a deep and abiding dialogue with the Other. This means that our attention requires we remain grounded in the empirical world of the Other” (p. 8). Madison’s critical ethnographic paradigm accounts for how researcher positionality informs representation of research subjects. He also argues, “Critical ethnography is a “meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s),” in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward viable meanings of the social world of the phenomena (p. 9). My early encounter with this critical methodological approach was troubling because I felt discomfort with the dichotomy of researcher and other. This was the impetus for my critique of the critical ethnographic approach.

early in my research study to question “who” was producing what “truths,” and “why” about the youth in my study. Given the power dynamics of a large urban school like the one I examined, it would have been far too risky⁴ to question institutional racism and inequity as a novice researcher. Thus, instead of engaging in a productive methodological practice of taking such risks, I as a critical ethnographer was positioned in a binary system of reasoning and a “knowing” process about my participants. To acknowledge my positioning, I simultaneously critiqued my use of the critical paradigm and came to realize that I was engaging in what Patti Lather (2001) has argued is somewhat of a “rescue mission in search of the voiceless” (p. 200) without attention to identity politics, the romanticized voice of the voiceless, and representation. This “rescue mission” continues to perpetuate inferiority of research participants, particularly those that occupy minority or marginalized statuses in society, and fails to account for the power dynamics at play and the potential relational connections. The rescue mission also adheres to and upholds the normative production of knowledge.

To summarize in relation to my experience, I was embedded in a set of power relationships, and often forced to negotiate my own alignment with various stakeholders even though my allegiance was to the youth. I consistently had to negotiate my own identity as well as my positioning as a social scientist while simultaneously problematizing the very paradigm from which I situated myself. It is now, upon further reflection, I understand that I needed to engage in a more risky methodological practice during field research, and to re-think the usefulness of critical ethnographic paradigms. As such, I move on to how I argue we must disrupt critical methodologies and the ways in which I view risky, disruptive methodological practices through Deleuze’s notion of event.

Disrupting Methodology

While the transition from conventional ethnography to a more critical one is well documented, fewer scholars have attempted to critique critical paradigms and move beyond them by mapping social processes in ethnography. Less attention has been given to ultimately questioning terms such as *critical* and researcher subjectivity⁵ itself despite the contributions of feminist post-structuralists such as Jackson and Mazzei, Lather, and St. Pierre. To pursue research that resists universal truths of classical or traditional ethnography, moves beyond binary logic embedded in the critical ethnographic approaches, or the essentialist accounts of identity, a more nuanced philosophy-as-method approach is necessary. Mapping social processes through ethnography alongside poststructuralist theory can “see” divergent and potentially contradictory accounts of the “real.” As such, Tamboukou and Ball (2003) argue that ethnography combined with assumptions of poststructuralist approaches to identity and power, subject-formation, and “truth-telling” are “disruptive,” and they account for the power-knowledge relations that operate in local and specific

4. To elaborate, the meaning of risk here relates to Kuntz’s (2015) point about how the normative steps associated with what counts as research and meaning-making about data are not risky because they adhere to and uphold neoliberal, and in to some extent positivistic, norms and values (p. 99). My use of Deleuzian *event* is risky in the sense that it challenges assumptions on epistemological (by questioning knowing processes) and ontological (departing from notions of being and fixed identities to becoming(s)) levels, and on material levels by engaging in what I am arguing is a methodological death in order to allow for relational encounters in the research process.

5. In this article, I consider the killing off of the ethnographer, which is a new examination of researcher subjectivity. I say this so as not to confuse readers because much attention to researcher positionality and reflexivity certainly exists at exhaustive levels.

settings, enabling the researcher to “focus upon events [and] spaces which divide those in struggle” (p. 4).

The theme of “disrupting methodology” (MacLure, 2011; 2013; Masny, 2013) itself means researchers need to experiment with concepts to enable them to disrupt the systems of reason and logic that govern the social sciences and researcher/participant relations in the field. MacLure (2011) argues for a shift in qualitative research to include “working in the ruins.”⁶ By this, she means that theorizing needs to be paired with a “return to the empirical” but a unique type of empiricism and what Deleuze (1994) calls “transcendental empiricism” (see also MacLure, 2011; Masny, 2013). MacLure (2011) explains, Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism

attends to sensations, forces, and movements beneath the skin, in matter, in cells, and in the gut, as well as between individuals and groups. This kind of empiricism traces intensities of affect that move and connect bodies, subatomically, biologically, physically, and culturally. (p. 999)

The bodily, material experiences are the “stuff” of ethnography. While it is challenging to often capture “matter” in ethnography, I argue that linking philosophy-as-method, or making our philosophical concepts mobile, allows for new encounters in research (MacLure, 2011).

