

Thinking Without Method

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Abstract

The author relies on Deleuze's critique of the dogmatic image of thought to produce the conditions under which new concepts are created. Putting together a network of concepts such as the outside, the encounter, and force, the author invents *thinking without method*, an emergent, fragmented strategy that forms the outside of stratified qualitative research methods. The author draws upon some of her previous work to experiment with a new starting place for inquiry.

Keywords

Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, image of thought, qualitative inquiry, method, the outside, the encounter

Starting With the Outside

While the theme of this special issue is concept as/instead of method, my contribution is to provide an account of Deleuze's "thought without image" in which the production of concepts takes place. Deleuze (1994) claims that concept creation does not occur in the dogmatic image of thought, for "the object of the concept, in itself or in relation to other objects, relies upon resemblance as a requirement of perceptual continuity" (p. 138). For Deleuze, this reliance on recognition renders thought bound to representation and stranded in a striated, universal space that crucifies difference. Thus, my intent is to take readers out of the dogmatic image of thought and into the conditions under which concepts are created and expressed. The descriptive force of my approach here is to emphasize rhythmic movement within an open system: what I'm naming *thinking without method*.

Thinking without method relieves qualitative inquiry from the twin forms of epistemological imperatives of knowledge production and a conventional dependency on procedural method. Freedom from this reliance gives us a new starting place: the *outside* of method. The *outside* is an important concept in Deleuzian thought and undergirds my argument for thinking without method in qualitative inquiry. In his book *Foucault*, Deleuze (1988) reads his own concept of the outside through Foucault's theory of power, so ideas about relations, forces, and resistances are crucial to constitute the outside of both method and thought. In this section, I take up these intersections in an introductory manner because in qualitative inquiry, method has taken on normalizing forms. Giving prominence to *relations* that compose the outside is a radical shift that takes qualitative research into the new.

In the social sciences, and qualitative research in particular, method reigns supreme to provide normative forms to our thinking in research. In other words, method supposedly, somehow, saves us from criticisms of credibility and reliability. A fixed image of method (i.e., a method that precedes inquiry) takes on a stratified form of trustworthiness that validates research. For example, qualitative fieldwork methods are recognizable: those of us trained in method know what it means to collect valid interview data. "Formed substances are revealed by visibility," writes Deleuze (1988, p. 77), and method's visibility has been captured and institutionalized by qualitative textbooks, coursework, publication standards, and so on. Method, as a "molar agency" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 76) of stratification, takes on functions of stabilization and reproduction (i.e., doing the same thing, or starting in the same place). Method, as strata, governs our inquiry.

When we are caught in a dogmatic image of method, one option to escape capture is an oppositional turn to deny method altogether—which may trap us in a binary system of staunch procedure versus anything goes. However, we can rely on Deleuze to refuse that dichotomy and start elsewhere: *the outside of method*. Deleuze (1988) insists that any dualism opens up to a "multiplicity of relations between forces . . . free of any dualizable form" (pp. 83–84); these relations between forces "do not lie outside strata but *form the outside of strata*" (p. 84). The outside of method, then,

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is comprised of relations between a dance of forces in an emergent, nonstratified space of resistance and a nonplace of mutation, where “suddenly, things are no longer perceived or propositions articulated in the same way” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 87). To be on the outside of method, then, is not an exteriority that then takes on its own form: The outside is not strata. Likewise, the outside of method does not transform an interiority (or form of method): *The outside is the transformation itself.*

The outside is composed of forces that “exist only in a mixed-up state of agitation, modification, and mutation” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 87); Deleuze refers to these forces, which form the outside, as *strategies*. Furthermore, these strategies do not come from predetermined, stabilized forms of method; rather, a strategy is “an exercise of the non-stratified, and these ‘anonymous strategies’ are almost mute and blind, since they evade all stable forms of the visible and the articulable” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 73). Therefore, strategies are in contrast to stratifications because they are not known in advance and avoid taking on a regulating form. Most importantly, a strategy (because it *forms* the outside) is not a plan or a starting point but is emergent and revealed in fragments along the way. Deleuze (2007) describes strategy this way:

[The spider] does not know it at the beginning, he learns it by following different rhythms, on very different occasions, and this method, literally, is the spider strategy. (p. 45)

