



VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University
VCU Scholars Compass

Theses and Dissertations


Graduate School

2017

'The Writing Writes Itself': Deleuzian Desire and the Creative Writing MFA Degree

Ginger Walker
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Commons](#), [Art Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

© The Author

Downloaded from

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/4721>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.

© Ginger Marie Walker 2017
All rights reserved

“The writing writes itself”: Deleuzian desire and the creative writing MFA degree

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by Ginger Marie Walker
Bachelor of Arts
George Mason University, 2001
Master of Fine Arts
George Mason University, 2004

Director: William R. Muth, Associate Professor
School of Education

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
April, 2017

Acknowledgement

I'd like to thank my dissertation chair, Bill Muth, and my committee members, Ross Collin, Kurt Stemhagen, and Kirk Richardson. Much gratitude goes to Susan Watson, Nick Morgan, Ann Walker, and Annie Laurie Walker for their support. I am grateful, as well, for the four anonymous participants who provided writing samples for my project.

Table of Contents

List of figures.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Rationale.....	1
Broader context.....	2
Overview of the literature and methodology.....	4
Research/analytical questions.....	4
Research design.....	5
Literature review.....	6
Overview and critique of creative writing MFA programs.....	6
Graduate creative writing workshops.....	12
Problems with the graduate workshop.....	13
Theoretical approaches to understanding creative writing.....	14
Literature on Deleuze, creative writing, and writing pedagogy.....	18
A note about Deleuzian grammar.....	18
Literature on Deleuze and the author’s subjectivity (sense of self).....	20
Subjectivity as a “creative activity”.....	22
Deleuzian productive desire and writing pedagogy.....	24
Post-qualitative research and Deleuze in light of the literature.....	30
Methodology.....	33
Thinking-with-theory and interdisciplinary “plugging in”.....	33
Thinking-with-theory in the field of education.....	34
“Plugging in”.....	35
IRB and data collection overview.....	37
Findings.....	39
Part 1: Analysis of the collective writing sample.....	39
Fractured subjectivity.....	40
An altered state.....	41
“I just made fire”.....	43
Push and pull.....	43
Overview of findings in Part 1: Jackson and Mazzei’s models.....	45
<i>What is happening when writers write?</i>	45
<i>What are the desires that produce writing?</i>	45

Part 2: Rhizomatic reflections on the research/data assemblage.....	45
How to “read” the montage/data assemblage.....	50
Montage/data assemblage.....	52
Example reading of the montage/data assemblage.....	67
Overview of findings in Part 2: Major and minor language.....	69
Conclusions and recommendations.....	72
Subjectivity, Deleuzian desire, and creative writing pedagogy.....	72
The “moves” of literary analysis and thinking-with-theory.....	73
Necessary methodological contradictions.....	75
Recommendations for further inquiry.....	78
References.....	80
Appendix A: Study Information Sheet.....	87
Appendix B: <i>AWP Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing</i>	88
Appendix C: A note about “flow”.....	92

List of Figures

1.) Data montage/assemblage.....	52
2.) Research/inquiry structures.....	76

Abstract

“THE WRITING WRITES ITSELF”: DELEUZIAN DESIRE AND THE CREATIVE WRITING
MFA DEGREE

By Ginger Marie Walker, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017

Director: William R. Muth, Associate Professor
School of Education

This post-qualitative inquiry project investigated subjectivity (sense of self) among graduates of creative writing Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs. The project asked how subjectivity is involved in the creative writing process and how that process fuels further writing after a creative piece (such as the MFA thesis) is completed. A post-qualitative, thinking-with-theory approach was used to explore the role of subjectivity among four anonymous graduates of creative writing MFA programs who provided writing samples describing their creative writing processes. Following the thinking-with-theory approach, the data were analyzed using Deleuze and Guattari's theory of productive desire. Study findings are presented in two formats. First, a traditional, qualitative

presentation of findings describes how unconscious desires develop a beneficial weakening of subjectivity that may encourage creative writers to continue writing after completion of the MFA degree. Next, further findings are presented via a nonlinear, rhizomatic data assemblage. The project concludes with recommendations for the use of Deleuzian productive desire as a pedagogical framework in graduate-level creative writing courses, as well as a call for the consideration of post-qualitative research methods in the field of education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This project investigated how a writer's sense of subjectivity is involved in the creative writing process and how, after a piece of creative writing is produced, that piece might spark further writing. The study utilized the thinking-with-theory approach, a methodology informed by recent work in the field of post-qualitative inquiry. The analysis of the creative process among graduates of creative writing Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs, guided by Deleuze and Guattari's work on desire, was chosen to demonstrate the application of thinking-with theory.

Rationale

Educational researcher Maxine Greene (2001) believed in the power of questions, but her definition of "question" differs from the use of the word in the phrase "research question." Her "question" is a verb, not a noun, and her use of this verb is a call for the acknowledgement of the non-cognitive and unknowable in the world of educational research. An appreciation for the currently unanswerable lends an important aspect to academic research in all disciplines, but especially that of education, where the forming of young minds and spirits takes place. The world of creative writing can illustrate these concepts.

Studies guided by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990a) flow theory have attempted to quantify or otherwise organize the process of creativity in a "logical" manner. However, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) himself noted the contradiction in attempting to quantify the mysterious experience of artistic creation. The experience of crafting a written piece is very personal for the creative writer. This drive to achieve a private satisfaction cannot be quantified or represented using current qualitative methods, because it includes intuitive and unconscious features that are unknown and unnamable by the artist and researcher.

How the flow of creativity comes about is of interest to both producers and consumers

of creative writing. However, some academic researchers believe that the common methods of conducting research may not be appropriate for an examination of these questions. There is no standard trajectory for those who create art; there is no procedure or method that they can follow to guarantee results.

With these points in mind, this project explored the production of creative writing among Master of Fine Arts (MFA) graduates while attempting to work as an example of a new approach to educational research. This approach is known as post-qualitative inquiry.

Broader context

According to the physicist Karen Barad (2003) the procedures and methods of science (such as sampling, standard experimental designs, and statistical analysis) are *performed rituals* that will only reveal what they are proposed to reveal, leaving dimensions that are not addressed by the study's design or considered by the researcher unexplored. This unexplored area is known by Maxine Greene (2001) and others as "*the unanswerable*" or "*the unknowable*."

Post-qualitative researchers believe that published research reflecting or reinforcing the already-in-place goals of those in power has the potential to close doors to further exploration. MacLure (2013) observed, "[T]he price of knowledge gained is the risk of closure and stasis," (p. 662). For this reason, it may be beneficial for educational researchers to widen our definition of academic research to include explorations that do not necessarily lead to explanations, definitive results, or easily reportable facts.

MacLure (2013) offered two specific examples of phenomena drawn from a school context that could not be explained using traditional research methodologies: the case of Hannah, a five year old student who spoke normally with the exception of being unable to say her own name, and the case of another young student who vomited every day before lunch, for no apparent medical reason. According to MacLure, researchers working at the school tried to figure out what Hannah's inability to speak her own name and the other student's daily sickness "meant;" MacLure wrote, "Everyone wanted [these phenomena] to be codable—a sign of something else," (p. 663). However, attempts to code and analyze these examples could not lead to a precise understanding of them

causing MacLure to say they “sparked a kind of rage for explanation and meaning, as everyone sought to know *why* Hannah remained mute, what might have *caused* her silence, what it *meant*, whether or not it was *intentional*. In other words, what the silence *represented*,” (p. 662).

The post-qualitative approach argues that current research methodologies do not provide space for addressing Hannah and the student who became sick before lunch. Studies that target the “reasons” for these events using standard qualitative or quantitative methods would be based on assumptions (for example, the idea that these events and experiences have a central and reportable cause or meaning) built into the structure of the research methodology rather than the mysterious phenomena felt by Hannah and her schoolmate.

St. Pierre (2015) argued that today’s approaches to qualitative research have “become over-determined by the publishing industry, university research courses, and journals and books that detail very carefully what it is and how to do it” (p. 75). In other words, St. Pierre asks qualitative researchers to question the traditions of qualitative research and consider the powers at play behind these established structures.

These qualitative research structures must make space for the way in which “our world is plagued (or animated!) by innumerable problems for which we do not yet have answers” (Snaza et. al. 2014, p. 45). New lenses for thinking about qualitative research are necessary before one can “work at the edge of incompleteness” (Eisner, qtd. in St. Pierre, 2015, p. 81) and begin to reveal new questions and perspectives rather than use older methods that may reveal restrictive answers. A process of exploring questions without a demand for answers may provide us with more benefits than a prescriptive research process that offers us answers of only limited use.

An approach to research that begins with the premise that research questions may not be answerable is known by a variety of labels. For the sake of this project, I call it by St. Pierre’s (2015) term: *post-qualitative inquiry*, due to the fact that St. Pierre’s phrase acknowledges the way that this new approach to academic research builds on, yet breaks away from, the typical qualitative research paradigm.

Overview of the literature and methodology

An overview of the political and ethical foundation of post-qualitative work has been presented above. However, the term “post-qualitative” is not a methodology, and it does not provide an approach for collecting information and examples of this project’s specific topic of inquiry—the production of writing by creative writers. Considering the fact that post-qualitative research is more of an ethical stance than a methodology, a thinking-with-theory approach (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) was used to explore the production of creative writing among MFA graduates while attempting to adopt the spirit of post-qualitative inquiry through application of the work of post-structural philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Chapter two begins with an introduction to the structure of Creative Writing MFA programs, along with critique of these programs.¹ Next, a variety of theoretical lenses for viewing qualitative data on writing are presented. The chapter concludes with a focus on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and their concept of productive desire.

Chapter three develops Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) call for the use of theory to view and analyze qualitative data, and an explanation of my decision to use Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of productive desire in my analysis. Chapter three concludes with an overview of the data collection strategy and data analysis plan.

Chapter four presents findings in two parts. First, an analysis of writing samples provided by four graduates of Creative Writing MFA programs, using a thinking-with-theory approach based in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of productive desire, is presented. Following the analysis, I offer a first-person reflection on using thinking-with-theory to work through the research-assemblage resulting from the data analysis using Eakle’s (2007) data walking method. A discussion of the project’s limitations and suggestions for future work conclude chapter five.

Research/analytical questions

Deleuze viewed desire as a life-force that flows through and between people and objects

¹ The author of this study is a graduate of a creative writing MFA program. Their experiences have unavoidably shaped their view of these programs.

in the world, prompting continuous growth and change. Deleuzian desire theorizes that creative inspiration is an energetic, flowing process rather than a series of isolated sparks.

For this project, Deleuze's concept of productive desire was used with Jackson and Mazzei's thinking-with-theory approach to explore the following analytical questions:

- 1.) How is a writer's subjectivity (sense of self) involved (or uninvolved) in the production of creative writing?
- 2.) After a piece of creative writing is produced, how does that product fuel further writing?²

Research design

The project's design included writing samples collected from graduates of Creative Writing MFA programs. Following Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) thinking-with-theory approach, the data was viewed and discussed through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's (1972, 1987) concept of productive desire. As Jackson and Mazzei advocate, this project was not designed with the intention of answering research questions in compact and easily-reportable findings, but instead providing insight into MFA graduates' processes of writing creatively and making art.

² A more Deleuzian term would be "might," as it doesn't suggest that one piece of writing feeds into another. For this project and its IRB approval, however, "does" was used.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview and critique of creative writing MFA programs

Creative writing Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs are among the more competitive and popular graduate offerings at American universities. The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP), a nonprofit academic organization, serves as the major voice of the creative writing field in the United States. In addition to sponsoring the field's annual conference, maintaining a job list for MFA graduates, and producing *The Writer's Chronicle*, the field's primary publication, the organization's Board of Trustees developed guidelines for evaluating the quality of MFA programs (Association of Writers & Writing Programs, 2012). As of March 2017, the AWP's database of writing programs included over 900 listings.

Despite the popularity and proliferation of these programs over the past three decades, some scholars and journalists have demonstrated concern that the programs hold too much influence on the publishing field and work as mechanisms to produce reading material for the masses, rather than art or deeper learning among their students. Some of the main arguments in this controversy are detailed below.

In his essay, "An apologia for creative writing," Ron McFarland (1993), a professor of poetry and literature at the University of Idaho, provided a background on the debate over MFA programs and the argument that these programs are watering down literature. McFarland remarked that people have been complaining about the quality of poetry and fiction for decades; the only difference now is that the blame is being placed on universities. McFarland said that he understood these criticisms, but he believed that, overall,, MFA programs help writers and improve contemporary literature.

A stereotype of an instructor in MFA programs is that of a published fiction writer or poet

who “sold her or his poetic soul” (McFarland, 1993, p. 31) to take on a professor position. Many of the objections against MFA programs focus on complaints about the writer-as-professor and their supposed lack of enthusiasm for teaching. Another common complaint about the programs is the accusation that the writing produced in the programs is “chilled in the classroom, and vastly overproduced by men and women who are licensed to write it by degree if not necessarily by talent or spirit” (Joseph Epstein, qtd. in McFarland, p. 30).

McFarland argued against these complaints. He compared creative writing programs to sports, saying that getting rid of MFA programs would be like getting rid of major and minor leagues in baseball. He also noted that even though MFA programs face a lot of criticism, there is still a great demand for places in these programs; this means that writers are interested in what the programs have to offer and see value in them despite essays deriding the programs in popular media.

McFarland noted that one of the big tensions in English departments (which often house creative writing programs) lies between the creative writing professors, who want to focus on new writing and prepare their students for competition in the literary marketplace, and literature professors, who want to focus on “great works” of the past. McFarland argued in support of the creative writing professors, stating that it is very important for new writers to be familiar with other new writers, and not just the authors of classics. He also presented evidence against the complaint that MFA programs “certify” creative writers by saying that no college degree is an assurance that the graduate can actually *do* anything with the knowledge they’ve gained.

Citing and arguing against McFarland’s piece, David Radavich (1999), retired from Eastern Illinois University, asserted that creative writing has become “curricularized” (p. 107) since the popularity of MFA programs took off. He pointed out that in the past, writers (i.e., Allen Ginsburg, Amiri Baraka, and Jorge Luis Borges) turned away from the stodginess and hierarchy of universities. However, starting in the 1970s, writers began to return to universities and take up creative writing teaching positions in English departments.

As more MFA programs bloomed across the country, Radavich argued, they created a “new

class of credentialized creative writers” (p. 109). Programs produced MFA graduates, which the programs would then hire back to teach a new crop of undergraduate students. However, Radavich said, this cycle was flawed. He observed that MFA programs do not prepare their graduates for any specific job or employment, and very few MFA graduates receive full-time work teaching in MFA programs. Full-time and tenure track positions are reserved for best-selling authors, but lower level courses are often taught by MFA graduates working as adjunct professors. The glut of MFA graduates led to the development of PhDs in creative writing, which only exacerbated the problem.

Radavich said that during the 1980s, the popularity of creative writing classes made the creation of MFA programs seem like a good business choice for universities. However, by the 1990s, a “backlash set in” (p. 110) against the type of writing (seen as bland and commercialized) being produced by the programs. In addition, the “literary marketplace as creative writers have known it has collapsed on itself in recent years” (p. 110).

Radavich concluded his essay by offering three suggestions for fixing MFA programs. First, MFA programs should require students to take classes outside of the English and creative writing departments, in order to assure that the students are well-rounded and have sufficient skills for a varied job market. Second, he stated that MFA programs should not promote the idea of publication and popular acceptance as a means of valuing writing; instead, the programs should encourage a love of writing that is not rewarded by commercial means. Finally, MFA programs should move away from the idea that they bring out “self-expression” in writers and focus instead on communication with broader audiences and people outside of the literature world (p. 111).

Just as Radavich wrote in response to McFarland, David Fenza (2000) wrote in response to Radavich. Fenza’s rebuttal of Radavich was published in *The Writer’s News*, a newsletter for members of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), an organization that supports and publicizes MFA programs, of which Fenza is Executive Director.

Fenza began his article by stating that “free markets” have allowed artwork (including literature) to be produced at a higher rate than ever before. This flood of artwork has opened up new opportunities for critics who search for easy targets for their commentary. Fenza wrote that

most of the criticism of creative writing programs comes from people writing from a sensationalist perspective, rather than out of true concern for literature. He further disregarded the work of cultural critics by saying “In the anxiety of affluence, we need guides who will simplify our culture, and most punditry promises to do this.”

As the article continued, Fenza argued against the assertion that MFA programs are an assembly line that “produces” writers. Like McFarland, Fenza stated that the programs “help” writers, rather than “produce” them. He responded to Radavich’s argument that few creative writing instructors in universities receive tenure track positions by stating that “the goal of graduate study in creative writing is to become, first and foremost, an accomplished writer [...] All other goals, like becoming an academic professional, are ancillary to that artistic goal.” From here, Fenza continued to argue against the absorption of creative writing into the overall culture of universities, stating that many non-academic jobs are available to MFA graduates (pointing readers to the AWP’s job list), and saying that the academic job market is already saturated, so it makes no sense for creative writers to join the flood of qualified applicants for professor positions. He further refuted the argument that creative writers would be more engaged as “public intellectuals” if they became more immersed in academia by saying that phenomena such as Oprah’s book club and National Public Radio are venues for creative writers that reach broader audiences than traditional academic publications and conferences.

Fenza concluded his essay with a history of MFA programs and a list of reasons why creative writing classes are useful at the university level (for example, they contribute to a liberal education, they increase enrollment, and they “expand future audiences for literature”). He finished his article by arguing that the university-based MFA program is not “a huge monolith or Ivory Tower that stands apart from our general culture [...] It is a bit difficult to have ‘a university-based subculture’ when colleges and universities include students of almost every economic class, region, and ethnicity.” He finished by stating that his own MFA program was quite diverse, including both veterans and people of color.

Later writers had more critical views of MFA programs. Professor of creative writing and

literature at the University of New South Wales, Paul Dawson (2003) argued in favor of a new class of artist-scholar in a field he called the New Humanities. This interdisciplinary field blurs the line between the humanities and the social sciences, and Dawson wrote that creative writers are ideal participants in this burgeoning area.