Others have attempted to “disrupt methodology” through the notion of “encountering” (McCoy, 2012; Tamboukou & Ball, 2003) and by bringing Deleuze’s work into the research process (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Grinberg, 2013; Mazzei, 2013). The limit of these few attempts to disrupt methodology through poststructuralism is that they remain at the theoretical level and often fail to enter into the research site and “get lost” (Lather, 2001, p. 200). This means, as I explain below, Deleuze’s philosophy-as-method operates in the bodily, relational and spatial realm, which I argue is also the research site. A step in the right direction, McCoy (2012) draws from Deleuze’s philosophy to consider how we might “trouble” or be troubled by research encounters (p. 763). I wish to build here on McCoy’s theoretical argument for Deleuze’s work and more broadly for the use of poststructuralist concepts as avenues toward “courting trouble” (McCoy, 2012, p. 763) and potentially “death” and the “breakdown of systems and selves” in the research process (Deleuze, 1994, p. 192).

Encounter with Deleuze’s Event

As mentioned, I see an opportunity to bridge the theoretical, linguist domains of poststructuralism with the materialist, transcendental empiricism of a Deleuzian encounter with ethnography.⁷ My attempt here is to “disrupt methodology,” and move toward a methodology of death and the killing off of subjectivities for the researcher and the researched through the experimentation of Deleuze’s event. Masny (2013) recently argued that Deleuze moves away from a subject that experiences the world, thinks about the world, and represents (p. 341). Instead, the subject emerges in events, and events are moments of “rupture, creation,” and death (Masny, 2013, p. 341). In the

6. This phrase of “working in the ruins,” also refers to the ways in which feminist poststructuralists have engaged in research in spaces that have been shattered, leaving fragments. The “ruins” are at the “intersection of research, theory and politics” (Lather, 2001, p. 200).

7. I say “materialist” here mainly for conceptual clarity and to distinguish the material from other theoretical perspectives since Deleuze, as a material philosopher, considers the domain of philosophy to be the material. As such, this article engages with his materialist thinking—philosophy-as-method.

next sections, I attempt to walk the reader through this process of event—rupture, creation, and the death of the self. That said, I think it is necessary to re-frame the conversation around Deleuze’s work and to consider Zourabichvili, Lambert, and Aarons’s (2012) comment that,

to write on Deleuze is not to commemorate a philosophical revolution already made. Nobody knows nor claims to say what “the” philosophy of Deleuze is; we feel affected by Deleuze, we who are its explorers inasmuch as we try to do philosophy. (p. 41)

In this spirit and as part of the reflexive process of being a critical ethnographer, I begin with digging through Deleuze’s work in hopes of a definition of event. Below, I offer how event may provide an analytical lens since I was “affected” by the “ruptures” and “death” of selves during my research.

Event as an Analytic

Deleuze’s concept of event (1990; 1992; 1995) provides a useful optic for seeing Latino youth activism.⁸ Event as a concept from Deleuze’s relational space theory speaks to an “enlivened space—space as vital, material, immanent—that provides new space for living and new ways of being” (Doel & Clarke, 2011). Deleuze (1992) writes:

An event does not just mean that “a man has been run over.” The Great Pyramid is an event, and its duration for a period of one hour, thirty minutes, five minutes...a passage of Nature, of God, or a view of God. What are the conditions that make an event possible? Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes. (p. 86)

In this quote, Deleuze explains that an event is not a singular moment or thing that happens in a specific time or space; rather, he asks that we consider the “conditions” and social relations that make an event possible—the movement of bodies, relations, and material. The relations are particularly important in Deleuzian event because they reflect the spaces in which individuals mutually constitute themselves and the actions they take.