Strategies, at best, are contingent endeavors that, while constituted in a series (similar to a chain reaction), are not unified at the end. This chain reaction is not a deterministic, linear cause and effect but a chancy throwing of the dice: “Things are not joined together by a process of continuity or interiorization, but instead they rejoin above and beyond the breaks and discontinuities (mutation)” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 86). Thus, a series is a chain of mutations. Deleuze (2007) insists that strategies reveal themselves in scraps: bits and pieces along the way that function to produce the work. In other words, nothing is set at the beginning of the work; whatever strategy is followed

functions here and there, with mistakes as an integral part of the work and even when it has worked, it has to be taken up in another mode. And that continues until the end where . . . a kind of revelation intervenes. (Deleuze, 2007, p. 48)

Deleuze (2007) clarifies that this “revelation” is merely a glimpse of what worked to produce thought, and nothing is reunited at the end as a visible map to follow in the future. Rather, what is revealed is the opening to the unthought, conditioned by the “spontaneity and receptivity” of the thinker (Deleuze, 1988, p. 71). Thus, strategies, as relations of force, do the work of provoking thought; their function is to incite the new by creating the outside.

In this opening section, I have introduced what conditions a *thinking without method*: to be on the outside of method in a space of emergent, fragmented strategies that mutate according to the task at hand. I have now arrived at a juncture: moving from the outside of method to the outside of thought. My thinking without method is undoubtedly prompted by Deleuze’s (1994) “new image of thought” laid out in *Difference and Repetition*, as well as other essays in which he argues that thinking is not an innate or natural quality that we exercise through an application of ready-made methods. For Deleuze, thought happens by chance and by force. Thinking happens, without method, through an impositional encounter with the composing forces of the outside. Claire Colebrook (2002) explains,

Thinking is not something “we” do; thinking happens to us, from without. There is a *necessity* to thinking, for the event of thought lies beyond the autonomy of choice. Thinking happens. At the same time, this necessity is also the affirmation of chance and freedom; we are not constrained by an order or pre-given end. True freedom lies in affirming the chance of events, not being deluded that we are “masters” or that the world is nothing more than the limited perceptions we have of it. Freedom demands taking thinking, constantly, beyond itself. (p. 38)

Deleuze (1994) critiques a single, dogmatic image of thought in Chapter 3 of *Difference and Repetition* via eight postulates, detailing the prevailing presuppositions of humanist recognition and representation that undergird a dogmatic image of thought in traditional philosophy. Deleuze’s postulates expose how they “profoundly betray what it means to think” (p. 167). Rather than coursing through these specific postulates and fully addressing what are sometimes vague and vertiginous Deleuzian ideas, I extract from them three imbricated principles that guide Deleuzian thought without image, or how thinking without method happens: (a) by force, (b) through an encounter, and (c) by chance. Following this move(ment), I situate thinking without method as an encounter with the outside, and by doing so, I disturb notions of a pervasive container view of thinking as relying on an image of recognition (i.e., reflection), closed off from the conditions that generate thought. I extend this critique to qualitative research method and its overuse and overreliance as a script, even loosely followed.

A companion accompanies me in this thinking without method: a backflip. I’ve written previous articles about this backflip (Jackson, 2010, 2016), and I return to it again and again because it is an encounter that “engenders thinking” (or difference, or the new) in thought (Deleuze, 1994, p. 147). I situate the backflip as a violent, destructive sign and a chance happening. I ponder how thinking without method functioned in this event. To map conditions of thought for

concept creation along lines of difference, I animate the backflip in which “non-stratified strategies” seemed to flicker, in a sort of emergent “revelation in scraps,” as mentioned above. A critique of humanist recognition and representation steers Deleuze’s creation of his new dialectic, so I follow the contours of his argument and extend them into my creation. Most importantly, I want to emphasize that any “thinking without method” is a feminist project of refusal. To think like a feminist, in the words of Grosz (2011), is “about the generation of new thought, new concepts, as much as if not more than it is about the critique of existing knowledges” (p. 77). Thus, my purpose is to signal a thinking without method that can be put to creative use in postqualitative (St. Pierre, 2011), postfoundational educational research in a gesture toward what current inquiry might become in the future. In this way, my concept of “thinking without method” is not a *solution* to the problem of methods-driven qualitative research but *living with* “the possibilities for being otherwise” (Grosz, 2011, p. 78).