Dawson made his argument by stating that creative writing as a discipline is polluted by the focus placed on breaking into the “literary establishment” (p. 163). This puts creative writers at odds with other members of academia. He observed that in the past, the “public intellectual”³ was typically the critic, and he offered a new approach to criticism: “oppositional criticism,” which is built on Marxist and Foucaultian approaches. The big question of oppositional criticism is “Can a literary intellectual do radical work *as* a literary intellectual?” (Frank Lentricchia, cited in Dawson, pp. 165-166).

Dawson said that creative writing is a field in which theory and practice stand in conflict. He recommended that theory be introduced in creative writing courses, arguing that post-structuralism has made this introduction appropriate. He further argued that creative writers need to be more active in society, rather than just create art that *reflects* society. He cited Pierre Bourdieu by noting that intellectuals are made by acquiring cultural capital, and that in this realm, the MFA degree holds some status and gives “the placeless writer” somewhere to reside in the “knowledge class” (p. 168) that is typically made up of members of traditional academic disciplines.

In order to encourage the role of public intellectual among creative writers, Dawson offered several recommendations. He said that creative writers who hold positions in universities need to receive credit for their “public writing” (i.e., essays and criticism that are not part of their typical creative genre). Like Radavich, he argues that the idea of “self-expression” should be downplayed in creative writing workshops; rather than promote the idea of the individual expressing their own emotions and ideas, the field of creative writing should promote social commentary and provoke universal ideas for a broader audience. He further agreed with Radavich, stating that creative

³ Dawson (2003, pp. 169-170) defined “public intellectual” as one who can “straddle the academic world [...] the exemplary figure of the New Humanities,” which he called “an institution with greater public influence” than might typically be associated with academe.

writing classes should present historical and critical approaches to writing and build research and other practical skills into their programs. Dawson concluded by remarking that the university is not a “neutral site” (p. 177). This lack of neutrality gives MFA programs the potential to develop as an arena for public intellectuals.

Elif Batuman (2010), essayist and writer for *The New Yorker*, also took a critical, Bourdieuan approach to examining MFA programs. Her article, titled “Get a real degree,” begins as a review of Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*, a book detailing the history of MFA programs in the US. Batuman used the opportunity of writing a review of McGurl’s book to examine problems with the MFA culture.

Batuman’s main grievance with MFA programs is the way that cultural diversity is commodified in the programs. Citing the phenomenon of the *Stuff White People Like* blog, Batuman wrote, “non-white, non-college-educated or non-middle or upper-class people may write what they know, but White People have to find the voice of a Vietnamese woman impregnated by a member of the American army that killed her only true love.” She quoted Sandra Cisneros, who wondered during her MFA years, “What could I write about that my classmates, cultivated in the finest schools in the country like hothouse orchids, could not?”

Using the examples of white authors such as Robert Olen Butler and Dave Eggers, who have written from the perspective of non-white and non-male characters, Batuman highlighted what she called “high cultural pluralism,” or “striving to describe the greatest possible disjuncture from some static, imagined cultural dominant” which is middle and upper class white readers of literature. This issue, Batuman says, insults people of non-white ethnicity as well as giving the “implication that children of privilege don’t have stories to tell.”

The closing paragraphs of Batuman’s article presented an indictment of MFA programs. She wrote, “Literary writing is inherently elitist and impractical [...] Because writing is suspected to be narcissistic and wasteful, it must be ‘disciplined’ by the writing workshop [...] Pretending that literary production is a non-elite activity is both pointless and disingenuous. It’s not possible to be a writer and non-elite [...] Writing, especially nicely turned prose, demands a certain surplus of

money and leisure.” In addition, Batuman argued against Dawson’s idea that creative writing can be a force for social change, saying that it is contradictory to believe that a novel that succeeds as a well-constructed piece of artwork and as a source of entertainment will also change the world.

Those in support of keeping the status quo in the programs (i.e., McFarland and Fenza) used as their evidence the popularity of MFA programs in comparison to other programs and majors at universities, and that the almost-guaranteed full-enrollment of these programs makes it hard for a business-minded university to turn away from them. This means that, despite arguments that MFA programs may thrive on elitism and demean their own graduates with under-paid adjunct work, the capitalist structure of today’s university will continue to perpetrate them.

Graduate creative writing workshops. The writing workshop is an entrenched tradition in college-level creative writing courses.⁴ For many students and instructors in college creative writing programs, the idea of teaching a creative writing course outside of the workshop format would be as unthinkable as teaching a cinematography class without video cameras, or teaching painting without paint and paint brushes. For members of creative writing communities on college campuses, the workshop is the heart of the program, its defining experience (Vanderslice 2011).

The traditional college level creative writing workshop involves very few, but very specific, procedures (Vanderslice 2011, Swander 2005). First, students in the workshop provide copies of a current work-in-progress or complete draft to their classmates and the workshop instructor. The instructor typically is a published writer (the more prestigious the writing program, the more well-known the author). Prior to workshop, the class and the instructor take the copies home, read them over and “mark them up” (i.e., annotate them and write notes for the author). During the workshop, the author’s classmates discuss her work, making suggestions on how it can be improved and prepared for publication. Traditionally, the author is not allowed to respond to comments or critiques, but must instead sit quietly and absorb the advice of her peers.

The ritual of the creative writing workshop began on American college campuses in the 1890s and grew in popularity with the introduction of the GI Bill following World War II. The

⁴ For more commentary on graduate creative writing workshops, see Donnelly (2010).

writing workshop is “a place where [...] writers could be hardened to critics, where success could be claimed if a student (usually a female) occasionally and apocryphally (for we know writers are great storytellers) fainted after a particularly rigorous session” (Vanderslice, 2011, p. 79). Created in the model of “boot camp” or sports coaching, the style appealed to the male students who had experienced actual boot camp as soldiers or through their sports training earlier in life (Swander, 2005).

Vanderslice (2011) pointed out that the traditional MFA workshop method is product-centered, leaving out attention to the process of writing. Students bring their “drafts” in as complete, plot-formed stories or complete poems. The process of writing the piece typically is not addressed in the workshop. Entire courses can be taught via workshop—with the only assignment, “Bring in a story or poems next week for workshop.” From here, the pieces are shared with the class, who provide critical and positive feedback and direct the writer toward revision.

With years of tradition behind it, many creative writing students who have completed MFA degrees in the discipline likely equate their graduate school experience with the workshop format. However, over the years, this teaching format has faced a good deal of criticism, a few salient points of which are discussed below.

Problems with the workshop. Criticism of the college writing workshop format falls into several categories. These include concern that the format damages students psychologically, that it is too male-centered and too Eurocentric, and that it hinders creativity.

Gray (1999) observed that by asking fellow writers to critique a peer’s writing, the workshop actually is asking the peers to imagine how they would write the story or poem if writing it were their responsibility. However, since the peers are not the authors of the piece, they do not have the artistic authority to tell the writer what to do. They can make suggestions, but ultimately the piece does not belong to them. By putting the peers’ criticism on the same level as the author’s vision, the workshop format plays down the power of artistic inspiration and waters down the author’s intentions. Since in the traditional workshop, the author is not permitted to talk or explain her choices, she is not allowed to clarify misunderstandings of the piece on the part of her classmates.

If a workshop reader does not understand or agree with a passage or a verse, this is treated like a flaw in the writing rather than a flaw in the reader's understanding.

Swander (2005) and Kearns (2015) both remarked that the interactions in MFA creative writing workshops privilege masculinity and whiteness. Swander cited linguist Deborah Tannen on the different ways that men and women interact and communicate with each other, and how graduate workshop rituals follow a more masculine form of interaction. Kearns cited African-American authors such as Toni Morrison and Amiri Baraka who crafted creative writing using the storytelling patterns of the African-American community—patterns that may not be respected or understood in a white, masculine workshop atmosphere. Kearns also argued that the tradition of the “author's gag order” (p. 792) in the workshop-style classroom is dangerous and offensive because it echoes the history of silencing that women and people of color have faced in male and Eurocentric societies. Rather than open the floor to the perspective of writers that may differ greatly from that of the reader and allow for increased understanding, the traditional MFA workshop format forces authors to remain silent and swallow the criticism of readers who may never have considered the voices and stories of those from different backgrounds.

Radavich (1999) further warned against potential damage done by the workshop method—not only to authors, whose artistic drive and expression may be crushed by ignorant comments in workshop, but also to the writing produced as a result of workshop. Radavich warns against the “k-mart-ization” (p. 110) of literature and poetry that can come from the workshop process.

Some practices and criticism of MFA pedagogy are described above. These descriptions show a concrete world that the writer enters into, interacting with other writers and dealing with the affects of social constructs.

In contrast, the theories of creative writing that follow below demonstrate an abstracted world of writing removed from the institutional structures of MFA programs.

Theoretical approaches to understanding creative writing

Merlou-Ponty (1964) highlighted the connection between philosophy and fiction, claiming that philosophy and fiction accomplish the same results. Fiction, Merlou-Ponty believed, gives

context and meaning to philosophy (1964b, p. 28). If painting reflected seeing, then writing reflected thinking (1964a, p. 129). According to Deleuze and Guattari, this thinking/writing is intrinsically active. It is a “state of becoming” (1987, p. 276). Deleuze and Guattari discussed the production of writing as a type of guiding framework or “line.” A writer can have a general idea of where their story or poem will take them, but it is the writing process itself that shapes this journey.⁵ In this way, the production of writing is like moving blindly along an unfolding line. This blindness lends a “fictitious voice” to all writing (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, p. 205).

Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas of language were shaped by the work of Derrida. Derrida believed that words and ideas (the sign and the signified) are connected by a “trace” or track (Spivak 1974), something like a wafting fragrance that allows the two to be related to each other, yet always absent from each other. Derrida called this idea the “absence of a presence,” because the word could never be what it signified; in order to be a sign, it had to be removed from what it signaled. As a means of demonstrating this concept, Derrida wrote phrases in ~~striketrough~~, which he called “under erasure;” this way of writing allowed Derrida to twist and change written language in ways that cannot be signified through speech.

Carrying on some of the themes of Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari’s observations of writing, Butler (1990) said that creativity and imagination empower diverse writers by allowing them to use signs instead of being a “sign object” of another group (p. 51). Butler called attention to the concept of playful “masquerade,” (pp. 46-47) and the importance of writing in creating alternative accounts of reality (p. 36). Butler said that writing and language are types of performativity, an active creation or performance guided by the writer or speaker. And like Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari, Butler also noted the fictional nature of all writing. In Butler’s view, this fictional nature is most apparent when we try to “narrate ourselves” (2001, p. 26). Butler argued that consciousness can not be narrated. When we write and speak about ourselves, we work within a “web of relations” (like the lines and assemblages of Deleuze and Guattari’s observations) that moves us back and forth between what we realize and what we do not realize, and we cannot be

⁵This idea is further elaborated on below.

conscious of all of these shifts (p. 34).

The theorists mentioned above addressed writing and language as a production not necessarily shaped by the author or speakers' conscious (or unconscious) intention. They also observed that writing does not produce a singular product, but instead plays an active role in supporting our conception of the world. Building on these theories in the field of education, Greene (1988) said that one's desire to speak and write signified an "awareness" of freedom, a sense of agency that offered the potential to change the world (1988, p. 11). Greene used the phrase "author of our world" to describe the action taken in the space of this freedom (p. 22). Greene's work addressing art education highlighted the importance of the arts (including creative writing) as an empowering way to remind students of their freedom to express themselves and take action in their worlds. Greene observed that capital can be used to stifle freedom,⁶ and that the commoditization of the arts can remove them from their liberating potential. Deleuze and Guattari further observed this, warning that as soon as an artwork is recognized as art, it becomes a kind of "machine" (1977, p. 368) and connects into the machine of capitalism and despotism rather than liberation.

Moving away from existential and post-structural philosophy into less abstract visions of writing, the element of all writing as inherently fictional remains. Literature scholar Genette (1980) argued that the narrator in a written piece is always fictional, even if "assumed directly by the author" (p. 213). Connecting with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of writing lines and Derrida's erasure, Genette stated that narrating always "leaves traces" of the author, and that elements from the cultural setting in which the author works, and the author's moods and emotions, "invade" creative writing (p. 214, 259).

Genette's work built on Bakhtin's (1986) theory of dialogic writing, which presented language as the primary way people utilize agency and develop themselves as subjects in day-to-day life. Bakhtin also introduced the idea of heteroglossia, which is his term for the tension between language's tendency to become organized and structured on one hand, while on the other hand simultaneously and constantly becoming reshaped and altered by individuals' use of language

⁶ For more on cultural capital and its implications, see Bourdieu (1991).

in society (Middendorf, 1992). Bakhtin, like the theorists above, also used fiction as a way to understand our world, saying, “pure everyday life is fiction, a product of the intellect” (1986, p. 154).

Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990a) further echoed the idea of writing as a “state of becoming.” Writing, in Csikszentmihalyi’s words, is a “disciplined means of expression [that] brings order [...] to self communication” (p. 131).⁷ Furthermore, Csikszentmihalyi offered a framework for beginning to think about the lived experience of writers and other artists with his concept of flow. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow requires the following elements: clear, goal-oriented tasks; an environment that allows for complete absorption in the task; instantaneous feedback or an ability to quickly evaluate one’s progress at the task; effortless yet intense involvement; a sense of pleasure; reduced self-consciousness; and a feeling that time is slowing down (p. 49).

Greene, Genette, Bakhtin, and Csikszentmihalyi’s work on writing from the fields of education, literary theory, and psychology reflected ideas presented in the existential and post-structural theories of Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari, and Butler: The connecting thread in these theories is the concept of writing as a means of creation, a support mechanism that runs parallel to (or “passing underneath,” in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, or as an “absent presence” in the words of Derrida) the production of writing. Similarly, the assertion that all writing has an imaginative, fictitious quality to it (a type of “masquerade,” to use Butler’s language) is also present in these theories.

The theoretical approaches to creative writing and fiction run in contrast to the structures of MFA programs noted and critiqued above. The theorists described writing, language, and the possibilities of fiction as mechanisms for developing one’s understanding of oneself as a subject in the world. The use of the phrase “fiction” is more abstract and flexible in the theorists’ work compared with the concrete meaning of “fiction” as an artistic genre in the sources on MFA programs.

⁷For further studies on flow theory as it applies to creative writing, see Forgeard, Kaufman & Kaufman (2013), Morgan (2002), Perry (1996), and Schere (1998).

The theorists spoke of writing and language as more than tools, but as essential elements of life available to all. The controversies surrounding MFA programs, and the rigidity of the workshop structure, seem to leave little room for addressing the vitality and benefits of creative writing within the MFA's institutional structures in a way that looks beyond the production of a completed, published work.

Literature on Deleuze, creative writing, and writing pedagogy

Some of the theories of Gilles Deleuze have already been mentioned above. A more in-depth examination of Deleuzian ideas about writing is necessary, however, because this project utilized Deleuze and Guattari's theory of productive desire in the data analysis.

A note about Deleuzian grammar. Deleuze viewed *becoming* as a continuous flow of time and change for which there is no original starting point. The grammar and language he used reflected his philosophy. As a result, scholars writing from a Deleuzian perspective often utilize Deleuze's unique grammar as well.

This can be seen most commonly in the use of infinitives. Colebrook (2002), explaining Deleuze's sentence structure and syntax, said

Instead of thinking that there are pre-given objects—a tree which is green, a subject who thinks—the infinitive expresses the event [or *becoming*]: 'to green,' 'to think,': the infinitive—"to think," "to green," "to act," "to write," "to be"—does not admit of a division between what something is and what it does. There is the event itself and not some prior transcendence at which the event would be an act" (Deleuze, qtd. in Colebrook, p. 34).

Bogue (1996) noted that Deleuze put a special effort into removing himself from his writing to the greatest extent possible. Bogue wrote, "What Deleuze eliminates in his writing is the personal—the anecdotal, memory-laden, intentional subject. The goal of writing, says Deleuze, is becoming-imperceptible" (p. 252). This goal, combined with Deleuze's use of infinitives, gives Deleuze and Guattari's writing a tone that can feel stilted and overly formal to some readers.

The following glossary of terms is provided with the hope of helping qualitative researchers become more comfortable with the use of Deleuzian theory and language.

- *Affect*: A reaction to something in the world. For example, affect could be used to describe

the connection a reader has with a novel or a viewer has with a piece of visual art.

- *Being versus becoming*: Summary of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's thesis that life is never static (a state of *being*), but a continuous shifting flow of transformation and uncertainty (a state of *becoming*).
- *Body without organs (BwO)*: Deleuze's philosophy that there is no original starting point for life or our world. He called this idea the Body without Organs. The emphasis in this term is not so much "body" or "organs," but "without," because the BwO concept focuses on Deleuze's idea that "life is the power or potential to produce relations, not a set of relations among already distinct substances" (Colebrook, 2002, p. 63). The BwO is "prehuman, prelinguistic," and can be seen as "an abstract machine, as chaos, as difference in itself" (Colebrook, 2002, p. xlii).
- *Deleuzian (productive) desire*: Deleuze and Guattari's argument that desire is not a negative need to fill a lack or void, but a positive, unending drive to produce growth and change.
- *Desiring-machine/assemblage*: Terms that describe life as a machine built on assembled connections. These connections are not only physical, but also psychological, emotional, political, and artistic. This machine-of-life is fueled by productive desire. (Or, in other words, desire assembles the connections that make up the desiring machine/assemblage.)
- *Minority/majority*: Rather than a reference to numbers (for example, a majority of a population) these ideas reflect beliefs held in our world. Majority reflects a belief generally taken as true and correct, while minority reflects a belief that goes against tradition or the status quo. For example, traditional research methods follow the majority; post-qualitative concepts are in the minority.
- *Rhizomatic/arborescent*: Deleuze and Guattari used botanical metaphors to describe two ways of thinking about how things (including bodies, art, politics, writing, et cetera) are organized in the world. The arborescent view is organized hierarchically and vertically, with one thing building on another just as a tree grows taller over time. The rhizomatic view is non-hierarchical; in this view, things follow an unpredictable, nonlinear network

resembling the roots of rhizomatic plants.