Moreover, in the context of a now disrupted methodological approach, the “chaos” reflects all of the potential connections across the field—a multiplicity.⁹ The critical ethnographer brings

8. This ethnographic study was conducted in Chicago between 2012-2014. I studied a community-school partnership in Chicago Public Schools, and observed Latino youth activists during the historic school closures during the 2012-2013 year. I completed more than 1100 hours of fieldwork, 40 youth interviews, and interviews with community organization staff and teachers at the low-income urban public school. The experiences I describe in this section are also part of another publication (Rodriguez, forthcoming), but because I am focusing on the theoretical and methodological dimensions and questions in this paper, I am not detailing the traditional social science format of study design, site selection, sampling, etc. since that would be the antithesis of Deleuzian encounter (see, Rodriguez, 2015b for study design).

9. The notion of event connects to Deleuze’s larger philosophical project and perspective on how human thought can and ought to escape the constraints of language, institutions, social practices or any other thing that stifle an individual’s ability to be creative and liberated (see for example, Deleuze & Parnet, 1987 and Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). As such, a multiplicity—where events occur within—is a concept that provides a window into his view of the social world and relations among and across individuals. From the events of a material world, the self creates meaning more productively. Deleuze’s productive world inculcates ideas and practices in a productive space by embracing a realm of possibility. It is this realm of “possibles,” that marks and broadens issues of ontology to include a space

into view particular events as the intervener while questioning which “truths” are critical to tell as part of the process of research. This is not to say, that she is on the inside or outside position of the research site, and that she extracts meaning as it emerges. Rather, the critical ethnographer, in Deleuzian event, is also part of event(s) and mutually constituted as part of the pure chaos of event. As such she stands on unstable, non-knowable, ground that is no longer rooted in the normative (social science) means of knowledge production. This is an imperative move toward a different kind of “intervening,” one in which the inquirer is not only situated in the chaos of event but equally contingent and susceptible to risk. Below, I describe this risk—or what I am calling a methodological death—and I describe the *process* of youth activism and identity formation along with my role as ethnographer to demonstrate how youth make up the “material,” of the “enlivened space” and how that which constitutes event is a series of conditions, experiences, and desires.

Deleuze’s notion of event revealed youth identity formation as a process of killing off identities, generating self-created identities, and then restructuring social space and also reconfiguring the materiality of space. First, Deleuze’s event is a complex, non-linear process as opposed to a singular, linear moment in time. Deleuze (1995) explains,

underneath the large noisy events lie the small events of silence. I’ve tried in all of my books to discover the nature of events: it’s a philosophical concept, the only one capable of ousting the verb ‘to be’ and its attributes. (p. 141)

Here Deleuze signals that concepts like event are a process or a *becoming* rather than *being*. Further, Humphrey (2008) argues,

event is a creative switch. It can be considered itself as a-temporal; it can be an instance or more likely drawn out over a sequence of happenings; in either case, it breaks apart earlier bodies of knowledge by forcing them to be seen in a particular light. (p. 375)

Events are the ways that life, desires, and bodies enliven a space or give space its materiality. Building upon sense making of event, Patton (1997) explains, “the knife opening up a wound in flesh is an attribute of interpenetration of bodies, but the event of ‘being cut’ is what is expressed by the statement.” Here, Patton (1997) refers to the sensations that the body endures as part of event rather than just the language of “being cut.” This cut, or what I refer to later as a death, signals a break from the normative work of methodology for me and a break of the system of reasoning that categorize and position youth in unproductive ways. Similarly Barad (2003) refers to this as an “agential cut” as a “local” moment in which a “material configuration” occurs, suggesting a space where desires, bodies, things interact to produce something, relationally. In addition, meaning is made through a re-configured set of social relations where no distinctions between the observer and the observed exist, only the relations that emerge as part of the research site (Barad, 2003). This is important, then, for theorizing event as part of the disruptive methodological practice because it raises implications for doing critical work in newly productive ways.

Next, I offer the narrative of event, a small piece of the larger two-year project, in a Deleuzian sense to recount the experiences of youth in the study, which also means to “begin in the middle” (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987) and to collapse time and space in the narrative. By this, I offer here an opportunity for the reader to enter into the process that I write about and to live within our

where multiple ideas and practices operate. This realm considers the socio-political events of the world as useful for understanding our existence.

experiences as part of this disrupted methodology—the “chaotic multiplicity.” This section allows readers to envision: a) the material bodies and affective desires for social change of youth through narrative description; b) the memory of the ‘event’ through the eyes of the “analyst” and her lived experience and documentation through field notes, where I echo Bruno Latour’s (2005) notion of the “analyst” as one who reassembles subjects in anthropological narratives (see also Humphrey, 2008); c) the folding, non-linearity, of time across the event. Finally, the reader should envision youth who are labeled as “failures” undergo a Deleuzian process of the death of the self. As I conducted and analyzed the ethnographic research, I found that youth literally had to kill off parts of themselves to become something other than the institutionally ascribed identities placed upon them and perpetuated through deficit discourses.