Deleuzian Critique of the Dogmatic Image of Thought: “Everybody Knows”

In a conversation between Deleuze and Parnet (2007), they articulate,

“Images” here doesn’t refer to ideology but to a whole organization which effectively trains thought to operate according to the norms of an established order or power, and moreover, installs in it an apparatus of power, sets it up as an apparatus of power itself. (p. 23)

That is, a dogmatic image of thought is machinic: It produces certain rules for thought, with predetermined goals and ends. In his postulates, Deleuze (1994) rejects a single image of thought by examining its mechanisms that operate as “dogmatic, orthodox, or moral” (p. 131); his rejection is based on his general resistance to common sense, recognition, and representation (discussed below) in both traditional philosophy and the empirical sciences. Deleuze’s resistance reveals how we have inherited a single image of thought and what is at stake when we operate within its rooted arborescence. This dogmatic image is ready-made: already at work when we start to think, most of the time without our even knowing it.

By contrast, Deleuze’s new image of thought is the rhizomatic weed growing between the cracks in the paving stones. “Thought without image” is a proliferation of creation and generative of concepts. “Thought without image” happens on a plane of composition that “engenders ‘thinking’ in thought” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 147). Rather than building upon a previous, preexisting, and fixed image of thought in a hierarchical way, “thought without image” is infused

with difference, de-centering and fracturing not only the thinking subject, but also thought itself.

How can thought shake off its model, make its grass grow—even locally, even at the margins, imperceptibly? (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 24)

Deleuze (1994) begins his critique of the dogmatic image of thought with an implicit supposition: “Everybody knows what it means to think”—a form of representation, of common sense (p. 130). “Everybody knows” appeals to representational common sense because it claims a universal recognition and generality. “Everybody knows,” in terms of dogmatic thought, is a starting point, a nod to a natural capacity for thinking that is exercised on the “good will on the part of the thinker and an upright nature on the part of thought” (p. 131). What, precisely, is this upright nature? Deleuze’s (1994) use of “upright” is incisive:

Thought is supposed to be naturally upright because it is not a faculty like the others but the *unity* of all the other faculties which are only modes of the supposed subject, and which it *aligns* with the form of the Same in the model of recognition. (p. 134)

Deleuze’s stress on *unity* and *alignment* foreshadows his ensuing critique of coherence, which he will claim works against difference in thought (a point to which I return below). Deleuze (1994) extends the notion of common sense from an agreed-upon, in-common understanding to include a unification of not only the subject “I” but also the identity of its objects and values attached to objects. A subject applies an explicit method to its object, a method that unifies all faculties: “perception, memory, imagination, understanding” (p. 133). To make his point about common sense, Deleuze (1994) refers to Descartes’s observation of wax: “It is of course the same wax which I see, which I touch, which I picture in my imagination, in short the same wax which I thought it to be from the start” (p. 133). All four faculties are fused: What is recognized and remembered coheres to the representation of the thing. A stable coherent subject reflects upon and understands a stable coherent object. In this single image of thought, thinking is natural and constant, harmonious and good. Subjects and objects are kept in their presupposed “good” places, providing a foundation, or starting point, with a moral grounding between thought and Truth. Nothing is transformed—no new concepts are created—in a reflective epistemology using “upright thought.”

Thus, “everybody knows” assumes a rational, empirical “I,” with a Cartesian lineage, who is both represented and recognized in discourse. “According to this image,” Deleuze (1994) writes, “thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses the true and materially wants the true. It is

in terms of this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think” (p. 131): Thinking is natural, voluntary, and we all do it the same way. In this image, we think because we are all equally endowed with an innate ability to exercise our faculties: to understand and to explain, for example, categories that we already know (and that everyone else knows). Universals are not only knowable (“in common” with our thinking about them) but also shareable (common) in this image of thought.