- *Territorialization/deterritorialization*: The process by which the majority belief is replaced by what was previously the minority, and the continuous cycle by which this new majority is eventually unseated and replaced by another minority. This can also apply to a person's individual beliefs.
- *Transcendence/immanence*: Transcendence is Deleuze's term for what is typically thought of as outside of ourselves. It includes the taken-for-granted structures of our world. Immanence is what we typically think of as "experience" (Colebrook, 2002, p. xxix) or feelings. It is close to us, rather than outside of us. For example, religion could be considered transcendental because it asks us to look for a higher power and rules above and outside of ourselves; a "religious experience" or moment of religious conversion could be considered immanent, because these are intimate and not assumed to be shared by others.

According to Vagle (2016), Deleuze and Guattari's theories are "anti-method," and in order to apply Deleuzian theories in analysis, the researcher must be willing to "go to places and spaces from concepts [and] find conditions in which new things can occur." Creative writing, as a form of art, is suited to this sort of "anti-method" analysis because Deleuze considered art as more than representation, but as a way to see how representations are formed (Colebrook, 2002). In line with a post-qualitative framework, Deleuze considered writing as an "open and almost involuntary response to the events of one's time" (Colebrook, 2002, p. xxxiii).

Literature on Deleuze and the author's subjectivity (sense of self). It is common to view writing as something centered in the human body. In order to turn thoughts into writing that can be shared, a writer has to take bodily action of some kind, whether typing, writing in longhand, or dictating. Deleuze offered a definition of bodies that goes beyond the physical, however, saying that bodies are also "cultural and political, textual and visual, corporal and abstracted—and all of these things, both at once and potentially. Bodies [...] reside on a spectrum between relative fixity and radical flux" (Richardson 2013, p. 155). Richardson (2013) said that writing comes from these bodies-in-flux when the bodies come into contact with the Deleuzian concept of affect (a reaction

to something in the world). Quoting Massumi's belief that bodies exist in a "dimension of pressing potential" (qtd. in Richardson, 2013, p. 157), Richardson theorized that affect, combined with this "pressing potential," could produce creative writing.

Though Richardson did not address the idea of the writer's subjectivity in his piece, Deleuze's concept of bodies and affects is based in a worldview uncentered from the human subject. Baker (2013) asserted that creative writing could bring about the construction and deconstruction of a writer's subjectivity, illustrating Deleuze's value of becoming. In Baker's article, writers' sexualities are shaped by Deleuze's idea of repetition, in which each revisiting of a concept changes that concept slightly. In this way, repetition leads to a continuous state of *becoming* rather than a stable *being*.

Baker contrasted the idea of a linear, "genius" model of creative writing (in which a writer portrays their self-identity in a final work but does not challenge that identity) and a Deleuzian-influenced view in which creative writing works an unconscious way in which the author's subjectivities become entangled with other affects, which shift as the author writes and re-writes, creating a piece that is always in a state of becoming rather than a static product.

Musser (2012) further incorporated Deleuze's ideas about writing and subjectivity by examining Deleuze's observation that writing, like physical acts of masochism, sparks desubjectification. Musser said that, according to Deleuze, pain "is a reaction to the injury of subjectivity [...] it stimulates affects and creates experience" (pp. 141-142). Looking at this suggestion alongside Richardson's idea about affect and the "pressing potential" of writing, as well as Baker's argument that a revision-focused approach to creative writing allows for the continuous construction and deconstruction of the writer's subjectivity, provides further evidence for the use of Deleuze's work in the examination of creative writing and subjectivity.

Theorists such as Butler and Foucault have argued that writing develops and strengthens the writer's sense of subjectivity (Baker 2013). Deleuze's belief that writing can be separated from the writer (the "I") presents a contrasting view. It's reasonable to ask what benefits can be drawn from the Deleuzian framework that are not gained from the theories of Butler, Foucault, and others

who see writing as a way to build subjectivity rather than break it down. Some of these benefits are discussed below.

Subjectivity as a “creative activity.” The poet and novelist Thomas Bernhard said, “I existed only when I was writing” (qtd. in Cixous, 1993, p. 11). This quote suggests that writers both rely on their subjectivity (producing writing that comes from the *inside*, for consumption and praise by *outside* readers) while also chafing against it.

Reversing the Bernhard quote demonstrates a flipped version of the problem: if Bernhard “exists only when” writing, then he writes only when he “exists.” While writers undoubtedly rely on subjectivity (or a sense of self) to a great extent, subjectivity also restricts them. Too little self-awareness cuts a writer off from writing in ways that are relatable for readers. Without a sense of an audience beyond them, a writer with a weakened sense of subjectivity may not feel the push to put their ideas into words at all.

As noted above, Deleuze claimed that the goal of writing is “becoming-imperceptible” (Bogue, 1996, p. 252). From a Deleuzian perspective, if writing is an attempt to gradually unravel the writer-subject until it is no longer “perceptible,” then the reverse is also true: The subject-writer is something initially “raveled”—woven, organized, or, in other words, created. The subject (the author’s sense of self) does not exist on its own. Semetsky (2013) observed that Deleuze considered subjectivity a “creative activity.” Rather than a given, the Deleuzian subjective point of view and sense of self is a constructed tool that can be used to see the world, while simultaneously separating us from the world.

According to Colebrook (2002), “Western [Cartesian] thought begins with the subject who views the world, assuming a strict distinction between viewer and viewed. There is *a* world, perceived from a number of viewpoints, and these views of the world can be assessed according to their correctness and fidelity” (p. 161). In order for this singular world (and its various viewpoints) to be conceivable through subjectivity, however, a system of signs is necessary; the sign “I” is necessary before a person can think of themselves as an “I” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 16). Massumi (1992) said that these signs and the subject they create are a “set of strategies” (p. 26): tools to

create our sense of the world and our sense of ourselves. These “strategies” include language.

Through Deleuze’s view of a creatively constructed subjectivity, the subject (the “I”) puts together a story about that “I” and lives their lives as the central character of this story. Guattari (2002) said, “I do not believe there exists a subjectivity that does not produce a narrative text” (p. 241). The importance of a creative, fictitious element as essential to our concept of life is seen frequently through the literature on writing, cited above (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, p. 205; Butler, 1990; and Genette, 1980).

There are numerous possible benefits to an “I”-less, fictitious, creatively-constructed viewpoint, if one is willing to experiment with this alternate image of thought. These benefits are especially useful for writers and other artists. Grosz (2008) and Rajchman (2000) argued that the intuitive sensations (Deleuze’s affects) we feel when interacting with art are pre-subjective. If we are stuck in a subject/object framework, we will never be fully aware of art’s possibilities.

From a pedagogical perspective, the degree to which a teacher values subjectivity can shape the way a writing class unfolds. According to Snaza and Lensmire (2006) traditional k-12 writing workshop instruction relies on the idea of an author’s subjectivity—often called “voice” in this context.⁸ This traditional approach to writing instruction focuses on writing as a means of expressing an author’s individuality and personality. Snaza and Lensmire describe these methods as asking writers to “burrow deep into subjectivity, to discover your authentic, true nature” (p. 2). Within a Deleuzian framework, however, this approach is problematic because it will “render student voice as surprisingly static and undeveloping [while] a sense of student voice as dynamic or in-process can be lost when the complexities and struggles of actually speaking and writing in classrooms are ignored” (Snaza and Lensmire, 2006, pp. 2-3).

From a traditional, western-centered, Cartesian viewpoint, self-expression, praise, and

⁸ In the k-12 context, strong evidence exists for the benefit of the “voice” concept. Snaza and Lensmire cite Calkins (1986) and Graves (1983) as proponents of these benefits in their paper. However, the k-12 workshop and the graduate writing workshop significantly differ in structure and aim. Though Snaza and Lensmire argue against “voice” in the k-12 workshop, I believe that their argument is suited to the graduate workshop as well. (And possibly *better* suited to graduate writing workshops than k-12 workshops; see below.)

attention are obvious motivating factors for many writers. However, if we instead think with the Deleuzian view of a writer's subjectivity as a constructed, crafted event, then we should also ask: what propels this construction? According to Deleuze, the answer to this question is *desire*.

Deleuzian productive desire and writing pedagogy. For many, the definition of "desire" requires some variation on the fulfillment of a lack. This type of desire—a desiring lack, in Deleuzian terms—is easily associated with sex: sexual desire is fulfilled by sexual consummation. Simply put, desire is frequently seen as the filling of a void. The lack of the thing desired is the beginning of a line that ends with fulfillment of that lack. For example, a hungry person desires food. After eating, their hunger is gone, along with the desire for food.

Deleuze and Guattari provided a concept of desire that is not based in lack or any sort of ultimate fulfillment or conclusion. Their desire is a kind of life-force that creates and produces societies, living things, concepts, and art (Colebrook 2002). Their definition of desire subsumes and is broader than the lacking-desire concept discussed above.

Unlike lack-based desire, Deleuzian desire bypasses a dualistic, Cartesian sense of self as a subject standing apart from the world. Colebrook (2002) wrote that lack-based, "negative" desire requires a subject who desires and an object of desire. In contrast, Deleuzian desire is a positive kind of "creative striving" (pp. 98-99). Productive desire doesn't require the concept of a subject/object binary. Instead, "desires are not images we have of what we lack; desires are positive events" (pp. 99-100). Seeing desire as a productive event rather than a subject's attention toward an object allows for a new definition of desire that breaks away from "the human" and instead exists as a "flow of life" (p. 100).

A popular illustration of Deleuze and Guattari's idea of productive desire is the use of their phrase "desiring machine" in terms of a capitalist economy. As noted in the "glossary" above, Deleuze and Guattari's desiring machine is a metaphor for the way desires assemble individuals, ideas, affects, and actions together in order to produce the events that make up life. In the capitalist economy example, advertisements highlight a consumer product's idealized features, promising that the product can add joy and empowerment to the consumer's life. Marketing fuels the

consumer's desire for the product, drawing the consumer into a cycle of working, desiring, and spending in order to possess the desired product, which leads to more work: in other words, the "machine" of the capitalist economy relies on the endless production of desires rather than the fulfillment of desires (Cole 2012).

Creative writing MFA programs themselves illustrate this model. Potential MFA students who desire the opportunity to gain a degree through the labor of their writing create high demand for places in such programs compared to other graduate programs in the arts or humanities (McFarland, 1993). Since the creative writing degree itself often is not the object of desire, but a symbol of one's desire to be recognized for their writing effort, the desiring machine of the MFA program is perpetrated by the movement of MFA graduates into low paid adjunct instructor positions or teaching positions unrelated to creative writing (Radavich, 1999). These positions function as a capital-generating "holding place" while the graduate continues to write in the hopes that their work will someday be considered more than "surplus labor" (Goodchild, 1996), but instead a product desirable enough to consumers that it can enter into the machine that produced it. For many writers, however, the desire to write will continue even if the writing produced is not economically valued.

As noted above, Deleuze's concept of productive desire—a life and society generating desire, rather than a lack-based desire—is the focus of this project. While demand and supply (in other words, cycles of desire and fulfillment) are necessary for the desiring machine of capitalism, productive desire in art relies on unpredictable possibilities and the drive to create new phenomena regardless of its economic worth. Rajchman (2002, p. 13) said that Deleuzian desire is not "based in sacrifice or privation," but connection. For artists, a desire based in lack (for instance, lack of fame or financial income) is "the melancholy model of the blank page or empty canvas." In contrast, Deleuze's productive desire allows artists to overcome the burden of art that came before them: the "too many clichés, too many possibilities" that must be pushed aside to allow for the creation of truly new works (Rajchman, 2002, p. 13).

Goodchild (1996) argued that productive desire works in both directions: desire not only

produces itself indefinitely, but desire propels production of all types. The desiring machine model—including the desiring machine of capitalism—is always producing, and countless, varied things are produced. Goodchild offered the comparison of technological advancements to artwork. He argued that artistic production differs from technological production in that “where the production of technical machines is decided in advance, the production of the work of art is a psychic effect on the viewer that cannot be predicted in advance” (p. 185). Goodchild wrote, “Every production of a work of art follows a line of flight, escaping dominant presuppositions [...] unlike labour, art wishes to tear open the firmament and plunge into chaos” (p. 187).

Goodchild (1996) demonstrated how Deleuze and Guattari used the novel as an example of ways art can become chaotic and challenge the writer/artist’s subjectivity. [These observations mirror the work of Derrida (Spivak 1974) and Genette (1980) mentioned above.] Goodchild, in his interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the novel, wrote,

Many novels are constructed in the manner of a diarist or journalist: one reports observations, feelings, opinions; one relates situations one has encountered and people one has met. Such novels express the significations and subjectivity of the author, especially when they are not explicitly biographical. For the leading character, or subject of the statement, is constructed as a constant subject even if this character is not a double of the author. The implicit presuppositions of such works become clearly stated constants. For a novel to become a ‘work of art,’ however, the implicit presuppositions must be constructed at the same time as the text. Art has to attain an immanent plane of composition, where the assemblage of the components is determined not by some pre-established code or territory, or a set of implicit presuppositions, but by experimentations of desire in the form of becomings (p. 187).

In other words, a Deleuzian novel is only a work of art when it is not pre-structured or planned with a specific goal in advance and a constant subject in mind. Elements of the text (plot, descriptions, characters) must unfold simultaneously with the text itself in the spirit of experimentation. The author must undergo de-subjectification of the author (or, in Deleuze’s terms, deterritorialization of the author-subject) in order to produce the novel as a work of art through productive desire.

While work has been done on desire and affect in educational settings,⁹ little literature focused on Deleuzian desire's role in pedagogy exists. Zembylas (2007) offered a broad definition of pedagogy (“[...] the relational encounter among individuals through which many possibilities for growth are created,” p. 332) and argued for the application of productive desire in pedagogical settings. Zembylas asserted, “desire is not just a feeling or an emotion but a *force* influencing the subject's mode of existence” (p. 336). Working with the idea of productive desire, rather than desiring-lack, has the potential to alter an instructor's (or MFA program's) approach to writing pedagogy.

It can be argued that the pedagogy of productive desire applies to graduate level fine arts programs more so than other educational contexts. Because students in graduate writing workshops have had the opportunity to develop their sense of self, their subjectivities do not have the vulnerability of children's subjectivities in the k-12 context. Writers who come to MFA programs are likely to already have a sense of the “voice” Snaza and Lensmire (2006) discussed and are ready to grow by having that “voice” challenged.

Along these same lines, Zembylas (2007) wrote, “the antagonism between ‘pleasure’ and ‘risk’ as a pedagogical goal is at the core of the struggles that are going on presently in educational discourses over knowledge and the construction of teacher and student subjectivities” (p. 339). Citing Pryer's (2001, cited in Zembylas) example of how viewing a ballet teacher's dancing sparked Pryer's own desire to study ballet, Zembylas described a pedagogy that “creates the space for such a ‘seduction’ between the teacher and the student's body. That is, the teacher's role is not understood through the model of the transmission of knowledge, but the relationship between teacher and student becomes more ambiguous and complex” (pp. 341-342). Zembylas recommended that a pedagogy based in Deleuzian productive desire encourage open, uncensored questioning by students; welcome experimentation and challenges to convention; and reconsider “the role of the body in teaching and learning” (p. 343). The unique environment of a graduate-

⁹ See Garrison (1997) and Todd (1997) for more on desire in educational research, and Appleby (2013) and Motha & Lin (2014) for work specifically on desire in language learning.

level arts program allows for the application of all three of these recommendations, which are arguably inappropriate for a k-12 context.

Snaza and Lensmire (2006) integrated work on Deleuze, pedagogy, subjectivity, and capitalism to examine the author's subjectivity, which they called "voice," in k-12 writing workshops. Cole (2012) noted that the capitalistic desiring machine pushes consumers into a cycle of debt in their drive to fulfill a desiring-lack, and this cycle of debt is fueled by productive desire, which continuously produces new images and products for consumption. According to Deleuze and Guattari, any form of art, protest, or transgression can be incorporated into the capitalistic machine (1977). And Snaza and Lensmire (2006) said, "there is no difference between liberatory acts and acts that serve the interests of global capitalism [...] any act no matter how counter-hegemonic can be subsumed by capitalism" (p. 14).

Since artists and critical pedagogues often see themselves apart from the mainstream (or, in Deleuzian terms, majority), the argument that art and critical pedagogy have the potential to—or even, inevitably, will—become incorporated and commodified in a capitalistic desiring machine of pedagogy can be hard to swallow. Snaza and Lensmire (2006) argued that artists and critical pedagogues

[...] must cease to think of our lives as separate from the operations of capital. It no longer makes sense to imagine, for example, schools as 'preparing' humans to 'enter' the economy. Students, like teachers, are *always* directly part of the global economy through their production of communication, affect, and forms of subjectivity. School "and" society is a false dichotomy; school *is* society (p. 14).

Snaza and Lensmire (2006) emphasized the importance of valuing *production* of writing over the *consumption* (final revision and grading) of writing in classes taught using the workshop format. They wrote, "Even the moment of critical appraisal takes for granted that, learning from our critical practice, we have the power to try again, to build something else. We cannot, as educators or as humans, ever forget we have this power" (p. 15) to revise and produce new writing and new ideas.

Offering further recommendations for instructors leading writing workshops, the authors

stated, “Our bodies and our thoughts, which are one and the same and which always exceed what we can know of them, produce texts, relations, and ideas. Only after the moment of production can we judge whether they are worthy or not. And there is a single criterion for this judgment: does what is produced lead to more joy (life) or more sadness?” (p.16). They concluded with the observation that “before we are readers, before we experience the pleasure of the text, there must be a moment of the pleasure of production, where the body (which is always the social body) produces in an expression of joy” (p. 17).

These articles demonstrate how Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of productive desire provides a framework for conceptualizing writing pedagogy. Productive desire is never fulfilled, meaning that a writer driven by productive desire will continue to produce writing as long as the desire exists, rather than simply to fulfill the goal of a single written product.

Desiring-lack, however, would not follow this model. A writer who writes as a fully-formed subject, without the opportunity for experimentation described by Goodchild (1996), is writing to fill a void. This illustration of writing makes sense in the context of capitalism (the written product—for example, a popular novel—is created to fill the needs of a consumer population) as well as the desiring-lack of educational institutions (in which the written product—for example, a student’s thesis paper or poem-- is evaluated and graded by an instructor according to a pre-set assignment or rubric).