“The Die-In,” and Event as the Death of the Self

In the spring of 2013 after being ignored by the Board of Education, the next steps were set in motion for youth activists. They wanted to plan a demonstration—an act of civil disobedience—to continue to disrupt the oppression of the school closure policy occurring in low-income communities of color. Over and over, youth told me when they understood how unfair school policies were in their city, it felt like “bursting a bubble” for them. They felt compelled to organize against the school closure policy and engaged in what several youth called a “movement” even though their school had perceived them as “just regulars.” In the school system, “regulars” meant the students were not honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate students. For instance, a teacher referred to the “regulars” as “a bunch of low-income kids at a ghetto school on the South Side of Chicago.” By this she meant, it would be hard to envision that these youth would reach educational attainment or advancement in society beyond even high school given where they come from. Despite having experienced institutional identities that were informed through deficit discourses of failure and being lower-tracked students, the youth engaged in activism. This was unique because of the high levels of strategizing and critically thinking that took place throughout the year by the youth in my research. These were not skills that the school and other education policy makers perceived to be a part of the repertoire of youth from low-income, “at risk,” failing schools.

Youth met across the city and in coffee shops after school to plan what would be called the “die-in.” The “die-in” would allow them to lie down in an intersection on the South Side of Chicago. The purpose of lying down in the intersection was to show the possible casualties that could result from school closures. To explain, the youth selected an intersection that also signaled a “gang territory line.” Marley (pseudonym) said:

We chose that intersection because that is a dividing line for gang territories. We said that if they close these schools, then children would have to cross a street to go to their new “receiving school” that would put their lives in jeopardy.

Penny (pseudonym) added:

We performed our act of civil disobedience in which we laid down in the streets with white t-shirts with mock blood on the shirts to represent the possible casualties that could result from the careless policy of the Board of Education and the Mayor. (Field Notes, April 30, 2013)



Marley and Penny were the activists on the scene.¹⁰ They were arrested, as they had been prepared for with the help of teachers from O'Donnell (pseudonym) and youth organizers with the community organization, and were taken to a jail on the south side of the city near their high school. They were held at the jail that night. After the "die-in" and the stint in jail, Marley and Penny reflected on the experience with me the next day outside of O'Donnell:

Penny said, "We lay down silently during a red light. We were silent but I started chanting when I was arrested." Marley said, "We were protesting, and then a press conference started. And it was all just happening. Penny grabbed the microphone and said, "All my great teachers taught me that if you believe in something, you can make change." The cops told them to get up out of the intersection or they were going to get arrested. "People were chanting. Cars were also beeping at us and were slowing down. It was all just happening around us. We did stop traffic. We didn't get up, so they put handcuffs on us. It was sorta sharp and tight on my wrists." He continued, "The cops said we were obstructing traffic and it was criminal negligence. We were taken to the police station. I was held there until 1:30 a.m., but Penny got out earlier around 10:30 p.m." He remembered that it was warm that day and he felt the concrete, hot against the thin white t-shirts they had made. (Field Notes, May 21, 2013)

Further, Marley commented:

We did something right. We got arrested because we want to get our point across. The system is set up to keep us down, like CPS (Chicago Public Schools) doesn't acknowledge this civil disobedience or our previous walkouts and protests. The group of us that were

10. The youth activists took this image. These images were posted to the youth activist twitter account that was formed so they could circulate the actions widely to the public.

arrested were held together before questioning. The room they had for us wasn't big enough so they split us up into groups of two. There was this officer processing our information. She said she agreed with us, like she agreed with what we were doing, but she said she couldn't protest with us or stand up with us because she is a cop. She was on our side. That made me feel good. People know that the Board of Education are putting forth racist policies that hurt kids. From where we were on the ground, you could see one of the windows of the school. It had kids cheering and then the blinds came down. Like they didn't want the little elementary school kids to see us or cheer for us from the school. (Field Notes, May 21, 2013)

Penny said: "They called us, 'the revolutionaries,' at school when we were walking down the hall today" (Field Notes, May 21, 2013). Amelia said: "We do activist things even though we're 'nothing'" (Field notes, May 21, 2013).