So, what exactly is the *problem* with common sense and recognition? Common sense is an illusion that subordinates difference; that is, common sense is governed by sameness, identity, resemblance, and sedimentation. Common sense allows us to relate to things that are perceptible and recognizable; common sense does not violate thought. While Deleuze does not deny that it may be futile to completely discard recognition, he opposes recognition as a *single image of thought*. Deleuze (1994) argues,

It is apparent that acts of recognition exist and occupy a large part of our daily life: this is a table, this is an apple, this the piece of wax, Good morning Theaetetus. But who can believe that the destiny of thought is at stake in these acts, and that when we recognise, *we are thinking?* (p. 135)

Deleuze wants to reconceptualize thinking, to move recognition out of its dominance. The task of thinking, for Deleuze, is to “profoundly fracture” the thinking subject to restore “difference that thinking makes in thought” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 266). This difference comes from the outside, from the unthought.

Deleuze’s Thought Without Image and the Conditions of Creation

Deleuze claims that the single image of thought—the postulates of recognition and representation—distorts what happens when we think. He does not deny that these comparative activities occur, but because they are always bound to reproduction, remembrance, and resemblance, they deny difference in itself. If we are recognizing an object via our memory, or bringing it into resemblance by posing an analogy, or doubting our understanding of said object, then we are still on a plane of representation. We are not thinking; we are simply recognizing. “Thought may busy itself,” writes Deleuze (1994); but these activities in the dogmatic image of thought “have nothing to do with thinking” because thought fills itself with what it already “knows,” and recognizes itself the more it recognizes things (p. 138).

In a Deleuzian (1994) “thought without image,” thinking is an act of creation, not one of recognition. What are the conditions under which this creation happens? Something happens that gives “birth in thought to the act of thinking” (p. 139). Thinking happens by force, by chance, and through

an encounter. This force—this violence—is an intrusion: the claws of both “necessity” and “enmity” inflict themselves and “awaken thought from its natural stupor” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 139). *There is no method to thought* because

there is only involuntary thought, aroused but constrained within thought, and all the more absolutely necessary for being born, illegitimately, of fortuitousness in the world. Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 139)

Thought, then, is *of the outside*. As trespass, thought is a force—an involuntary “intrusion of an outside that dismembers the internal” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 87). This violence is the unhinging of what Deleuze (1994) describes as empirical, interior¹ faculties: memory, recall, reminiscence, imagination—those faculties that form an internal, incorporated common sense by “converging and contributing to a common project of recognizing an object” (p. 141). Deleuze (1994) portrays a “triple violence” that dissolves each empirical faculty: “the violence of that which forces it to be exercised, of that which it is forced to grasp and which it alone is able to grasp, yet also that of the ungraspable” (p. 143). It is through this violence from the outside that new faculties can arise, *new faculties that are unanticipated and unregulated by method*. Prompted by an encounter, these new faculties trespass beyond their proper place (e.g., on the plane of recognition): They reach *into* the outside. These “enemy” faculties are involuntary, and they are also transcendent in that they take flight from their empirical domain but remain *within* the world. That is, the outside is a dimension of force that is always “both closer [to] and farther away” from any form (Deleuze, 1988, p. 86). We don’t invite or expect this force, and when it happens, conditions of thought emerge; thus, the violence is both a destruction and a creation. That is, to create something new, the dogmatic image of thought must be disrupted and destroyed. We don’t try to understand, recognize, or resolve this force. Instead, we create.

Deleuze (1994) explains that an encounter is an involuntary and contingent confrontation with “something in the world” that disturbs common sense and “*forces us to think*” (p. 139). Because Deleuze is uninterested in a subject/object dualism, an encounter is not a confrontation with a “thing” but a *relation* that is sensed, rather than understood. If our immediate perceptions and memories attempt to make “easy sense” (Mazzei, 2014) of an encounter—to recognize something—then we are not thinking. We think only when we encounter a *signal* of the limit and the imperceptible, when we encounter the outside of the plane of recognition (or difference). In other words, thought happens under the conditions of thinking without method, which remain open to forces of the outside.

An encounter is a zigzag, something that happens in between and takes on its own direction:

We said the same thing about becomings: it is not one term which becomes the other, but each encounters the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two since they have nothing to do with one another, but which is becoming between the two, which has its own direction, a bloc of becoming, an a-parallel evolution. (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, pp. 6-7)

In an encounter, the thinking without method that happens is not mutual recognition or shared understanding. Rather, thinking is both “outside” and “between” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 7) the encounter, and, like a becoming, produces difference (or, the unthought, the new). Encounters *signal* the outside (or the limit) of thinking. That is, the encounter takes our disjointed faculties to their limit; the encounter that forces sensation is also that which is sensed (they are not distinct instances). And as becomings, these encounters contain what Deleuze (1994) describes as “coexistent contraries”—not what can be recognized, but what is monstrous, silent, and anarchic (the signals of difference) (p. 141). Deleuze’s (1994) example is that of the gods and demons: The gods are objects of recognition, *but we encounter the demons*. The demons are “dark precursors”; they are almost imperceptible and awaken a “free form of difference . . . the different within that difference” (p. 145).