Some of the writing produced in educational contexts—especially graduate creative writing programs—straddles the line between desiring-lack and productive desire. Snaza and Lensmire’s (2006) assertion that a “false dichotomy” exists between school and society is especially relevant to graduate creative writing students. Graduate creative writing students utilize the same desiring-lack in the product-for-assessment cycle of all writing students from the k-12 to graduate levels. At the same time, their sense of productive desire may have brought them to the creative writing MFA program context in the first place. Creative writing MFA programs uniquely illustrate the false dichotomy of degree-as-a-consumer-good in the capitalistic sense compared with the romantic stereotype of the poet or fiction writer whose writing is intrinsically driven—in other words, driven

by productive desire.

Goodchild (1996) presented Deleuze and Guattari's view of the novel-as-art as a work born out of chaotic, unplanned experimentation. Zembylas (2007) advocated for pedagogy that incorporates the instructor not as a vehicle for knowledge, but as a means by which students can be "seduced" into producing truly new, unconventional work. Finally, Snaza and Lensmire (2006) reminded writing instructors and others involved in pedagogy of the fine line between the capitalistic desiring machine and the idea of art as a marginal or—in the Deleuzian sense—minoritarian, process. Their observation that "school *is* society" (p. 14) reflects the way that desiring-lack can easily grow into productive desire, and vice versa. The greatest difference between the two, however, is the description of productive desire as an especially joyous life-force and site of free experimentation and seduction (Snaza and Lensmire, 2006, p. 17; Colebrook 2002, pp. 98-100; Goodchild 1996, pp. 185-187; Zembylas 2007).

Post-qualitative research and Deleuze in light of the literature

St. Pierre (2015) has argued against research models that present study participants as objects of examination by the subject-researcher. Discussing her struggles with traditional qualitative research, she said "If you think the 'researcher begins a study,' then you think the researcher exists before the study, ahead of language and materiality, that the researcher is not always already in the middle of everything..." (p. 15) and noted the "incompatibility between post-structuralism and humanist qualitative methodology" (p. 18). Deleuze himself reflected these concerns, writing "thought [...] surpasses the consciousness we have of it" (qtd. in Snaza and Lensmire 2006).

Thus, according to St. Pierre, a post-structural research framework can't use humanistic assumptions of the essentialist "I." This makes a post-humanist approach that decenters the subject necessary for researchers working in a Deleuzian theoretical framework.

As a tool for undertaking this type of inquiry, Mazzei (2016) offered the idea of the Voice without Organs (VwO), a variation on Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs (BwO). Mazzei paraphrased the Body without Organs concept as "a post-humanist body that exists as a complex network of human and non-human forces" (p. 153). Warning qualitative researchers about the

danger of following old habits that attempt to boil down interview data into a static view of what a participant or phenomenon *is*, Mazzei instead asked those working with Deleuzian ideas to look for a “*becoming-voice*, or VwO, [in order to] resist an essentializing of experience and voice or a fixing of time as a series of instants” (pp. 154-155).

For example, consider the following observations on creative writing, taken from a 1978 interview with the fiction writer Joyce Carol Oates:

One must be pitiless about this matter of “mood.” In a sense, the writing will *create* the mood. If art is, as I believe it to be, a genuinely transcendental function—a means by which we rise out of limited, parochial states of mind—then it should not matter very much what states of mind or emotion we are in [...]

[James] Joyce said of the underlying structure of *Ulysses*—the Odyssean parallel and parody—that he really didn’t care whether it was plausible so long as it served as a bridge to get his “soldiers” across. Once they were across, what does it matter if the bridge collapses? One might say the same thing about the use of one’s self as a means for the writing to get written. Once the soldiers are across the stream...[...]

But in general, the writing writes itself—I mean a character determines his or her “voice” and I must follow along [...]

Throughout these excerpts, Oates described the drive to write as something separate from herself that propelled her forward, something she must “follow” after. The writing is not something that she crafted as an artist, but, rather, a flow of energy that worked independent of her. It represents the type of unpredictable lines of flight that Goodchild (1996) described in Deleuze and Guattari’s requirements for a “work of art.”

Returning to the quotes above, it is arguable that a variation of the VwO is seen in the way Oates talked about her writing production. However, the VwO appears in Oates’s words alongside Oates’s subjective, first-person perspective. An exploration of whether or not the VwO can be found entangled in the first-person narratives of other creative writers might help qualitative researchers see a deterritorializing/reterritorializing subjectivity that is a type of *becoming- VwO*, close to what Mazzei asks post-qualitative researchers to seek out.

Often when creative writers are asked to talk about their work, they describe their work as

a product. They discuss what they intended to construct in their writing and how different events and observations they'd made in their lives contributed to the final, written piece. Subjectivity is high in this context. However, when Oates spoke about the process of creative writing, subjectivity lessened. Hardt and Negri (2004, qtd. in Snaza and Lensmire 2006, p. 15) asked that we "rid ourselves of the notion that innovation relies on the genius of the individual." When other writers talk about their creative process (the "innovation"), rather than their product (brought about by the "genius of the individual"), do more examples of VwOs emerge?

It's difficult—if not impossible—to answer this question using current qualitative research methods because current methods do not deal with the concept of zero subjectivity. For this reason, I attempted to use Jackson's and Mazzei's (2012) recently developed thinking-with-theory approach for this project. The first part of the findings section presents an example of this attempt; reflections on this attempt follow in the second part of the findings section.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The use of a pre-determined research protocol violates core beliefs among many post-qualitative inquirers: As quoted above, St. Pierre (2015, p. 81) argued, “method can only be described after the fact.” Nevertheless, this project attempted to preserve a post-qualitative spirit by following Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) call to use theory—in this case, Deleuze’s idea of productive desire (pp. 85-109)—to think through first-person reflections by fiction writers on the flow of creative writing. Jackson and Mazzei called this application of theory to the analysis of qualitative data “plugging in” (2012, pp. 1-10).

Thinking-with-theory and interdisciplinary “plugging in”

I hypothesized that Jackson and Mazzei’s “plugging in” of theory¹⁰ in order to analyze a text mirrors a typical practice in the study of literature. In the humanities, and literature in particular, the concept of “the text” could be considered equivalent to the concept of “the data” in the social sciences (S. Watson, personal communication, May 17, 2016).

Most scholarship in literary analysis and English studies follows the “plugging in” pattern. Interdisciplinary lenses frequently are used to bring new dimensions of a literary work to light. Dawson’s (2003) idea of practices in the New Humanities advocates for an interdisciplinary “plugging in” of connections between humanities’ disciplines. The current project argues that similar “moves” can be made in the social sciences.

¹⁰ Jackson and Mazzei (2012, p. 5-6) define theory as “philosophical concepts,” or ideas developed and presented by writers from the field of philosophy. They wrote “what sprouted in the assemblage of our thinking were *people*, or *theorists*,” who “rhizomatically emerged” during their reading of interview data.

To provide a very brief example, consider Showalter's (1985) work on the way Shakespeare's Ophelia has been portrayed throughout history. Using paintings, photographs, quotes from Shakespearian actors over several centuries, and additional research on the treatment of mental illness in women during the Victorian era, Showalter "plugged in" feminist theory to a number of texts in order to further illuminate new dimensions of Ophelia's portrayal in *Hamlet*.

Polvinen (2007) offered an additional example of theory being applied to texts in an interdisciplinary manner with her review of articles using chaos theory to analyze literary criticism. Her review aimed not only to look at the usefulness of a mathematical theory for understanding the structure and meaning of literature, but also as a means for examining the application of theories to problems across diverse disciplines. She concluded that, while chaos theory provides only a limited metaphor for the way literature functions, its application in the reviewed articles offered promising examples of research utilizing theories from various fields.

Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) call for "plugging into theory" as a means of conducting post-qualitative, post-humanist work in education and other social sciences resembles the text-as-data view of literary analysis as well. Deleuze and Guattari's words from *A Thousand Plateaus* nicely illustrate this premise: "When one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, *must* be plugged into in order to work" (qtd. in Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 1).

Thinking-with-theory in the field of education

Mazzei (2011) demonstrated her own thinking-with-theory approach in her work on white student teachers' silent reaction to race. In her study, Mazzei "plugged in" Deleuze's work on desire to interview data with white student teachers assigned to work in classrooms with a majority of students of color. One of her interview participants, Jan, said,

[...] The only time my being white was ever an issue is when I was in an environment where I was the minority and those in the majority treated me poorly because of it. The rest of my life being white has put me in the majority and has probably given me advantages of which I wasn't even aware (qtd. in Mazzei, 2011, p. 665).

Examining this data through the lens of Deleuzian productive desire, Mazzei wrote about how a desire among the white student teachers to preserve the racial hierarchy in the classroom produced silence--an unconscious resistance to acknowledging racial differences between the white teachers and their non-white students. As part of her Deleuzian analysis, Mazzei wrote of this excerpt,

Jan is [...] operating from a historical perspective that enacts coding and investment in the 'tribe' of whiteness. While individual desires function to preserve and maintain whiteness they are enacted within a social whole. [...] It is this investment in whiteness, in these collective desires producing a desiring silence that maintains and sustains whiteness and reveals itself for what it is in Deleuzian terms: a connection of desires, a conjunction of flows, and a continuum of intensities (p. 666).

In the example above, Mazzei applied Deleuze's concepts of social wholes, desires, desiring silence, flows, and intensities to call attention to the way Jan's sense of being a racial minority in the context of her classroom, but not elsewhere, shaped her own unconscious desires.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) provided further examples of the thinking-with-theory approach in their text *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research*. Throughout the text, Jackson and Mazzei applied theoretical lenses developed by six post-structural philosophers (Derrida, Spivak, Foucault, Butler, Deleuze, and Barad) to the analysis of interview data collected from two first-generation academic faculty members (pp. vii-xv). Even though the same data was used in each chapter's analysis, the findings in each study differed based on the theoretical lens being applied. For example, the chapter that applied Foucaultian theory examined the role of power in the interview participants' lives because Foucault's work features the theme of power. The chapter based on Butler's theories looked for instances of performativity in the interview data because Butler's work develops ideas of performativity and agency. Each theoretical framework illuminated different aspects of the interview data.

“Plugging in”

In the examples above, theories were used as lenses to provide new, interdisciplinary ways for understanding texts and data. In the words of Mazzei and Jackson, theories were “plugged in”

to data in order to produce these new understandings.

Showalter (1985), writing from the discipline of English literature, plugged feminist criticism into various data sources (including texts and media from art, drama, and psychiatry) to illustrate how different sources related to portrayals of *Hamlet's* Ophelia demonstrated changing views of women and sanity over time. Showalter wrote of her goal in the piece, "By beginning with these data from cultural history, instead of moving from the grid of literary criticism, I hope to conclude with a fuller sense of the responsibilities of feminist criticism, as well as a new perspective on Ophelia" (p. 80). Similarly, Polvinen (2007) examined a trend of applying theories from math and physics to the interpretation of literature in her piece, which looked at the ways interdisciplinary scholars plugged chaos theory into writing by authors such as Doris Lessing, Tom Stoppard, and others.

The intellectual "moves" made by Showalter and the scholars Polvinen reviewed may be similar to the moves made by Jackson and Mazzei in their work from the field of education. Jackson and Mazzei (2013) provided the following three "maneuvers" for educational researchers interested in a thinking-with-theory approach:

- 1.) disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they *constitute or make one another*;
- 2.) allowing analytical questions that are used [by the researcher] to think with to *emerge in the middle* of "plugging in;" and
- 3.) showing the *suppleness of both theory and data when plugged in* [...] (p. 265).

These suggested "maneuvers" for educational researchers resemble similar moves made in literary analyses such as those described above:

- Showalter and the authors in Polvinen's review borrowed theories and intellectual practices from other disciplines to blur the lines between fields, demonstrate new connections, and test the practicality of these applications (Jackson and Mazzei's first "maneuver")....

- Rather than begin with specific questions, Showalter and Polvinen instead entered into their texts (or data) with the spirit of seeing what would “emerge in the middle” of their analytical processes (the second maneuver)....
- Finally, their moves attended to theory and data equally (the third maneuver).

Using Jackson and Mazzei’s (2013) maneuvers in my project required my testing the premise that the “moves” of literary analysis mirror the thinking-with-theory approach. Following their recommendation that scholars working in a thinking-with-theory approach conceptualize their preliminary questions as “analytical” rather than “research,”¹¹ the following analytical questions were nested into the second goal and explored:

- 1.) How is a creative writer’s subjectivity involved (or uninvolved, according to Mazzei’s theory of the VwO) in the production of creative writing?
- 2.) After a piece of creative writing is produced, how does that product fuel further writing?

IRB and data collection overview

Virginia Commonwealth University’s Institutional Review Board approved this study (HM20008590) for exempt status. A study information sheet (see Appendix A) was shared on Facebook among creative writing MFA students, faculty, and alumni. Writing samples from four creative writing MFA graduates (with concentrations in fiction writing) were received via email.

Thinking with Mazzei’s theory of a collective VwO, participant demographics (age, race, sex, etc.) were not collected. (However, as noted in the literature review above, creative writing MFA students in the United States tend to be white and from affluent backgrounds.) Mazzei (2016) challenged researchers to move away from the individual subject/participant as a study’s “unit of analysis.” For this reason, the writing samples were gathered into a single document for analysis as a whole, rather than as a collection of distinct participant contributions.

The project described above applied Jackson and Mazzei’s thinking-with-theory approach to the analysis of first-person accounts by creative writers. Simultaneously, the project explored

¹¹ By replacing “research” with “analytical,” Jackson and Mazzei emphasize the necessity of analysis, which can’t be taken for granted in the case of “research.” One can arguably produce research without taking part in analysis. Analysis is a key element of thinking-with-theory, however,

the premise that the style of analysis in the humanities (especially literary studies) resembles the moves of Jackson and Mazzei's thinking-with-theory approach for use in educational research. This analysis of creative writers' first-person discussions about the production of their writing adds to Jackson and Mazzei's work with Deleuze and subjectivity in the field of education (Mazzei, 2011; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2016).

Chapter 4: Findings

Part 1: Analysis of the collective writing sample

For this part of the project, the two guiding analytical questions included parallel prompts that were provided to the participants. The questions guiding this study are listed in the “analytical questions” column below. The questions as they were worded on the study information sheet provided to participants are listed in the “writing sample prompts” column. The third column refers to the models of Deleuzian analytical questions provided in Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research*.

	Analytical questions	Writing sample prompts	Jackson & Mazzei’s (2012) models
1	<i>How is a creative writer’s subjectivity involved (or uninvolved) in the production of writing?</i>	<i>What happens when your writing takes on a life of its own?</i>	<i>What is happening when writers write?</i> “As we look at the data, we ask not what [the participants] are doing, but what is happening” (p. 92).
2	<i>After a piece of creative writing is produced, how does that product fuel further writing?</i>	<i>Can you provide an example in your work of when this shift occurs?</i>	<i>What are the desires that produce writing?</i> “What are the desires that are producing the silence on the part of [the participants]?” (p. 95).

As noted in chapter three, four participants provided emailed writing samples in response to the two prompts in column two. The participants’ emailed responses were combined into a single document in the hopes of capturing Mazzei’s VwOs.

Material related to both analytical questions was found throughout the document woven together by responses from the four participants. The following connections arose out of the data.

Fractured subjectivity. A creative writer's subjectivity may become fractured throughout the writing process. During the writing process, the creative writer may develop different voices or imagined characters in order to generate new ideas or perspectives for their fiction. Examples of this fractured subjectivity were seen throughout the data:

- *One of my strategies [for dealing with writer's block] is to talk to myself about the story as if I'm interviewing myself about the finished product. During these moments is when the writing is most likely to take on a life of its own. The more questions I ask myself about the writing, the more I pull myself back into the actual world of the story.*
- *I start to imagine myself as a character in the story. I pace around my house, talk to myself in their voice, imagining scenes from their viewpoint. I actually feel the emotions of the characters.*
- *The initial words come to me in one of two ways: a monologue in the voice of the character [...] or] a snatch of dialogue [between two or more characters].*
- *When I've spent enough time imaging the space [that the characters are in] I can envision them moving around in it. When [the character] turns around, I can fill in the space that [they] see.*
- *[Staying up late to write] reminds me of the ways I wrote in high school and college, though especially in high school [...] listening to stuff like the Cure and punk rock [...] I do still listen to a lot of punk rock when writing, though [...] I suppose this ties back to my having the same feeling I had in high school when writing as of late, as much of this music was my soundtrack when I was a teenager.*

In these excerpts from the data, writing strategies involving a sort of intentional charade generate a flow of creative ideas. Rather than the creative writer seeing themselves as a writer writing, a fractured sense of self involving a type of role playing helps propel the writing. In these excerpts, imagining an interview, speaking in a character's voice, picturing the space a character would move in, and recalling the creative writer's younger self require a degree of creativity on their own in order to support the creative energy needed for fiction writing. Two

additional examples of fractured subjectivity were also seen in the data:

- *Somewhere [in the writing process] something shifts, and all of a sudden ideas are coming out as if they really do have a life of their own, and it's like there are two of me—one person is doing this, and having the thoughts, and writing them down; and the other person is just watching in awe of the production.*
- *I sometimes will push past that critical analysis of myself and start daydreaming in a way.*

These excerpts show shifts in the creative writer's sense of self that differ from the masquerade/role play seen in the earlier examples. Here, the creative writer is able to step outside of themselves and observe the writing from an objective position. A certain "push" is involved with this shift in the second example, where the creative writer is able to move into a dreamlike state that allows them to surpass the type of self-criticism that can hold back the flow of creativity.

An altered state. A second way in which the creative writer loosened their subjectivity in order to produce their fiction writing involved a feeling of being lulled into a different world, as if a spell of creativity had overtaken them. In the example above, the creative writer mentioned that "daydreaming" helped them move away from their sense of self and become more immersed in their work without the distraction of self-criticism. This sense of being wrapped up into a different world or almost "drugged" was seen throughout the data as well. In several cases, the creative writer described not only losing track of time and self-consciousness but also losing a sense of control and reality.