Discussion

A phrase that all the youth in this study repeated to me was, "It's a movement." This phrase reflected the literal movement across spaces, as in the walkout/protest, marches to CPS headquarters and board meetings, the die-in, and the protest and vigil on the day the board voted to close a historic number of schools. The "movement" also reflected the desires that were conjured for youth as they participated in activism, not viewing each move as a singular act but instead viewing their movement of ideas across time and space. Such "movement" also signals the larger process that youth were engaging in—the becoming something other than the fixed labels that were assigned to them through institutional labels. Striving to recognize the spaces in which youth constituted themselves in relation to the death of previous labels/identities is part of what I try to capture above by privileging youth voice and description of the experience—constantly asking who were the youth in these moments. This section discusses the ways that Deleuzian event connects to the death of the self, and then I discuss the notion of desires that emerged through the lens of event.

Event as a "Movement" and the Death of the Self

Deleuzian event enables us to witness and experience social identity formation through "ruptures," and "incomplete, always-in-process" tellings of youth desire and actions (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012, p. 750). Through the lens of event and alongside this data, we see youth engaging in a process of what Deleuze calls self-actualization—or as the youth stated, "bursting a bubble"—from their social reality to the realization that educational inequality existed. Youth recognized themselves as poor, "just regulars," in their school and even as "nothing" as Amelia stated to me. They recognized themselves as marginalized in particular spaces such as their low-income communities and "failing schools." Their voices were unheard and their bodies often rendered invisible in educational policy matters. Further, they were not allowed to speak in white spaces such as those of the Board of Education meeting. With each activist activity, youth generated ideas, new desires, and new acts to perform in their fight for justice. In this Deleuzian event, they faced new parts of themselves as social space was mapped by youth experience.

To elaborate, moments of self-actualization are critical in Deleuzian event because they offer a rupture, and a potential avenue to experience death(s) of particular subjectivities. In moments of self-actualization, Deleuze (1990) posits that subjects constitute themselves in relation to

the social space and the mingling of bodies, desires, and affinities across space. In a sense, the youth experienced this in the “die-in” when they performed the “die-in” and refused to speak, move, or be. While difficult to capture the meaning and truth telling around the event as the media cameras were filming, youth refused to speak, and thus they complicated the space as a space of death of themselves. The deaths were symbolic of their prior selves as “just regulars” and “nothings” on route to becoming “activists.” The tension exists is a productive one as youth shed, or kill off the former self of *being* nothing to *becoming* something.

Further, the “die-in” was a performative act in which they laid down in the intersection to represent possible deaths that would be an effect of school closure policy. The youth also engaged in a symbolic death against themselves as another self was constituted in the *process of becoming*, saying, “we’re not just regular. We’re activists.” They shed a self that was associated with the schools they attend in the communities in which they live to *become* the activist. Connecting to event with the moments from the data, Deleuze (1990) argues:

Every event is like a death. With every event, there is indeed the present moment of its actualization [youth’s bubble bursts, the realization that the school board’s policies are “racist”], the moment in which the event is embodied in a state of affairs, which we designate as “here, the moment has come” [Walkout, April 24, 2013, Die-in, May 15, 2013, Protests, May 22-25, 2013 as examples of such designation]. But, that which happens before and after is also wrapped up in this event—the movement that is “free of limitations.” (p. 151)

The “movement,” as youth put it, included moments free of limitations and self-actualization; moments such the “die-in” are made into a “state of affairs” because we call it a signifying moment in the youth experience. But, in Deleuze’s event, that which came before, in between, and after also are relevant. The youth experience of developing an awareness of the ways in which they were marginalized in their schools and in their communities is wrapped up in event. Despite the arrests, the policing of school administration to suppress any momentum around youth activism, and being silenced by the Board of Education, the youth were still able to develop a sense of social justice and a model for change beyond the moments designated here as having importance. For example, they said:

Marley: I mean I feel like I have learned and developed my view of social justice these last months. I feel like school is a place I at least began to learn and think about these issues, so education became connected to social justice for me but it moved beyond the classroom. What CPS is doing is not justice.

Penny: When we were put in the police car, it was exciting and we had a moment of feeling scared. We’re not nothing. We made these acts and changed what that intersection meant.