Thus, thinking without method is “paradoxical operation” in which the new can only surface when the dogmatic is abolished (Deleuze, 1994, p. 146). And Deleuze is careful to warn that the new should not be borrowed from another system of thought; that would risk replacing one single image for another, constituting strata. Instead, the new exists only as nonstratified, and it is continually engendered:

The problem is not to direct or methodically apply a thought which pre-exists in principle and in nature, but to bring into being that which does not yet exist (there is no other work, all the rest is arbitrary, mere decoration). To think is to create—there is no other creation—but to create is first of all to engender thinking in thought. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 147)

When we sense the imperceptible, when an encounter “moves the soul, perplexes it” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 140), we turn the encounter into a problem—not a problem to be solved, understood, or interpreted via procedures, but a creative problem *posing* that opens up to the outside, to the new. According to Deleuze, problems have been construed, in the dogmatic image of thought, as ready-made, coming from elsewhere (that is, not via an encounter but perhaps the master discipline), and dependent upon a Cartesian frame of doubt and uncertainty (which remains locked in the postulate of recognition). Problems, on the plane of recognition, also imply a need for a solution that is preexistent, waiting to be discovered. In the dogmatic image of thought,

problems are gaps, or lack: They can be solved by filling them up with preexistent information, waiting our unearthing. When problems are solved, writes Deleuze (1994),

They disappear in the responses or solution. Already, under this double aspect, they can be no more than phantoms. We are led to believe that the activity of thinking, along with truth and falsehood in relation to that activity, begins only with the search for solutions, that both of these concern only solutions. (p. 158)

In Deleuzian (1994) thought without image, “a problem does not exist apart from its solutions. Far from disappearing in this overlay, however, it insists and persists in these solutions” (p. 163). That is, if problems persist, then solutions are not the end, because there may be other solutions to come that are unpredictable.

In summary, encounters force thought. To create (or to think) requires our openness to the violence of the encounter so that everything is transformed, so that the images we rely on to “make sense” are destroyed to make way for the new. Including ourselves.

Thinking Without Method: Fragments and Flickers

Finding, encountering, stealing instead of regulating, recognizing and judging. For recognizing is the opposite of the encounter . . . Better to be a road-sweeper than a judge. (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 8)

In the previous sections, I relied on Deleuze’s concept of the outside and his critique of the dogmatic image of thought to lay out a plane for what I’m calling *thinking without method*, and I now turn to some of my previous work to map its conditions. Thinking happens, without method, through an encounter that imposes itself on thought as an act of violence. As I mentioned in the introduction, I experienced an encounter in 2002 while working on my dissertation that explored the construction of subjectivity by adolescent girls in the milieu of small-town, rural education. I was interested in the *concept* of subjectivity within a poststructural framework, but designing a study was not appealing to me. When I look back on my dissertation proposal, there is no plan to collect data other than showing up at a particular high school at the start of the day to follow girls around (with their consent) as they lived their school lives. I wanted to see what would happen, to let things unfold in the absence of a pre-planned method: no interview protocols, no observational goals, no identified data sources. Rather than going completely rogue during fieldwork, I did carry around a notebook to jot down my “thinking with theory” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012): I had been reading Foucault’s and Butler’s theories of power and subjectivity, so what always caught my attention were practices of performative resistances, within relations

of power, by adolescent girls. One girl whom I followed for several weeks was a cheerleader, whose unwavering resistance to the hypersexualization of a seductive dance routine created tensions within the team. During practices (which I attended), she refused to perform the dance, oftentimes standing still rather than grinding her hips to the music. Finally, at a high school pep rally, she executed an unplanned (and unwanted by her squad) backflip in the middle of the dance, and doing so disrupted everything.