- *There are times when I just get so into the process that, when I look back at what I've written in the morning, I almost can't recall putting some of the details on the page.*
- *If I'm really deeply into it, I'll keep working out the story when I'm supposed to be doing other things.*
- *[...] I have to slow down the stuff that was happening automatically in my brain [...] In most situations, though, if I keep trying I get to a point where I'm no longer consciously laboring with what I'm writing.*

- *Usually I don't recognize the zone right away. It's only when I'm pretty deeply into it that I realize I have no idea how much time has passed, but I've added three pages to my manuscript. [After writing] it's frustrating because I can't remember exactly what I did to get there. I also can't precisely budget out the amount of time writing will take; I don't have a good sense of how long it takes me to write three good pages, and I don't know how many false starts it will take for me to get to that zone in the first place.*
- *The story was meant to be a funny little piece [...] a fun idea, but didn't really have much of a plot [but] what was intended to be a short paragraph or two suddenly spiraled out of control. I was consumed with this side character [...] meant to be sort of a punchline at the end of a joke. Instead, the ending focused on [this] character [...] this revelation changed the focus of the rest of the story. It practically rewrote itself.*

Some degree of sleep deprivation, which was mentioned throughout the data, possibly played a role in this sense of an altered state that softened the creative writer's subjectivity. In some cases, writing only ceased when the creative writer suffered from a physical need for sleep.

- *I'll often write for hours on end. I don't stop until I get so sleepy I have to. Often, this means writing until the sun comes up.*
- *Chances are I haven't gotten enough sleep.*
- *I've been doing a 100 word/day, 100 days challenge [...] It makes me write every day, and I'm not allowed to skip, no matter what happens. It made me write [...] on a day when I was so tired I cried as I got dressed and drove to work. [...] But the other night I realized that I had lost about sixty pages of my novel draft—the last sixty. [...] So I upped my goal to two pages/day and started writing, in the bed, before going to sleep.*

In these examples, the creative writer does not lose their complete sense of self or subjectivity, but the creative writing process appears to require some challenge to that subjectivity. By imagining themselves as a character in the story, as a participant in an interview, as an adult looking to their youth, or even split into two separate individuals (a worker and a watcher), the creative writer in this data collection often needs to create a new (or at least slightly changed) version of themselves in

order to produce their fiction. Time, memory, and control are also challenged as the creative writer writes. Giving up these taken-for-granted aspects of “normal” life seems to be essential for the writer described in this data collection.

“I just made fire.” As noted in the literature review, Deleuzian productive desire is recognized by an exuberant, overwhelming life-force. A sense of euphoria was mentioned throughout the data, in particular after the creative writer had spent an extended period of time (for example, all night) working on a piece. The actual completion of the piece was never mentioned in the data. Instead, it was the sense of effort that seemed to build up to a satisfying, joyful state.

- *I'll often write for hours on end [...] This feels exhilarating.*
- *It's very like the rise and fall of energy that happens during physical exercise [...] When it's over, you HAVE EXERCISED—you are sweaty and tired and you feel accomplished and happy. And then you celebrate. [...]The next time you start you look forward to it that much more because you remember that, even though it sucks just as much to start, you know in your head that it will be worth it.*
- *Afterwards, I feel elated and triumphant, like I just made fire. I spend the next twenty-four hours in a kind of happy glow of creative bliss, basking in the glory of what I made and how good it felt coming out.*

Push and pull. Though the description of euphoria brought on by writing was prevalent in the data, the tension between idea generation (which typically took place internally) and the actual writing (which took place externally; that is, literally: on a computer keyboard) was even more common. Throughout the data, *thinking* about the creative piece was described in much more positive terms than the actual *work* of putting words to the vision in the author's mind. Like the excerpt above, which compared the satisfaction of completing a workout with the satisfaction of having written a piece of fiction, there was an expectation throughout the data that the pain of finding words (the term “translating” was used more than once in the data) and getting the words down on paper (or screen) was the price paid for the pleasure of writing.

- *For me, so much of the writing process is forcing words on the page. [...] The fun part was before I started writing; the thinking and imagining. The real work is translating all of the thoughts onto paper. The actual writing/editing process is where I'm most likely to lose faith in a piece of writing. I take a lot of breaks to rethink the story and to reignite the creative part.*
- *It takes a push. And time. But, as with any activity, the more I do it the easier it is to make happen. I start out with a direction, or no direction, and I decide to keep writing; even when I run out of ideas, or if I think what is coming out is awful.*
- *I get to the point where I've worked out a full scene (or series of scenes, maybe even a plot) and there's nowhere for the part of the story that's in my head to go but on the page, or I have a deadline (external or self-imposed) to get a story written. At this point I start writing, and the easy flowing part stops. [...] Ideally, [the words] approximate the words that sounded great in my head. If I'm lucky, this translates into a full first scene, or at least an outline for the rest of the story. Just as often, though, I get stalled trying to turn the ideas into words. Maybe the sentences that came easily in my head—when I could inflect them with intonation and strategic pauses and my mental image of the character's face and gestures—feel flat on the page. So it might take two or three false starts that I end up totally discarding. Maybe when I spend more time with the idea, there isn't enough there, and I let it die on the page.*

Though all four study participants were graduates of creative writing MFA programs with fiction concentrations, MFA programs were only mentioned once in the collected data. In this section, the creative writer's description of the MFA program reflected the criticism of MFA programs cited in the literature review.

- *I felt zero inspiration. I started to hate everything I wrote and felt none of the critiques were helpful. Most of the stories we were assigned to read and the authors we more or less were encouraged to sound like were [...] largely whitewashed, largely about upper-middle class characters, and the plots were stone-cold serious. [...] I didn't get these bursts of energy to write, this intense excitement for my work and the need to create for about two years post-MFA.*

Overview of findings in part 1: Jackson and Mazzei's models. Excerpts from the data collection document illustrated responses to both analytical questions. These responses reflected Jackson and Mazzei's models as well.

What is happening when writers write? The first question based on their model showed that, when creative writers work to produce writing, their subjectivity is challenged and fractured --but not lost entirely. This echoes the selection by Joyce Carol Oates in the Methodology section, in which subjective and non-subjective perspectives were interlaced together. The creative writer's voice seen in this project's data described a fissured subjectivity brought on intentionally by the writer—by imaginative games that shifted the author's perspective from that of the writer to that of an invented character—and unintentionally through a kind of “altered state” in which the creative writer seems to lose self-consciousness, a sense of time, and a feeling of control over their own creation.

What are the desires that produce writing? The second question based on Jackson and Mazzei's model was demonstrated in three ways in the data. First, the creative writer's voice in the data craved a kind of “high” that could be expected via the writing process. Next, the writer had an assumed masochistic understanding that the pain of selecting the words (signifiers) to most closely match the intended images and feelings in the creative work (the signified) was a given in the writing process. Finally, the structures of the typical MFA program appeared disconnected from the elements of productive desire and, in some ways, even seemed to contradict or interfere with the flow of productive desire illustrated throughout most of the data.

Part 2: Rhizomatic reflections on the research-assemblage

The analysis presented above differed from prior examples (Mazzei, 2011; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei 2016) of thinking-with-theory studies in several ways. Mazzei (2016) noted that in these studies

[...] it is necessary to eschew reading practices of traditional inquiry. There are no singular subjects, static places, or traceable times. There is no planned moment in the field or

analysis of interview transcripts. Although I present text in the form of words, they are not words to be read as a literary utterance spoke by an individual, nor are they accounts of psychological memories or instants. They are a result of hauntings and troublings that exert a pull and that won't let go of the past, as if it is in the past (p. 159).

My example mirrored many of the typical patterns illustrated in traditional qualitative research; it appeared I had fallen into the trap that Mazzei warned against when she asked researchers to “not produce the same methods with a different language” (2016, p. 153). Jackson and Mazzei (2013) said, “we are drawn to that data that seemed to be about difference rather than sameness” (p. 263) and observed, “coding takes us back to what is known” (p. 267).

Stepping back and looking at the presentation of findings in Part 1, a pattern of coding is visible. Rather than a surprising “difference,” the findings closely followed the analytical questions, giving an echo of “sameness” to the results.

Jackson and Mazzei (2013) warned researchers to avoid:

[...] simplistic treatments of data and data analysis in qualitative research that, for example, beckon voices to “speak for themselves” or that reduce complicated and conflicting voices and data to thematic “chunks” that can be interpreted free of context, circumstance, other texts, theoretical concepts, and so on (p. 261).

However, despite my collecting the work of four participants into one “voice,” and my asking participants to present written responses rather than take part in interviews, I struggled to find a way to explore this voice (my attempt at finding a “Voice without Organs”) other than the traditional qualitative pattern of collected and arranged quotes. Even though my analytical questions were shaped by “theoretical concepts” (the concept of Deleuzian desire), I’m not sure the presentation of my findings conveyed the complexity of productive desire’s involvement in creative writing.

It also appears that my data did not reflect the “rich data” valued in most qualitative research. Jackson and Mazzei worked from extensive interview data in their studies; while this may have entangled the interviewees further into the data, it may have also generated deeper material to work with than that which is possible via written responses.

Because my project was about writing, I imagined that my participants would feel most comfortable offering written responses¹². My participants indeed provided me with written responses to the prompts; they gave me no more or less than what I'd asked, but prior to data collection I could not anticipate how much material they would provide for me. When I prepared my IRB proposal, I had no idea how many participants would respond to my call, either. Furthermore, since my questions themselves addressed the topic of a writer's subjectivity, the participants may have been guided to write about their subjectivity in a manufactured, simplified way that bypassed the challenges involved in the production of a creative writer's sense of self.

Fox and Alldred (2015) examined the ways a researcher's feelings shape the way research is produced. Following Deleuze, they defined research as a nonlinear process that *produces--* rather than a linear series of steps *constructing--* a singular, complete work (i.e., an article, report, or dissertation).

Thinking research with Deleuze highlights how desire assembles countless threads and elements together to produce academic works. The researcher's own beliefs and prior experiences shape this assemblage in ways that are not always known to them. Since a Deleuzian framework pushes back against the concept of subjectivity, the typical qualitative research "statement of subjectivity" carries little weight. The Deleuzian idea of affect can replace the "conventional conception of human agency [...] meaning simply the capacity to affect or be affected" (Fox & Alldred, 2015, p. 401). But even moreso than the idea of human subjectivity or agency, the concept of affect is difficult to put into words.

According to Fox and Alldred (2015), these language-defying affects propel the production of research. "Different stages in the research process, such as data collection or analysis, or

¹² This was an unfortunate assumption on my part. One of my potential participants told me that they felt that writing a response required more work than being interviewed. It's also possible that those who identify as creative writers are less likely to provide anonymous written material that will not be attributed to them or fulfill a desiring-lack that drives them to seek recognition for their writing, no matter how insignificant. Though I was in favor of allowing participants to voluntarily reveal their names, this was discouraged by the IRB, which instead strongly encouraged keeping the participants anonymous.

techniques used, for example, to sample data or increase validity, can be treated as a machine that *works because of its affects*” (Fox & Alldred, 2015, p. 403). Specific research methodologies assemble into research machines that produce findings shaped by the specifications of that methodology and the researcher’s approach to it, the participants’ responses, and so on.

“Unlike ‘spontaneous’ assemblages in daily life,” Fox and Alldred wrote, “research-assemblages are machines designed to do specific tasks and comprise relatively few relations and affects [...] This machine is a ‘filter’ [...] extracting only certain data and categorizing it according to the affect economy of the instrument rather than of the event itself.”

Post-qualitative inquiry asks researchers to approach their work the way they would approach the creation of art: as something unpredictable and uncontrollable that must guide the researcher/artist rather than be directed and managed by the researcher/artist. This view contradicts the popularly held view of research, which assumes that the discovery and organization of facts is the primary goal.

This contradiction may feel familiar to some educational researchers. Art educator Eliot Eisner (2003) wrote, “our field, the field of education, has predicated its practices on a platform of scientifically grounded knowledge, at least as an aspiration.” However, he argued, “the forms of thinking the arts evoke [are relevant] for reframing our conception of what education might try to accomplish” (p. 373). He further stated, “learning to pay attention to the way in which form is configured is a mode of thought that can be applied to all things made, theoretical or practical [...] We need to learn to ask not only what someone is *saying*, but how someone has *constructed* an argument, a musical score, a visual image [...] This will require activities that slow down perception rather than speed it up” (p. 378).

In order to “slow down perception” and explore how affects shape writing and the construction of research assemblages, I produced a data montage (Figure 1) following an adaptation of Eakle’s (2007) “data walking” approach to data analysis (pp. 483-485). Eakle wrote:

Similar to strolling in physical space, I examined the data traces as a whole: listening to all of the interviews, reading all of the notes and transcripts over before proceeding to

assemble data. As I advanced, walking into the data, I stopped at notable text sequences, joined various data chunks and my impressions, and colored words and passages differently [...] which resulted in intuitive, fragmented montage and movement effects.

As a participant in the research assemblage, I tried to unravel the affects that shaped my presentation of results. The data montage provided me with an opportunity to look at the nonlinear, rhizomatic process behind the construction of my analysis in Part 1.

How to “read” the montage/data assemblage:

In addition to the data from Part 1 and portions of the literature review, the following pieces were drawn into the montage:

- Eisner’s (2003) essay, “Artistry in education,” which reflects my own beliefs about art’s value in education as a whole
- The Association of Writers and Writers’ Programs *Hallmarks of a Successful MFA Program in Creative Writing*, to represent the concrete world of institutionalized creative writing instruction
- Excerpts from the Association of Writers and Writers’ Programs’ *Hallmarks of a Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum* (**in bold, centered**)
- “Notable text sequences” were selected from the literature review and Eisner’s (2003) essay, “Artistry in education” (shown in the left hand side of the montage)
- “Data chunks” from the collective writing sample (*on the left hand side, in italics*)
- My impressions, especially as they pertained to the idea of productive desire, are located on the right side of the figure, typed in arial font.
- Wording that stood out for me is underlined in the hallmarks, quotes, and data.

Like all writing, this montage was constructed under the influence of unavoidable affects. A reading of the montage will be directed by affects unique to the reader, as well. These affects will be shaded by the reader’s subjective experiences and preferences. Readers may choose to consider how the selected texts (Eisner’s essay, the AWP excerpts, and specific quotes from the literature review and the data) shape their readings, and how, if other texts were selected instead, their reading would differ. Multiple readings of the montage offer the opportunity for readers to think about how repetition produces new readings. Repetitious readings also offer the chance for readers to observe what pleases, disgusts, and annoys them in the case research assemblages of all types, and this project in particular.

Note: Only six “hallmarks” were selected from the AWP document. The full list is included in Appendix B; the hallmarks used in the data montage are bolded in the appendix.

An example “reading” follows the montage on page 68.

Data Montage

AWP: [...] At the heart of this curriculum are graduate-level creative writing workshops and seminars taught by core creative writing faculty on craft, theory, and contemporary literature. The institution also provides challenging elective, graduate level classes in the literature of many centuries and continents. The program should provide an enabling progression of both practice and study in the literary arts in order to prepare the student for a life of letters and to equip the student with the skills needed for writing a publishable book-length creative work for the thesis (2012 p. 10).

- A Challenging Workshop. The writers' workshop is a seminar in which students critique one another's work under the mentorship of an accomplished writer-teacher. The workshop is writing intensive, offering each student multiple opportunities for submission and revision of creative work (2012, p. 10).

Musser (2012) further incorporated Deleuze's ideas about writing and subjectivity by examining Deleuze's observation that writing, like physical acts of masochism, sparks desubjectification. Musser said that, according to Deleuze, pain "is a reaction to the injury of subjectivity [...] it stimulates affects and creates experience" (pp. 141-142).

The selections above include an excerpt from the introduction to the AWP's *Hallmarks* as well as the first hallmark. The introduction makes it clear that the publishable, book-length work is the ultimate goal of the MFA program. This is a linear "progression" toward one ultimate goal: the "publishable" work.

Most MFA theses will not be published by major publishing houses. With-

Baker (2013) contrasted the idea of a linear, “genius” model of creative writing (in which a writer portrays their self-identity in a final work but does not challenge that identity) and a Deleuzian-influenced view in which creative writing works as a way for the author to continuously experiment with their subjectivity as they write and re-write, creating a piece that is always in a state of becoming rather than a static product.

I get to the point where I've worked out a full scene (or series of scenes, maybe even a plot) and there's nowhere for the part of the story that's in my head to go but on the page, or I have a deadline (external or self-imposed) to get a story written. At this point I start writing, and the easy flowing part stops. [...] Ideally, [the words] approximate the words that sounded great in my head. If I'm lucky, this translates into a full first scene, or at least an outline for the rest of the story. Just as often, though, I get stalled trying to turn the ideas into words. Maybe the sentences that came easily in my head—when I could inflect

out publication, how can we say what makes the work “publishable?”

The challenging workshop: Vanderslice (2011) and Swander (2005) portrayed the “bootcamp” style writing workshop, a grueling experience meant to toughen up writers for the inevitable criticism they would face during the process of getting their work published. Even though it's not described that way in this hallmark, the subtext here is that an “intensive” workshop will not be a comfortable experience.

The excerpt from Musser (2012) acknowledges Deleuze's belief that pain can provoke creativity, so in this sense a “challenging,” “intensive” workshop can produce art.

However, the “progression” toward a “publishable thesis” is linear. Baker (2013) called for an approach to creative writing that allows for continuous re-writing, to create a piece that is always in a state of becoming.

Is there any way for a CW MFA program to break out of this linear progression, to encourage writing that is not static? Is there any way to fit this approach to writing into the structure of an academic program?

them with intonation and strategic pauses and my mental image of the character's face and gestures—feel flat on the page. So it might take two or three false starts that I end up totally discarding. Maybe when I spend more time with the idea, there isn't enough there, and I let it die on the page.

~

For me, so much of the writing process is forcing words on the page. [...] The fun part was before I started writing; the thinking and imagining. The real work is translating all of the thoughts onto paper. The actual writing/editing process is where I'm most likely to lose faith in a piece of writing. I take a lot of breaks to rethink the story and to reignite the creative part.