Marley: Even if the Board votes to close the 50 schools doesn’t mean our fight will end. This is a movement.

Penny: As long as there is humanity, there will be people to fight. It’s a movement. (Field Notes, May 21, 2013)

Each youth experienced themselves through the social processes—the movement of event. The process of experiencing self occurs in spaces that function to “erase” them as “regulars.” Such a

moment, for instance, was when they participated in the “die-in” demonstration, and as Penny noted above, the youth changed what that space of the intersection meant to people by “enlivening the space” with the materiality and vitality of their bodies and desires for social change (Doel & Clarke, 2011; Webb & Gulson, 2013). Youth claimed the street intersection and made it mean something on their terms to demonstrate to the community, the city, and the Board of Education that their policies have consequences. Further, Deleuze (1990) argues:

An event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us. It must be understood, willed, and represented in that which occurs...to will and release the event, to become the offspring of one’s own events, and thereby, to have one more birth, and to break with one’s carnal birth—to become the offspring of one’s events and not of one’s actions effectively liberates us from the limits of individuals and persons. (p. 150)

This quote speaks to how the use of event allows the critical ethnographer as well as the youth in this case to emerge from within the process—pure event—rather from external forces or through extracted meanings. In the space of event (the research site, the intersection, marches, or protests), youth emerge in relation to former selves as they become new selves. Youth activists became the “offspring” and break from institutional labels of “failure” or “at risk” to push the boundaries of what is made possible as they changed the meaning of the space during the “die-in.”

In the Moving is Death and Becoming

Additionally, the “die-in” was a symbolic act of violence and “erasure subjectivity in the sites of their marginality” (Kaplan, 1996, p. 86). This means, that while youth were demonstrating to fight the school board’s closure policy, there existed deeper meaning beyond the activity. Youth, deemed ‘regulars’ and failures by the Board of Education, engaged in a symbolic act of violence. After several protests at the Board of Education, youth remained steadfast despite a lack of acknowledgment of their actions by the board. One youth, Amelia, said, “I do activist things even though I’m nothing. The board and even some teachers here think we are nothing. But what? We can’t be activists?” In the moments of planning activist activities and engaging in the die-in, youth killed off the “regular” self to *become* an activist and to ultimately re-shape their identities in new ways that were meaningful to them. Deleuze’s notion of event helps to re-conceptualize the methodological practice and site as event. We not only disrupt normative work with this newly productive methodological practice but we can also encounter new opportunities for death and becoming, and opportunities to re-configure the critical “truths” as they are purely emerging in event. Simultaneously, as youth let go of ontological positions ascribed to them through labels such as “nothing” or “just regulars” to engage in productive deaths of the self, I as the critical ethnographer let go of normative social science practices, and I problematized my own methodological practices in order to orient myself in the social justice-oriented research space. In other words, I experienced a death of a particular way of being a researcher in the world toward becoming someone from within the youth-space of event.

Furthermore, the data reveals instances of youth identity formation as a process of committing violence against oneself across racialized spaces. In other words, youth—who are already marginalized through institutional structures and neoliberal accountability mechanisms in public

education—find ways to invent new versions of themselves across spaces of power. Deleuze (1995) argues:

Once one steps outside what's been thought before, once one ventures outside what's familiar and reassuring, once one has to invent new concepts for unknown lands, then methods and moral systems break down and thinking becomes, as Foucault puts it, a "perilous act," a violence, whose first victim is oneself. (p. 103)

Examples of youth venturing beyond what they know and generating activist activities reveal that they engage in this "perilous act" to kill off former selves that were limiting their opportunity to grow and transform. For instance, moving from the space of their school to the streets and marching downtown to Chicago Public Schools headquarters are examples of youth attempting to shape spaces that exclude them or spaces that are racially marked through deficit discourses.

The expanding notions of self and experience reflect the movement, transformation, liberation, and death of youth selves in Deleuzian event. Further, Deleuzian event (as a space and subject) is a process in which a subject comes into relation with oneself in a particular space, moving toward liberation (Deleuze, 1992; Humphrey, 2008). The moments from the data capture how youth "tear" up themselves, but also propel themselves into unknown worlds of social problems (Deleuze, 1994). In Deleuzian event, "states of affairs" such as a protest, a march, or an act of civil disobedience, reveal sensation and desire of youth for a more socially just educational policy and experience (Coldwell, 1997). Using Deleuze's notion of event, accounting for desire, movement, and liberation, we can begin to break the social spaces and theorize alternative forms of identity and the production of space on the terms of often unheard and marginalized groups. It is the desire for knowledge—for "more"—that sustains them. Penny claimed, "I just came to realize how valuable youth are when it comes to injustice" (Interview, June 3, 2013). It is the unsteady and uncertain desires these youth experience that enables them to experiment socially, culturally, and politically with their social identities and to produce youth cultural organizing; "It's a movement."

Significance: Toward a Methodology of Death

This article offers a new method of contingency by drawing on philosophical concepts such as Deleuze's notion of event and bringing them into the research process. If in critical work we are to break down normative systems of reason that govern action and possible selves for youth, then it begins with breaking out of traditional paradigms and problematizing the very use of the work critical as part of the research practice. The implications of using nuanced concepts such as event and performing them in the analytic process were intended to push our thinking about critical methodology. The act of disrupting normative discourses through methodological interventions is significant for theorizing ethnographic data through poststructuralist lenses.

Moreover, in this ethnographic study, I saw the circulation of youth desire and the movement and travel of their ideas across the social spaces we traversed. I captured moments when youth "tear" up themselves, but also propel themselves into unknown worlds of social problems (Deleuze, 1994). I witnessed symbolic deaths as part of the social relations in the research field. The process of identity formation (for participants and researchers alike) involves many deaths as Deleuze (1990) says in *The Logic of Sense*. Death (symbolic) of selves is part of the process of effecting change. Youth—marginalized by neighborhood segregation, unequal school funding sys-

tems, and their academic positioning of “regular”—kill of the selves that are tied to such marginalization, and their desires for change and activism reflect the “methods and moral systems” that break down as the youth commit “perilous acts” in an attempt to liberate themselves.

The challenge for me as an ethnographer was the “So what?” and the pending critique of what this work means. Part of the journey has led me to reconsider these important questions and to entertain the idea that indeed perhaps the researcher needs to undergo a death. This means, the stories and voices are not always easily represented, categorized, interpreted, or classified in neat packages. Perhaps, the social science ethnographer needs to die in the process of the messy human entanglements since thinking with Deleuze considers these acts of data analysis and representation to be “second order operations performed on the flux and movement of the world. They make things stand still and separate out, so that meaning, structure, and order may coalesce” (MacLure, 2013, p. 228).

Moreover, Deleuzian event enables new productive entanglements as part of one’s methodological practice. For instance, to disrupt normative social science paradigms, I had to disrupt my own critical ethnographic practice by problematizing the very paradigm I was working within. These moments of what I am calling a methodology of death were troubling, intimate, risky, and productive. I was able to become part of a larger set of social relations in relation to the social justice work of the youth as well as part of the research. In these productive spaces researchers can re-create themselves. As such, Deleuze (1997) argues a relevant point for bringing philosophical perspectives into the research process, he says, “People necessarily enter into conditions of becoming [and] invent themselves in new conditions of struggle, and the task of [researchers] is to contribute to the invention of this unborn people who do not yet have a language” (p. xlii). By disrupting our own practices even as we engage in them regardless of the risks, we make way for new possibilities and for opportunities to tell new truths, which perhaps include those that would otherwise remain hidden or marginalized.

Finally, Deleuze (1990; 1994) helps us understand that education for youth includes moments of contradiction, movement, and shifts in identities. This is particularly important for educational research on marginalized youth in low-income urban communities as they navigate power structures and move toward liberation. We as critical researchers must transform dualistic and essentialism paradigms that often govern social science research.

References

- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, 28(3), 801-831.
- Coldwell, C. (1997). Deleuze and Foucault: Series, Event, Genealogy. Retrieved from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v001/1.2coldwell.html
- Coleman, R., & Ringrose, J. (2013). *Deleuze and research methodologies*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dimitriadis, G. (2001). Coming clean at the hyphen: Ethics and dialogue at a local community center. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(5), 578-597.
- Deleuze, G. (1990). *The logic of sense*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1992). *The fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and repetition*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