~

I've been doing a 100 word/day, 100 days challenge [...] It makes me write every day, and I'm not allowed to skip, no matter what happens. It made me write [...] on a day when I was so tired I cried as I got dressed and drove to work. [...] But the other night I realized that I had lost

Radavich (1999) noticed this problem. He observed that, prior to the popularity of MFA degrees, writers rejected the “stodginess” of universities. He cautioned MFA-ers to avoid focusing on “self-expression,” and instead work toward a type of writing intended to communicate with others. This approach nudges MFA students out of the comfort zone in which one uses writing to express, develop, and cement their subjectivity (or “sense of self,” or what Snaza and Lensmire called “voice”).

Giving up the “self-expression” aspect of creative writing—or at least scaling it back—can be painful for writers... and painful in a different way than a “boot camp” workshop session is painful. The later involves pain for the sake of improving writing that is already begun. The former involves the pain of starting a written work with the intention of sacrificing the satisfaction of subjective, voice-driven work from the start.

As far as the data is concerned, the author in the collective writing sample demonstrated confidence in creating their own structure and plan for writing. Plen-

about sixty pages of my novel draft—the last sixty. [...] So I upped my goal to two pages/day and started writing, in the bed, before going to sleep.

~

Usually I don't recognize the zone right away. It's only when I'm pretty deeply into it that I realize I have no idea how much time has passed, but I've added three pages to my manuscript. [After writing] it's frustrating because I can't remember exactly what I did to get there. I also can't precisely budget out the amount of time writing will take; I don't have a good sense of how long it takes me to write three good pages, and I don't know how many false starts it will take for me to get to that zone in the first place.

~

When I've spent enough time imaging the space [that the characters are in] I can envision them moving around in it. When [the character] turns around, I can fill in the space that [they] see.

~

ty of writing strategies are demonstrated (from the understanding that writing involved two phases--thinking and translating-- to committing to a 100 words for 100 days challenge). This writer has self-discipline and reliable procedures that work for them. They also have an understanding that pain will be involved in the writing process in some way.

The pain of writing on one's own is different from the pain of group critique during workshop. Did the experience of MFA workshop sessions contribute to the habits the author described in the data? (Basically, does the group workshop experience teach MFA students to summon up pain on their own so that they can keep pushing themselves after completing the program?) ~

It takes a push. And time. But, as with any activity, the more I do it the easier it is to make happen. I start out with a direction, or no direction, and I decide to keep writing; even when I run out of ideas, or if I think what is coming out is awful.

~

I start to imagine myself as a character in the story. I pace around my house, talk to myself in their voice, imagining scenes from their viewpoint. I actually feel the emotions of the characters.

The initial words come to me in one of two ways: a monologue in the voice of the character [...or] a snatch of dialogue [between two or more characters].

~

- **Attentiveness to Revision.** In addition to frequent readings and writing, the curriculum requires frequent revision of student work, and the teacher provides suggestions for improving the work as well as references to literary models that may be helpful. Thesis advising focuses on specific suggestions for revision of creative work and includes feedback on successive drafts (2012, p. 11).
- **A Variety of Seminars and Workshops.** As study with writers of varied artistic sensibilities serves a student best, students should have the opportunity to study with a different accomplished writer in a workshop each semester. Topics for literature seminars should also be diverse along several axes, offering exposure to many literary periods and cultural traditions, to literature that reflects a multicultural American society, and to varied craft topics (2012, p. 11).
- **A Variety of Lectures and Readings.** The program broadens the student’s knowledge of literary techniques and esthetics through literary lectures, craft lectures, and readings by faculty, visiting writers, and scholars (2012, p. 11).

Eisner: “I am writing about a culture of schooling in which more importance is placed on exploration than on discovery, more value is assigned to surprise than to control, more attention is devoted to what is distinctive than to what is standard, more interest is related to what is metaphorical than what is literal. It is an educational culture that has a greater focus on becoming than on being, places more value

The hallmarks above emphasize revision and variety. Reading these guidelines from a Deleuzian lens brings up a number of challenges.

Goodchild (1996) wrote that Deleuze recognized two forms of “novels.” The first type focuses on the author’s subjectivity/self-expression and is created with a static goal or purpose. According to Deleuze, this novel is not “art.” In order for a novel to be a work of art, Deleuze

on the imaginative than the factual, assigns greater priority to valuing than measuring and regards the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached” (2003, p. 383).

Eisner: “Consider first the task of working on a painting, a poem, a musical score. That task requires, perhaps above all else, the ability to compose qualitative relationships that satisfy some purpose. That is, what a composer composes are relationships among a virtually infinite number of possible sound patterns. A painter has a similar task. The medium and sensory modality differ but the business of composing relationships remains. To succeed the artist needs to see, i.e. to experience the qualitative relationships that emerge in his or her work and to make judgments about them” (2003, p. 377).

believed that the writer must break out of a “pre-established code” which smothers the *becoming* (as opposed to static *being*) of productive desire. Deleuze also valued repetition, which differs from revision. Each time an idea “repeats” in the writer’s mind, the original idea changes just a bit. This allows for the continuous becoming that Deleuze advocated.

The question here is whether Deleuzian repetition can be incorporated into the linear revision process described above. “Improving the work” and “references to literary models” point toward styles and work that already exist, rather than encouraging the *new* (in other words, the state of becoming).

The two hallmarks focused on variety offer a bit more potential for incorporating Deleuzian repetition and the breaking of an MFA “pre-established code.” Though the “multicultural” exposure described here addresses some of the concerns Batuman (2010) expressed, based on the literature, this “variety” could be expanded.

Radavich (1999) recommended that MFA students be required to take elective courses *outside* of the English

I'll often write for hours on end. I don't stop until I get so sleepy I have to. Often, this means writing until the sun comes up.

~

There are times when I just get so into the process that, when I look back at what I've written in the morning, I almost can't recall putting some of the details on the page.

~

Somewhere [in the writing process] something shifts, and all of a sudden ideas are coming out as if they really do have a life of their own, and it's like there are two of me—one person is doing this, and having the thoughts, and writing them down; and the other person is just watching in awe of the production.

~

If I'm really deeply into it, I'll keep working out the story when I'm supposed to be doing other things.

~

department. Dawson (2003) called for a greater emphasis on “action,” and the development of the MFA student as a “public intellectual” who is “active in society, rather than just creat[ing] art that *reflects* society” (p. 168).

The first quote by Eisner combines the hallmarks of revision and variety and offers some ideas of how MFA students can join the “New Humanities” that Dawson (2003) called for. The focus in the first Eisner quote is “relationships,” which occur in a “virtually infinite” amount and require “judgments.”

The revision hallmark calls for a “curriculum [requiring] frequent revision,” instructor “suggestions for improving the work,” and the use of prior literature as examples. Eisner intended his emphasis on relationships and judgments to apply not only to the arts, but to all areas of education. Calling an MFA student's attention to the fact that they possess an “infinite” amount of possible directions that a piece can take, and then the “judgment” required in selecting one of these directions over others, breaks “frequent revision” out of the typical idea of revision as a linear process in which a written piece

[...] I have to slow down the stuff that was happening automatically in my brain [...] In most situations, though, if I keep trying I get to a point where I'm no longer consciously laboring with what I'm writing

~

Chances are I haven't gotten enough sleep.

~

One of my strategies [for dealing with writer's block] is to talk to myself about the story as if I'm interviewing myself about the finished product. During these moments is when the writing is most likely to take on a life of its own. The more questions I ask myself about the writing, the more I pull myself back into the actual world of the story..

becomes “better” with each version. Looking at revision as a process leading to a product (a polished story, poem, or essay) pushes Eisner’s call for attention to relationships and judgments in the face of infinite options to the background.

The second quote by Eisner presents a new angle on “variety.” The third hallmark sees “lectures and readings” as a way to introduce students to “literary techniques and aesthetics through literary lectures, craft lectures, and readings.” Eisner’s variety calls for “exploration” “surprise” and “a greater focus on becoming than on being.” The variety here is not just in terms of lectures and readings calling for a “knowledge of literary techniques and aesthetics,” but on a variety of mentalities with which to approach art, education, and life.

The collective writing sample didn’t address revision as it’s described in the Attentiveness to Revision hallmark. Instead, the data showed writing as a continuous, intuitive process rather than something that happens in conscious stages. Just as Eisner called for an approach to education asking students to “slow down rather than speed up” (p.

378), the author in the data experienced involuntary flows of time, jarring shifts in ideas, and distancing of their subjective selves. ~

-
- **Strong Thesis Advising.** Faculty members excel in providing both holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision of each student’s thesis. Students are required to produce a publishable literary work, and they must demonstrate expertise in a primary genre to graduate. Rough guidelines for the page range of a thesis manuscript vary by genre: 50-80 pages for poetry, 150-200 for a short story collection or collection of essays, 200-350 for a novel or book-length work of creative nonfiction. Where a mixed-genre thesis is accepted, the form should demonstrate coherence—i.e., the compositional quality that would make it a publishable work—and the page range should correspond to guidelines for prose manuscripts (2012, p. 11).

Zembylas (2007) wrote, “the antagonism between ‘pleasure’ and ‘risk’ as a pedagogical goal is at the core of the struggles that are going on presently in educational discourses over knowledge and the construction of teacher and student subjectivities” (p. 339). Citing Pryer’s (2001, cited

Fenza (2000) said “the goal of graduate study in creative writing is to become first and foremost an accomplished writer.” Based on the repetition of the word “publishable” in the hallmarks, let’s assume that an MFA student who produces a “publishable” thesis is then an “accomplished writer.”

Though none of the partici-

in Zembylas) example of how viewing a ballet teacher's dancing sparked Pryor's own desire to study ballet, Zembylas described a pedagogy that "creates the space for such a 'seduction' between the teacher and the student's body. That is, the teacher's role is not understood through the model of the transmission of knowledge, but the relationship between teacher and student becomes more ambiguous and complex" (pp. 341-342). Zembylas recommended that a pedagogy based in Deleuzian productive desire encourage open, uncensored questioning by students; welcome experimentation and challenges to convention; and reconsider "the role of the body in teaching and learning" (p. 343).

Eisner: "In the arts, ends follow means. One may act and the act may itself suggest ends, ends that did not precede the act, but follow it. In this process, ends shift; the work yields clues that one pursues. In a sense, one surrenders to what the work in progress suggest" (2003, p. 378).

pants in the study had published their MFA thesis, or published a book-length work with a major publishing company, the voice that came across in the collective writing sample was confident and capable, if not "accomplished." The hallmark above addresses two important elements of the MFA experience: the thesis and the thesis advisor.

Before talking about the data and additional quotes, it's worthwhile to consider Snaza and Lensmire's (2006) argument that a "false dichotomy" exists between school and society. CW MFA programs are unique among other educational programs. While Radvich (1999) called for MFA students to turn away from their focus on "self-expression," for many, creative writing *is* primarily an outlet for self-expression. The discovery that what is written first as a means to release emotions and work through experiences can also speak to others is very powerful. While visual art and dance can be abstract, writing is often so tangled in the artist's subjectivity that it offers confirmation and support (or "passing underneath," in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, or an "absent presence" in the words

Afterwards, I feel elated and triumphant, like I just made fire. I spend the next twenty-four hours in a kind of happy glow of creative bliss, basking in the glory of what I made and how good it felt coming out.

~

I'll often write for hours on end [...] This feels exhilarating.

~

I sometimes will push past that critical analysis of myself and start daydreaming in a way.

~

The story was meant to be a funny little piece [...] a fun idea, but didn't really have much of a plot [but] what was intended to be a short paragraph or two suddenly spiraled out of control. I was consumed with this side character [...] meant to be sort of a punchline at the end of a joke. Instead, the ending focused on [this] character [...] this revelation changed the focus of the rest of the story. It practically rewrote itself.

of Derrida) to the experiences of the writer. When MFA students draw from their own lives (in “society”) for assignments submitted for workshop (“school”) that dichotomy weakens. More than other educational situations, Snaza and Lensmire’s ideas about an educational “false dichotomy” applies.

Snaza and Lensmire (2006) wrote that even after “critical appraisal” (in this case, the approval of a “publishable” manuscript), “we have the power to try again.” The writers who contributed to the collective writing sample clearly knew this, as they continued to write with a great deal of passion even years after completing the MFA, and without the external motivation of a major publishing contract.

Rajchman (2002) observed that lack-based desire is “based in sacrifice and deprivation.” This life of “sacrifice and deprivation” fits with the commercial MFA as a goal-driven endeavor. Completing the degree (and the “publishable” thesis) repays the student for their years of “sacrifice and deprivation” with the satisfaction of having achieved a significant goal. The writers who contributed to the collective writing sample did not stop writing after

this “reimbursement.” Publication was never mentioned in the data. They wrote due to productive desire, rather than desiring-lack.

Productive desire--or the desire to keep creating art beyond the finished product of the thesis--appears to be overlooked in the AWP’s hallmarks.

There may be room in these programs for the incorporation of productive desire, however. This desire is probably already present--but unacknowledged-- in MFA students.

While the AWP hallmarks emphasized a “publishable literary work” and “strong thesis advising,” the literature and the data collected for this project suggest that, for writers, *surrendering* to inspiration is more important than publishing.

Goodchild (1996) said that “art wishes to tear open the firmament and plunge into chaos” (p. 187). The data included phrases such as “elated and triumphant,” “creative bliss,” and “exhilarating.” One datum described a story that “practically rewrote itself,” while another described “pushing me past that critical analysis of myself.”

Eisner said, “in the arts, ends follow means. One may act and the act may in itself suggest ends, ends that do not precede the act, but follow it [...] In a sense, one surrenders to what the work in progress suggest (p. 378).

When the writer “surrenders [...] to the work in progress,” the role of the thesis advisor does not need to be neglected. On the contrary: according to Zembylas (2007), the faculty member’s role is to “create space for such a seduction” (p. 341).

Facing chaos and surrender, exhilaration and bliss, Zembylas’s call for instructors to “encourage open, uncensored questioning by students [and] welcome experimentation and challenges to convention” (p. 343) goes beyond the hallmark’s requirement that faculty only offer “holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision.”

Richardson (2013) said that truly inspired writers face a “pressing potential” that they cannot ignore. By acknowledging the “antagonism between ‘pleasure’ and ‘risk’ [...] in educational discourses over knowledge

and construction of teacher and student subjectivities” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 343) an MFA thesis advisor can help students lay the groundwork for future writing that challenges the conventions imposed by the conception of a “publishable” work.

The data collected for this project demonstrates that some MFA students will continue to write without the external motivation of a degree and a thesis. The writing they produce and the experiences they describe mirror the theories presented by Baker (2013), Eisner (2003), Goodchild (1996), Musser (2013), Snaza and Lensmire (2006), and Zembylas (2007).

Though the writers in the collective writing sample had completed the desiring-lack-based MFA program, they continued to write in a manner reflecting Deleuze’s productive desire theory. With this in mind, MFA faculty and program directors might consider incorporating some of the theories and ideas described in this project into their curriculum. ~

Figure 1. Data montage/assemblage

Montage Reading Example

What follows is one possible “reading” of the montage. This example draws from the AWP Hallmarks and the author’s commentary on the right hand side of the montage, along with further work by Deleuze. (Other readers, obviously, will draw from different sections of texts, prior readings, and affects.) This example plays a kind of “devil’s advocate” role in light of the author’s commentary:

Colebrook (2002, p. xxii) wrote that Deleuze wants us to consider “not what a text means, but how it works.” Several similar questions rise from this quote in light of the data montage and this project’s analytical questions:

- How might the AWP Hallmarks work to produce particular qualities in MFA programs?
- How might the AWP Hallmarks and MFA programs work with writers’ subjectivities to produce writing?
- How might the AWP Hallmarks and MFA programs work to produce writing that might fuel further writing?

Deleuze used politics as an example of how an assemblage (aka, the Body Without Organs) does not exist as an individual thing on its own: the assemblage is an “effect.” “[The] political state, for example, does not create social and individual order. The state is the effect of the assemblage of bodies” (Colebrook, 2002, p. xx). So, looking at MFA programs as Deleuze looked at the political state, we can ask which desires produced MFA programs in a manner that includes the structures of the AWP Hallmarks.

The productive desire that produces MFA programs might reflect a collective desire (similar to Mazzei’s VwO) to apply structure and legitimacy to the [un]discipline of creative writing. This desire may be propelled not only by students, but also by faculty, administrators, and other bodies, as well.

Even though the structures of the MFA program appear to operate around a desiring-lack model (with the ultimate goal of producing a “publishable” thesis), this desire was produced inside of the larger structure/assemblage of the MFA culture due to the desires of many to produce and support

these programs. Over time, a desire may have developed for assembling the structures that created the MFA programs and the AWP Hallmarks that helped shaped them. These programs were not produced simply because students demanded them; others' desires to form, support, and organize the programs were also necessary.

If MFA programs are produced due to the productive desires of bodies assembled together, then changes to these programs will occur due to these ideas as well as “problems” (see the literature review) with these programs. According to Deleuze, problems “disrupt life” (Colebrook, 2002, p. xxxiv) and offer minoritarian alternatives with the potential to make the MFA's structure (like all school structures) more flexible, and perhaps become absorbed into the majority of the MFA assemblage over time.

Some potentially desirable changes to MFA programs include a valuing of repetition over revision or a backing away from a focus on self-expression. A question worth considering here is how these changes would alter the current MFA assemblage. What will be gained and lost from these changes?

Dawson (2003) advocated for the New Humanities approach to conceptualizing MFA programs and the role of their graduates. For some, this shift might seem a long time coming; it's risky for academics to move out of their comfort zones in the academy to become Dawson's “public intellectual.” However, for some MFA faculty and graduates, this shift is already occurring. Through it can take time for the minoritarian to be absorbed into—and transform—the majority, this shift can also occur without our awareness or conscious effort.

If MFA programs shift toward the new Humanities, new approaches to revision and a new awareness of self-expression's benefits and drawbacks probably will continue to reshape MFA programs. The connection between desiring lack and productive desire in the programs might grow. Perhaps there is room in future MFA program for subjectless writing...but how might a subjectless MFA project function? What would it provide that current MFA programs don't provide?

MFA writers come into MFA programs already writing and identifying as writers; they write in the programs, and then they continue to write after graduation. This is no surprise. The case of

productive desire (writing before, during, and well after the program) and desiring-lack (writing with the goal of producing the MFA thesis or a bestselling manuscript) can occur simultaneously. What is the point of asking via research why this occurs? The sensation of surrender (seen in the data collected for this project) might feel so obvious to creative writers that there is little to be gained from studying it or trying to nail down its “cause.” If writing naturally brings joy (Snaza & Lensmire, 2006), then what’s to be gained from trying to locate its source...or assuming that a source even exists?