- Deleuze, G. (1995). *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. M. Joughin. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1997). *Essays critical and clinical*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London, UK: Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy? (European perspectives)*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (1987). *Dialogues (European perspectives)*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Doel, M. A., & Clarke, B. (2011). Gilles Deleuze. In P. Hubbard & R. Kitchen (Eds.), *Key thinkers on space and place* (pp. 141-147). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Grinberg, S. (2013). Researching the pedagogical (Dispositif): An ethnography of the molar, molecular and desire in contexts of extreme urban poverty. In R. Coleman & J. Ringrose (Eds.), *Deleuze and research methodologies*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2006). *The practice of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Humphrey, C. (2008). Reassembling individual subjects. *Anthropological Theory*, 8(4), 357-380.
- Kaplan, C. (1996). *Questions of travel: Postmodern discourses of displacement*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Koro-Ljungberg, M., Carlson, D., Tesar, M., & Anderson, K. (2014). Methodology brut: Philosophy, ecstatic thinking, and some other (unfinished) things. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(7), 612-619.
- Kuntz, A. M. (2015). *The responsible methodologist : Inquiry, truth-telling, and social justice*. Walnut Creek, CA: Leftcoast Press.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lather (2001). Postbook: Working the ruins of feminist ethnography. *Signs*, 27(1), 199-227.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- MacLure, M. (2011). Qualitative inquiry: Where are the ruins? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(10), 997-1005.
- MacLure, M. (2013). The wonder of data. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, 13(4), 228-232.
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Masny, D. (2013). Rhizoanalytic pathways in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(5), 339-348.
- Mazzei, L. A. (2013). Desire undone: Productions of privilege, power, and voice. In R. Coleman, & J. Ringrose (Eds.), *Deleuze and research methodologies*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.
- Mazzei, L. A., & Jackson, A.Y. (2012). Complicating voice in a refusal to “let participants speak for themselves.” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(9), 745-751.
- McCoy, K. (2012). Toward a methodology of encounters: Opening to complexity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(9), 762-772.

- Noblit, G. W. (1999). *Particularities: Collected essays on ethnography and education*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Noblit, G. W., Flores, S. Y., & Murillo, E. G. (2004). *Postcritical ethnography: Reinscribing critique*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Patton, P. (1997). The world seen from within: Deleuze and the philosophy of events. *Theory and Event*, 1(1). Retrieved 2016, from http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/vol/1.1patton.html.
- Quantz, R.A. (1992). On critical ethnography (with some postmodern considerations). In M. D. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education* (pp. 447-506). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Rodriguez, S. (2015a). The dangers of compassion: The positioning of refugee students in policy and education research and implications for teacher education. *Knowledge Cultures*, 3(2), 112-126.
- Rodriguez, S. (2015b). "I hate my own race; the teachers just always think we are smart": Reconceptualizing the model minority stereotype as a racial epithet. In N. Hartlep (Ed.), *Modern societal impacts of the model minority stereotype* (pp. 205-230). Hershey, PA: IGI.
- Smagorinsky, P. (2008). The method section as conceptual epicenter in constructing social science reports. *Written Communication*, 25(3), 389-411.
- Stich, A. E., Cipollone, K., Nikischer, A., & Weis, L. (2012). Walking the methodological tight-rope: Researcher dilemmas inside an urban school district in times of public disinvestment. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(6), 463-474.
- St. Pierre, E., & Pillow, W. (Eds.). (2002). *Working the ruins: Feminist poststructural theory and methods in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tamboukou, M., & Ball, S. J. (2003). *Dangerous encounters: Genealogy and ethnography*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Villenas, S. A., & Foley, D. F. (2011). Critical ethnographies of education in the Latino/a diaspora. In R. Valencia (Ed.), *Chicano school failure and success: Past, present and future* (3rd ed., pp. 175-196). New York, NY and London, UK: Routledge and Falmer.
- Webb, T. P., & Gulson, K. N. (2013). Policy intensions and the folds of the self. *Educational Theory*, 63(1), 51-68.
- Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2004). *Working method: Research and social justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zourabichvili, F., Lambert, G., & Aarons, K. (2012). *Deleuze together with the vocabulary of Deleuze* (Plateaus - New Directions in Deleuze Studies). Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press.

Sophia Rodriguez is an Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations/Sociology at the College of Charleston, USA. Research interests include: education policy, immigrants and education, racial/ethnic identity formation, and qualitative inquiry. She was the Chair of the Foucault and Contemporary Theory SIG in the American Educational Research Association from 2011-2016. She is also a member of the American Educational Studies Association. Her published work can be found in *Global Studies of Childhood and Knowledge Cultures*.