What will the future MFA program look like? It might depend on the desires of the assembled bodies producing it.

Overview of findings in Part 2: Major and minor language

Stemhagen and Warnick (2010) wrote about a “distinction between research that aims at practical knowledge and research that aims at finding limits of knowledge” (p. 116). Jackson and Mazzei’s thinking-with-theory approach offers a third distinction: limitless knowledge that plugs into assemblages in ways that won’t always seem immediately practical. Stemhagen and Warnick noted “generalizations are simulations of reality,” arguing for a balance between “practical utility and epistemic humility” (p. 117). Much educational research addresses the “practical utility” of its findings; less attention is given to a “humble” approach.

Hopefully, this project will encourage educational researchers to consider a third way to conceptualize educational inquiry. Deleuze’s work attracts researchers resistant to the “generalization” of their work, understanding that their research (and the writing that conveys it) is ultimately a “simulation of reality.” In addition to thinking-with-theory, Deleuze’s work has been adapted for use in educational inquiry in a number of variations, including schizoanalysis, assemblage theory, affect theory, and rhizomatic analysis. The attraction of these methodologies is a need to “push back through binaries and dualisms” (Ringrose, 2015, p. 394). Ringrose observed, “data-events are unfoldings in action [...] we do not know the possible effects and we freeze their movement to tell our stories” (p. 407).

The “storytelling” (or story-writing) aspect of research suggests possible uses of this project. Deleuze’s concept of minor and major writing illustrates this. Major writing is vehicular: “the language of bureaucratic transmission [...] the worldwide language of ‘everywhere,’” (p. 736) while minor writing is “that which a minority constructs within a major language” (Deleuze and Guattari, qtd in Honan and Bright, 2016, p. 734).

For Deleuze and Guattari, majority and minority did not refer to numbers (for example, a majority of a population) but to what is generally taken as true and correct (the majority), and that which goes against the mainstream (the minority). Major language is “vehicular” because it disseminates concepts that become major. Major writing is hegemonic and works to perpetrate the status quo. Minor writing, on the other hand, is “not writing according to what is expected, but writing to create—to bring something to life” (qtd. in Honan & Bright, 2016, p. 733). It challenges and chips at the majority, changing the majority bit by bit over time.

Honan and Bright (2016) observed “major vehicular language [...] denies its own politics, claiming value in discourses of lucidity, directness, clarity, and precision” (p. 737). In the case of this project, major language is seen in the Association of Writing Program’s hallmarks and Czikzentimihalyi’s (1990a) mass-marketed book *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*, which brought the words “in the zone” and “flow” into popular American discourse. In contrast, work such as Eisner’s (2003) essay, “Artistry in education,” while presenting groundbreaking work in the field of art education, could be considered minor writing because it did not create a major shift in education on a large scale beyond art education. Another work by Czikzentimihalyi (1997), “Assessing aesthetic education: Measuring the ability to ward off chaos,” can be considered minor, as it challenged the taken for granted ideas about assessment in art education.

Major and minor language is an important concept for education because what is considered major and what is considered minor are not stable phenomena. The minor can become the major. One clear way to illustrate this is in Deleuze’s views on art (Rajchmann, 2002). Deleuze warned artists to avoid attempting to build on the work of their predecessors. (This contradicts the AWP hallmark requiring that instructors offer “references to other authors” and “references to literary

models.”) Deleuze feared that artists following this majority path would face “melancholy” due to the pressure to produce the next level of work done by prior artists. For Deleuze, these prior works are a hindrance. Instead, he encouraged artists to turn away from those who came before them and produce works that are uniquely their own. In time, however, these minor artworks may become the major, and a new generation of artists will have to break from the “melancholy” of the new tradition and take the risk involved in producing minor works without the guarantee of praise, financial reward or fame.

Just as major art feeds and stimulates itself through minor art, Snaza and Lensmire (2006) observed that nontraditional—and even radical—pedagogy may eventually be adapted into education’s majority over time. Minority ideas --such as Zembylas’s (2007) theory of seductive education, and Snaza and Lensmire’s (2006) argument that there is no dichotomy between school and society—may seem unfathomable in the majority world of education today, but they have the potential to become the majority in the future.

Writing is the vehicle that disseminates research to scholars and practitioners. Throughout this project, a number of examples have demonstrated how writing styles change and shift over time, on the level of the individual as well as the cultural, and often in ways that the subject-writer cannot see, control, or predict. Through Deleuze’s concept of repetition, writing styles change over time as writers write. The idea of major and minor writing, both in terms of creative writing and scholarly writing (which is, as Deleuze and others would argue, unavoidably creative as well) provides a check on humanist, subject-centered pedagogy and provides an alternative means to explore the production of writing, both creative and academic.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This project's limitations (and possibilities) are numerous. Major limitations and possibilities I observed are noted below; many additional limitations are also likely present. The concluding discussion of the project's application to qualitative research and writing pedagogy admittedly provides more questions than answers. While openness and a resistance to solidified answers reflect the values of post-qualitative inquiry, readers who came to this project from outside of the post-qualitative mindset may chafe against the fact that this study that does not provide a traditional presentation of results.

Subjectivity, Deleuzian desire, and creative writing pedagogy

This project was not about what happens *during* graduate level creative writing classes, but, instead, what happens after these classes. However, taking into consideration Zembylas's (2007) definition of pedagogy ("[...] the relational encounter among individuals through which many possibilities for growth are created," p. 332) and the fact that all of the study participants were fiction-writing graduates of creative writing MFA programs, it is worth setting aside some space to discuss how the findings of this project may be of interest to graduate level creative writing students, instructors, and program directors.

A great deal of literature exists on creative writing workshops, creative writing pedagogy, and the benefits and challenges involved in enrolling in graduate creative writing programs. Many of these sources are noted in the literature review. This project does not address workshop pedagogy; instead, the data expressed the stories of creative writers who happened to have graduated from MFA programs. The idea of subjectivity and productive desire holds potential for use in creative writing pedagogy, however (see Figure 1).

This study illustrated various ways in which a creative writer's subjectivity is temporarily

altered or suspended for the purpose of producing creative writing. Baker (2013) wrote about creative writing's potential for strengthening a writer's subjectivity, especially in terms of the writer's sexuality. Musser (2012) called attention to Deleuze's own description of writing bringing about desubjectivity similar to the desubjectivity felt during physical acts of masochism. Similarly, this study demonstrated how a creative writer could anticipate a cycle of pleasure and pain involved in the writing process. Zembylas (2007) emphasized that desire and seduction should not be overlooked in pedagogical situations (which, as noted above, he defined as a situation in which people have the potential for transformation and development of all types). Snaza and Lensmire (2006) argued for the blurring of the line between "school" (i.e., a formalized learning situation) and "society" (i.e., everything outside of the typical school setting, including political binaries).

Considering these particular sources alongside this study's findings reveals a potential area for exploration among creative writing students and instructors. Desire and seduction are themes very rarely explored in the field of education. Graduate creative writing programs are one of the rare formal educational situations where these themes are clearly appropriate. If the data in this study reflects the experience of other creative writers, then creative writing instructors and students may find discussing some of the following topics alongside the traditional workshop practices worthwhile: the psychological pain the creative writer must repeatedly overcome, the exhilaration with which they are briefly rewarded, and the insatiable drive to write despite its challenges to the writer's sense of self.

The "moves" of literary analysis and thinking-with-theory

I wrote above that through my production of this project, I would test the theory that the type of analysis used in literary studies mirrored that of Jackson and Mazzei's thinking-with theory "moves."

In the Methodology chapter, I provided two examples from English/literary studies (Showalter, 1985 and Polvinen, 2007). Jackson and Mazzei's work is new, and there are few examples of its application (see Mazzei, 2016 and Mazzei, 2011 for two examples). Jackson and Mazzei's description of "plugging in" theory with data recalled my days as an undergraduate

English major, where texts were discussed in light of particular philosophical or cultural theories. In order to better illustrate the thinking-with-theory approach, I hypothesized that the mental “moves” of literary analysis would reflect the same type of “moves” made in the application of post-structural theory to collected participant data.

However, “plugging in” theory in the context of social science research and “plugging in” theory in the analysis of literary works differed more than I’d anticipated. In the Showalter and Polvinen examples, the authors had a certain degree of freedom permitted in their application of theory to texts. The Showalter example, in particular, demonstrated a great deal of flexibility in terms of the historical documents and feminist lens the author chose to take in her examination of differing portrayals of Ophelia. Polvinen’s piece, which reviewed a number of articles, illustrated flexibility as well by showing how authors from humanities fields applied chaos theory to their work in different ways.

“Plugging in” Deleuzian productive desire with the data I collected from my research participants involved different challenges than the ones I’d experienced in the English discipline. First, I had to make a commitment to a particular theory (Deleuzian desire) and proceed with my data collection based on a hunch that the theory would apply to the data. The two prompting questions I provided to my participants were very open and –I believe--did not direct them toward descriptions that would match with Deleuze’s theory. Prior to analyzing the data, I worried about what would happen to my project if the data did not reflect the idea of productive desire. Unlike my work in literary studies, I couldn’t select another theory or text if there wasn’t enough in the data to “plug in” to the theory. The lack of flexibility and the risk involved in basing an entire project around data that I had not yet collected and a philosophical theory that may or may not apply to this data surprised me.

Ultimately, I think that using the metaphor of literary analysis works as an initial invitation into Jackson and Mazzei’s thinking-with-theory approach. Actually collecting data and applying a specific theory, though, feels more like the experience of working with data in the social sciences than working with a text in literary studies.

Necessary methodological contradictions

The argument for a fresh examination of what qualitative research truly offers educators and other social scientists is an important, yet unsettling, one. Barad (2003) and St. Pierre (2015) asked qualitative researchers to observe the ways in which the patterns of quantitative research have shaped –and possibly restricted--practices in qualitative research. MacLure (2013) and Greene (2001) called our attention to how we can't research our way out of all that is unknown, and that we must face the fact that some questions are inevitably unanswerable by us.

St. Pierre's (2015) post-qualitative inquiry approach questions the idea of precision in qualitative research, arguing that the procedures of qualitative research that we consider precise are actually a façade. She warned that the methods for exploring some qualitative research questions require the watering-down of the question to the point that its "answer" becomes meaningless. St. Pierre asked those involved in qualitative inquiry to describe their methods only after uncovering questions or observations of interest. In other words, St. Pierre asked researchers to find an answer first, and "show their work" after. This approach isn't accepted within typical qualitative research methods.

The five-chapter dissertation format (and typical research article format, as well) is an example of traditional quantitative and qualitative research structures and does not allow much flexibility for the questioning of these structures. Challenges that come with the application of the traditional dissertation format to post-qualitative studies such as this one include the literature review, which Vagle (2014) warned could over-direct and bias a researcher working in a Deleuzian framework; the breakdown of the project's methodology prior to data collection and analysis (St. Pierre 2015); and the numerous, taken-for-granted habits of qualitative work (for example, research questions, hypotheses, participant demographics, the individual participant as a unit of analysis, data organized by theme, etc.) that Jackson and Mazzei (2012) and Mazzei (2016) noted. (See figure 2, below.)

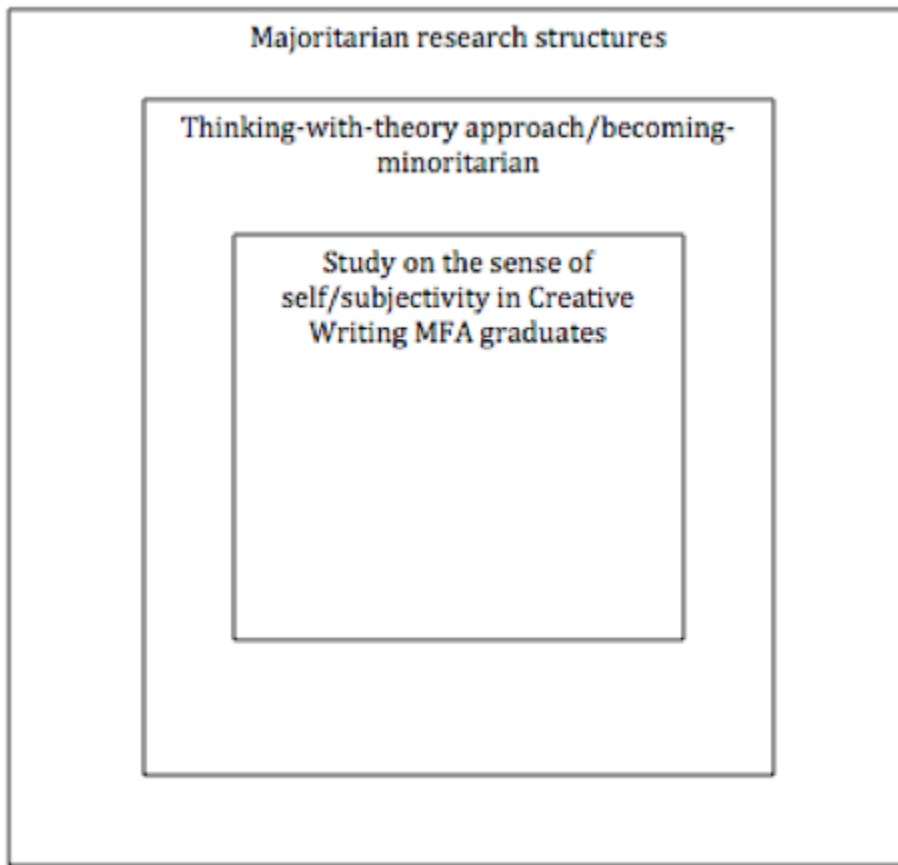


Figure 2. Research/inquiry structures

Figure 2 represents the structures surrounding and shaping this project. The study on subjectivity among MFA graduates was designed with the understanding that applying the thinking-with-theory approach would produce results that would not fit with the majoritarian, mainstream concept for a typical research project. Even with the knowledge that this project would not fulfill the expectations most readers bring to educational research, the challenges of working in the realm of the becoming-minoritarian were not simply psychic. Institutional structures shaped this project in unique ways that would not have applied, or would have applied to different degrees, in other settings. (For instance, outside of the doctoral dissertation or outside of academia altogether.) The application of the five-chapter dissertation format and the content required for each chapter

fundamentally shaped the way the project unfolded.

St. Pierre and other advocates of post-qualitative inquiry are fully aware that their approach runs up against the majoritarian view of how educational research should be conducted. The questions they ask researchers to consider are not without risk. However, without risk and challenge, there is no hope for the production of new views. Even if the post-qualitative approach does not appeal to a researcher, the fresh light this type of work may shine on topics and problems might lead a traditional qualitative or quantitative researcher to explore new directions in their own studies.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) said, “Majority implies a constant of expression or content, serving as a standard measure” (p. 105). The accepted habits, patterns, and protocols surrounding educational research are mentioned above; these are accepted in the field of education and provide the model by which most work is compared. They are “constant” and provide a “standard measure.” Deleuze and Guattari wrote that “There is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian” (p. 106).

Of the minoritarian, however, Deleuze and Guattari said, “Minorities, of course, are objectively definable states, states of language, ethnicity, or sex with their own ghetto territorialities, but they must also be thought of as seeds, crystals of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or the majority [...] There is a universal figure of minoritarian consciousness as the becoming of everybody, and that becoming is creation. One does not attain it by acquiring the majority” (p. 106).

In both parts of this study (the inner study on creative writing MFA students and the outer reflection on the application of thinking-with-theory, represented by the two inner squares in Figure 2), the majoritarian structures (represented by the outer square in Figure 2) of the dissertation format and the unchallenged assumptions of the role of an established methodology prior to data collection—and even the existence of a literature review prior to beginning the study—were felt throughout and shaped the project’s current outcomes. The structures represented by the outer square in Figure 2 included the prescribed five-chapter dissertation format, the requirement that the

methodology be selected prior to data collection, and the assumption that the project would benefit from traditional research concepts such as research questions and hypotheses. These “outer” forces shaped the study and directed it toward a place where it may not have gone if these majoritarian forces had not pressed on it.

Following Deleuze, the majority is “constant,” while the minority has the freedom to continuously grow and change. Barad (2005) and St. Pierre (2015) described how our taken-for-granted qualitative research structures were born out of the traditions of quantitative research. Over time, these changes were adapted into the majority to the point where they are now often unquestioned. There is no reason to expect that similar breaks from what we consider tradition won’t occur in the future.

By attempting an alternative to traditional, majoritarian research, I truly hope that this project will work as a “seed” that will “trigger” changes in majoritarian concepts of educational research and MFA programs, and encourage educational researchers to reevaluate both the benefits and drawbacks of working within traditional frameworks.

Recommendations for further inquiry

The topic of subjectivity among creative writers and its applicability to the MFA workshop is ripe for further research. Scholars without aversions to traditional qualitative research methods can explore this topic through a variety of means. A simple survey based on the data in this study could reveal more about writers’ habits and reasons for writing. A comparison between creative writers who have and who have not attended MFA programs could provide information about whether or not those who pursue MFA degrees feel a greater fracturing of their subjectivity (or predilection to masochism) than those uninformed with graduate programs. Existing survey instruments based on Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory --for instance, those developed by Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1987) and Jackson and Eklund (2004)-- could be revised to examine the kind of “altered state” described by the collective writer in this study (in which both the sense of self and sense of control is lost). Researchers interested in other artistic disciplines (for instance, dance and visual art) could utilize this type of survey to find similarities and differences among varying groups of artists.

Finally, a review of data gathered in studies on intrinsic motivation¹³ and thinking-with-theory studies using Deleuze's productive desire might reveal intriguing questions about motivation and desire--as well as what is and what is not captured via different research methodologies.

¹³ For a meta-analysis of studies on intrinsic motivation, see Cameron & Pierce (1994); for specific work on intrinsic motivation and writing, see Amabile (1985) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990b).

References

- Amabile, T.M. (1985). Motivation and creativity: Effects of motivational orientation on creative Writers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48(2), 393-399.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.48.2.393>
- Appleby, R. (2013). Desire in translation: White masculinity and TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(1), 122-147.
- Association of Writers & Writing Programs. (2012). *Program director's handbook: Guidelines, policies, and information for creative writing programs*. Retrieved from <https://awpwriter.org/application/public/pdf/DirectorsHandbook2012.pdf>
- Baker, D.J. (2013). Creative writing praxis as queer becoming. *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 10(3), 359-377. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2013.811265>
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1986. *Speech Genres and Other Essays*. (V. McGee, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28(3), 801-831.
- Batuman, E. (2010). Get a real degree. *London Review of Books*, 32 (18), 3-8.
- Bogue, R. (1996). Deleuze's style. *Man and World*, 29, 251-268.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). The production and reproduction of legitimate language. In *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 43-65.

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2001). Giving an account of oneself. *Diacritics*, 31(4), 22-40.
- Cameron, J. & Pierce, W.D. (1994). Reinforcement, reward, and intrinsic motivation: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 64(3), 363-423.
- Cixous, H. (1993). *Three steps on the ladder of writing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cole, D.R. (2012). Matter in motion: The educational materialism of Gilles Deleuze. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 44(S1). doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00745x
- Colebrook, C. (2002). *Understanding Deleuze*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990a). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990b). Literacy and intrinsic motivation. *Daedalus*, 119(2), 115-140.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). Assessing aesthetic education: Measuring the ability to 'Ward off chaos.' *Arts Education Policy Review*, 99(1), 33-38. doi: 10.1080/10632919709600763
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Larson, R. (1987). Validity and reliability of the experience sampling method. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 175(9), 526-536.
- Dawson, P. (2003). What is a literary intellectual? Creative writing and the new humanities. *Cultural Studies Review*, 9 (1), 161-178.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1972). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. New York: Penguin.
- Deleuze, G. & Guttari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.

Donnelly, D. (Ed.). (2010). *Does the writing workshop still work?* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Eakle, A. J. (2007). Literacy spaces of a Christian faith-based school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 42(4), 472-510. doi: 10.1598/RRQ.42.4.3

Eisner, E. W. (2003). Artistry in education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 47(3), 373-384. doi: 10.1080/0031383032000079317

Fenza, D.W. (2000, March 1). Creative writing and its discontents. *The Writer's News*. Retrieved from <https://www.awpwriter.org>

Forgeard, M.K.C., Kaufman, S.B., & Kaufman, J.C. (2013). The psychology of creative writing. In G. Harper (Ed.), *A companion to creative writing*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. doi: 10.1002/9781118325759.ch21

Fox, N.J. & Alldred, P. (2015). New materialist social inquiry: Designs, methods, and the research assemblage. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 18(4), 399-413. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2014.921458

Garrison, J. W. (1997). *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and desire in the art of teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Genette, G. (1980). *Narrative discourse: An essay in method*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Goodchild, P. (1996). *Deleuze and Guattari: An introduction to the politics of desire*. London: Sage.

Gray, M. L. (2015). Speaking my mind: Method and madness in the creative writing workshop. *The English Journal*. 89(1). 17-19.

- Greene, M. (1988). *The dialectic of freedom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a blue guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Grosz, E. (2008). *Chaos, territory, art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Guattari, F. (2002). From transference to the aesthetic paradigm: A conversation with Felix Guattari. (B. L. Ettinger, interviewer). In B. Massumi, (Ed.) *A shock to thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*. New York: Routledge.
- Honan, E. & Bright, D. (2016). Writing a thesis differently. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29(5). 731-743.
doi: 10.1080/09518398.2016.1145280
- Jackson, A.Y. & Mazzei, L.A. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research*. London: Routledge.
- Jackson, A.Y. & Mazzei, L.A. (2013). Plugging one text into another: Thinking with theory in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(4). 261-271. doi: 10.1177/1077800412471510
- Jackson, S.A. & Eklund, R.C. (2004). *Flow scales manual*. Morgantown: Fitness Information Technologies, Inc.
- Kearns, R. M. (2009). Voices of authority: Theorizing creative writing pedagogy. *College Composition and Communication*. 60(4). 790-807.
- MacLure, M. (2013). Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26(6), 658-667. doi: 10.1080/09518398.2013.788755
- Massumi, B. (1992). *A user's guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze*

and Guattari. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Mazzei, L.A. (2011). Desiring silence: Gender, race, and pedagogy in education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(4), 657-669.

Mazzei, L.A. (2016). Voice without a subject. *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies* 16(2), 151-161. doi: 10.1177/1532708616636893

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964a). Eye and mind. In *The primacy of perception*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 121-149.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964b). Metaphysics and the novel. In *Sense and Nonsense*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 26-40.

McFarland, R. (1993). An apologia for creative writing. *College English*, 55 (1), 28-45.

Middendorf, M. (1992). Bakhtin and the dialogic writing class. *Journal of Basic Writing* 11(1), 34-46. Retrieved from <https://wac.colostate.edu/jbw/v11n1/middendorf.pdf>

Morgan, W. (2002). "Poetry makes nothing happen": Creative writing and the English classroom. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 2 (5), 17-33.

Motha, S. & Lin, A. (2014). Non-coersive rearrangements: Theorizing desire in TESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(2), 331-359. doi: 10.1002/tesq.126

Musser, A.J. (2012). Reading, writing, and masochism: The arts of becoming. *Difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 25(1).

Oates, J.C. (1978). *Joyce Carol Oates: The art of fiction no. 72*. (R. Philips, Interviewer). *The Paris Review*, 74. Retrieved from <http://theparisreview.org/interviews/3441/the-art-of-fiction-no-72-joyce-carol-oates>

Perry, S.K. (1996). When time stops: How creative writers experience entry into the Flow state (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 9805789)

- Polvinen, M. (2007). The ends of metaphor: Literary analysis and chaos theory. *European Journal of English Studies*, 11(3). 273-284. doi: 10:1080/13825570701409581
- Radavich, D. (1999). Creative writing in the academy. *Profession*. 106-112.
- Richardson, M. (2013). Writing trauma: Affected in the act. *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, 10(2), 154-162.
doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2012.725748>
- Rajchman, J. (2000). *The Deleuze connections*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ringrose, J. (2015). Schizo-feminist educational research cartographies. *Deleuze Studies* 9(3), 393-409. doi: 10.3366/dls.2015.0194
- Schere, J.J. (1998). Effect of engaging in creative activity on the mood of artists and writers: An empirical test of Flow theory. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 9835789)
- Semetsky, I. (2013). Learning with bodymind: Constructing the cartographies of the unthought. In D. Masny (Ed.), *Cartographies of becoming in education: A Deleuze-Guattari perspective*. Rotterdam, NLD: Sense Publishers.
- Showalter, E. (1985). Representing Ophelia: Women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism. In P.A. Parker and G. H. Hartman (Eds.), *Shakespeare and the question of theory*. New York: Methuen, Inc.
- Snaza, N. & Lensmire, T.J. (2006). Abandon voice? Pedagogy, the body, and late capitalism. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 2(2).
- Snaza, N. et. al. (2014). Toward a posthumanist education. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 30(2), 39-55.
- Spivak, G.C. (1974). Translator's preface to *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

University Press.

Stemhagen, K. & Warnick, B.R. (2010). Unity and diversity in educational research: On heterogeneous community. *Philosophical Studies in Education* 41, 116-126.

St. Pierre, E.A. (2015). Practices for the “new” in the new empiricisms, the new materialisms, and post qualitative inquiry. In N.K. Denzin and M.D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry and the politics of research*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Swander, M. (2005). Duck, duck, turkey: Using encouragement to structure workshop assignments. In A. Leahy (Ed.), *Power and identity in the creative writing classroom: The Authority Project*. Ed. A. Leahy. Tonawanda: Multilingual Matters, Ltd, 2005. 167-179.

Todd, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Learning and desire: Perspectives on pedagogy, culture, and the unsaid*. New York: Routledge.

Vagle, M. (2014). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Vagle, M. (2016, May). *Beginning with philosophical concept in qualitative research*. Presentation at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign.

Vanderslice, S. (2011). *Rethinking creative writing*. Cambridge: Creative Writing Studies

Zembylas, M. (2007). Risks and pleasures: A Deleuzo-Guattarian pedagogy of desire in education. *British Educational Research Journal* 33(3). 331-347.
doi: 10.1080/01411920701243602

Appendix A
Study Information Sheet

Creative Writing Research Study Information Sheet

Researchers with Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education are conducting a research study about creative writing.

- ❖ This research study will analyze writing samples by creative writers about how they experience the writing process.
- ❖ Participants will be asked to write a detailed response to the following prompts and email their response to gmwalker@mymail.vcu.edu with the subject line Creative Writing Research Study:
 - What happens when your writing takes on a life of its own?
 - Can you provide an example in your writing of when this shift occurs?
- ❖ This activity is voluntary. It requires that participants send their writing samples via email only. Participants should only participate if they are comfortable sending their writing sample through email. If the participant is not comfortable with email communication, then they should not participate in the study.
- ❖ Pseudonyms will be used in the final report.
- ❖ If you have any questions about the study, please contact:
G.M. Walker, gmwalker@mymail.vcu.edu, (571)-216-3606

Appendix B

AWP Hallmarks of a Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum

Notes:

- Hallmarks in **bold** were selected as part of the data montage.
- The list below was retrieved from the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Directors' Handbook at <https://awpwriter.org/application/public/pdf/DirectorsHandbook2012.pdf>
- This project was not designed as an evaluation of MFA programs' effectiveness. The AWP hallmarks offer flexible guidelines that MFA program faculty and administrators may adapt to meet the needs of their students. I selected the Rigorous and Diverse Curriculum hallmarks as part of my research assemblage only as a policy document illustrating common structures of today's American MFA programs. This list was used in my project to symbolize MFA structures/assemblages in general rather than as an overall statement on MFA programs' strengths and challenges. The Program Directors' Handbook includes additional hallmarks under the headings Accomplished Faculty, Support for Students, Strong Administrative Support, Assets and Infrastructure, as well as recommendations for undergraduate creative writing programs, considerations for the work environment of adjunct and part-time faculty, and guidelines for creative writing program assessment.

From the introduction: [...]At the heart of this curriculum are graduate-level creative writing workshops and seminars taught by core creative writing faculty on craft, theory, and contemporary literature. The institution also provides challenging elective, graduate level classes in the literature of many centuries and continents. The program should provide an

enabling progression of both practice and study in the literary arts in order to prepare the student for a life of letters and to equip the student with the skills needed for writing a publishable book-length creative work for the thesis (2012 p. 10).

1.) Philosophy. The program has an overarching set of values, beliefs, and pedagogy that reflect: (a) the best practices of creative writing programs; (b) an awareness of the needs of its students; and (c) an understanding of the currents of contemporary literature and culture. The program's philosophy is appropriate to its institution's mission and the goals of its strategic plan. The curriculum requires studies that employ this philosophy effectively (2012, p. 10).

2.) Consistent and Frequent Course Offerings. Required courses are offered regularly in the actual course schedule every semester or quarter. Most of the courses are taught by permanent full-time (tenure-track or tenured) faculty members. (2012, p. 10).

3.) A Challenging Workshop. The writers' workshop is a seminar in which students critique one another's work under the mentorship of an accomplished writer-teacher. The workshop is writing intensive, offering each student multiple opportunities for submission and revision of creative work (2012, p. 10).

4.) Extensive Literary Study: One must become an expert and wide-ranging reader before one can hope to become an accomplished writer. The curriculum balances the practice of the art of writing with the study of literature, requiring at least 21 semester hours or credits in literature courses [...] Extensive and diverse reading lists for such courses should inform creative and critical writing assignments. Courses might cover topics such as the following: The Evolution of the Short Story; The Architecture of the Novel; Traditional Forms of Verse; The Craft of Translation; Magical Realism and Its Influence on Contemporary Authors; Post-Modern Theory and Contemporary Literature; The American Long Poem Sequence; etc. (2012, pp. 10-11).

5.) Attentiveness to Revision. In addition to frequent readings and writing, the curriculum requires frequent revision of student work, and the teacher provides suggestions for improving the work as well as references to literary models that may be helpful. Thesis advising focuses on specific suggestions for revision of creative work and includes feedback on successive drafts (2012, p. 11).

6.) A Variety of Seminars and Workshops. As study with writers of varied artistic sensibilities serves a student best, students should have the opportunity to study with a different accomplished writer in a workshop each semester. Topics for literature seminars should also be diverse along several axes, offering exposure to many literary periods and cultural traditions, to literature that reflects a multicultural American society, and to varied craft topics (2012, p. 11).

7.) : A Variety of Lectures and Readings. The program broadens the student's knowledge of literary techniques and esthetics through literary lectures, craft lectures, and readings by faculty, visiting writers, and scholars (2012, p. 11).

8.) Strong Thesis Advising. Faculty members excel in providing both holistic and line-specific suggestions for revision of each student's thesis. Students are required to produce a publishable literary work, and they must demonstrate expertise in a primary genre to graduate. Rough guidelines for the page range of a thesis manuscript vary by genre: 50-80 pages for poetry, 150-200 for a short story collection or collection of essays, 200-350 for a novel or book-length work of creative nonfiction. Where a mixed-genre thesis is accepted, the form should demonstrate coherence—i.e., the compositional quality that would make it a publishable work—and the page range should correspond to guidelines for prose manuscripts (2012, p. 11).

9.) Residential Course Work and Mentorship: Although AWP recognizes the effectiveness of electronic learning and Web-based classrooms, face-to-face mentorship is crucial to an artist's education. Because residential learning and individualized instruction foster the best retention and graduation rates among matriculated students, every MFA program, including a low-residency program, requires at least 14 days of residential study annually (2012, pp. 11-12).

10.) Cross-Genre Study. The program may require the student to take one seminar or workshop in a genre other than the student's declared specialty. A nonfiction writer, for instance, often benefits from learning the narrative strategies of fiction writers, while fiction writers often benefit from learning the research techniques of nonfiction writers. Although this feature is not a necessary part of a program's curriculum, it is a feature of many effective programs (2012, p. 12).

11.) Vocational Study Options: Students may have access to elective classes in journalism, publishing, composition, theater, screenwriting, technical writing, teaching writing, or communications taught by distinguished faculty. The program may also provide internships through an affiliation with a journal, press, publishing venue, or other community literary programs that provide editorial experience (2012, p. 12).

Appendix C

A note about “flow”

The creative writer in this study portrayed fiction writing as an isolating, intimate process with the potential to create fractures in their subjectivity. An immersive activity that removes the artist from their own self-consciousness and sense of time and place fits what many of us colloquially call “being in the zone” or “flow.”

The subjective experience of being “in the zone” –especially in terms of writing--has been frequently studied in the fields of education and psychology (see Forgeard, Kaufman & Kaufman, 2013, Morgan, 2002; Perry, 1996; and Schere, 1998, for more on this topic). However, is it possible that a “deep flow” narrated in the collective writing sample demonstrates a separate phenomenon from the one studied by Csikzentmihalyi (1990a)?

Csikzentmihalyi (1990a, pp. 47-70) presented the following nine requirements for the presence of a flow state. Though these requirements were briefly introduced in the Literature Review, Csikzentmihalyi’s flow theory deserves a closer examination in light of the data.

In order for a person/writer/subject to achieve Csikzentmihalyi’s state of flow or “being in the zone,” they must first:

1. Be engaged in an activity that balances a satisfying degree of challenge with the subject’s skill level.
2. Possess a sense of action and awareness merging. (In other words, the actions involved in the activity feel automatic.)
3. Have clear goals.
4. Receive unambiguous feedback.

5. Achieve a high degree of concentration.
6. Experience a sense of control and confidence over the task....
7. ...while also experiencing a loss of self-consciousness and desire to self-reflect.
8. Lose track of time.
9. Find the activity to be intrinsically rewarding.

The creative writer shown in the collective writing sample demonstrated some of Csikzentmihalyi's flow requirements, but certainly not all of them. For instance, the creative writer never discussed specific goals for their pieces. When they did talk about vague goals, these were goals that seemed to spring up through the activity of writing itself, rather than something planned. The creative writer in the collective sample never mentioned the importance of feedback. Similarly, they did not discuss a feeling of being in control of their writing. Instead, the desire to write forced them to keep writing and disrupted their control of other aspects of their lives (for instance, sleeping).

Csikzentmihalyi's final requirement perhaps is the most complicated of the nine in terms of the data provided for this project. While the creative writer presented in the writing samples clearly felt an intrinsic drive to write, this drive was described as both joyfully rewarding *and* painstakingly tedious. Even when the ideas "flowed" from the participants' imaginations, the participants understood that the trade-off for their enjoyment would be the unpleasant act of "translating" their ideas into words.

As far as Csikzentmihalyi's flow theory is concerned, the collective writing sample did not demonstrate all of the required elements for flow. Did the creative writer represented in this study experience more or less flow than other artists? The question here might be one of methodology. Barad (2003) and St. Pierre (2015) warned qualitative researchers to consider the ways method and research questions shape the results that come to light in a project. In this project, the analytical questions selected for the participants focused on Deleuzian productive desire. Projects shaped by Csikszentmihalyi's work --perhaps utilizing instruments such as the Experience Sampling Method (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1987) and Jackson and Eklund's (2004) flow scale survey

– may not reveal elements such as the seductive, masochistic, drug-like experience of writing that the collective writing sample revealed—simply because the methods chosen may not provide an opportunity for these elements to show themselves. The flip side is also true: questions left unasked in this study may have prevented stronger similarities between the flexible subjectivities demonstrated in the data and classic elements of flow theory from rising to the surface.

Another question worth considering is the meaning of *joy* when it comes to writing. Snaza and Lensmire (2006) wrote, “before we are readers, before we experience the pleasure of the text, there must be a moment of the pleasure of production, where the body (which is always the social body) produces in an expression of joy” (p. 17). This raises the question: How is the pain and tediousness of writing connected to joy? Would the creative writer in the sample have demonstrated *less* joy if pain were not involved in their writing production? Pain’s connection to joy might be another example of a phenomenon that cannot be fully explored by current research methodologies. Writers, however, know it in their guts when they experience this connection. For the creative writer, no academic study will make that knowledge any more or less real.