The backflip was so perplexing to me in 2002 that I could not write about it in my dissertation. The backflip, as an encounter, was such a “shock to thought” (Massumi, 2012) that I was unable to *recognize* it—though I did *sense* that it was *more than* playful movement or simply a demonstration of athletic prowess. I finally wrote something about the backflip in “Deleuze and the Girl” (2010), in which I worked with the Deleuzian concept *becoming*. Becoming led me, six years later, to the *refrain*, which I used in a recent paper (2016) “An Ontology of a Backflip.” This unlimited process of thinking without method, as well as an “eternal return” (Deleuze, 2005) to this encounter, is repetition with difference; that is, each encounter with the backflip creates newness without end. It is the difference *produced* by the repetition of an encounter—its newness each time—that is the power of thinking without method.

To create difference is to generate new relations in thought. Doing so requires a violence, a forgetting, a refusal. What dogmatic image of qualitative inquiry must be destroyed to make way for thinking without method in qualitative inquiry? What do we have to forget to make new connections and relations? In other words, what were the conditions under which the backflip became an encounter? To explore these questions, I re-animate Deleuze’s critique to bring it forward into a thinking without method, eventually returning to the moment of the encounter of the backflip.

The dogmatic image of Method casts long shadows over qualitative inquiry. This image of Method is consecrated in thousands of academic textbooks and university course syllabi across the world. Method is normative in that it is recognizable: Everybody knows what it means to conduct good fieldwork. Everybody knows the process of forming a research question, searching the literature, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up findings. While there may be variations in practices of fieldwork, as well as critical debates over, for example, what counts as data, Method relies on common sense and recognition (e.g., “everybody knows”) to maintain its universality. That is, there is a unified (common) representational motor that churns out products like coded analyses of interviews and thematic representations of both literature and data. There is a universal presumption that research problems address gaps that need to be filled with recognizable knowledge that coheres to a master discipline (such as anthropology, built by Method). And, there is a unified (common) notion of a researcher (subject) and an object of knowledge that are

separate with the researcher endowed with *a priori*, voluntary skills to seek-and-find. In her critique of reason and method, Manning (2016) writes,

In working as an apparatus of capture, method gives reason its place in the sun: it diagnoses, it situates, it organizes, and ultimately it surveys and judges . . . method works as the safeguard against the ineffable: if something cannot be categorized, it cannot be made to account for itself and is cast aside as irrelevant. (p. 32)

The upshot of the dogmatic image of Method in qualitative research is this: Even after decades of debates over what Method *is*, it secures its coherence because it is recognized *as* qualitative inquiry. Arguing for its so-called diversity (i.e., multiple approaches to methods) misses the point: *Method is a given; it has become natural and ready-made*. Method is waiting for us, external to us—a form that we aspire toward. In this image of thought, Method becomes voluntary and “common sense”: Everybody knows that if you learn how to conduct inquiry, you can willfully apply it—thus affirming and reproducing it. Method installs itself via a doer who coheres to its Image and believes in its promise to deliver credible, authentic, and trustworthy research. That is, a well-trained qualitative researcher is already presupposed to be recognizable through practices such as “immersion in the field,” “triangulation,” “member checking,” “reflexive journaling,” and so on. Thus, this empirical “I” recognizes *itself* in its Method.

Despite debates and critical (even deconstructive) proliferations in qualitative inquiry, unity underscores Method’s persistence. Even critical interventions in Method are oriented toward recognition: Researchers still start in the same place, on the same plane of common sense and resemblance, to critique. In other words, to critique interviewing from any epistemological or ontological framework, the object of recognition (i.e., interviewing) must pass through “the screen of the Same” (Zourabichvili, 2012, p. 47). What we glean from Deleuzian thought is that critique without *creation* remains within a dogmatic image of Method (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Concept *creation*, then, is what

opens up the thing, object, process, or event—the real—to becoming other, to indeterminate becomings . . . the concept is how we welcome a people to come, a world to come, a movement beyond ourselves, rather than simply affirming *what we are*. (Grosz, 2011, p. 81, emphasis added)

The starting place for thinking without method is always in the middle of the unexpected, in the violence of an encounter that cannot be predicted:

A genuine beginning requires the expulsion of every presupposition . . . The beginning must be repeated, and even affirmed on all occasions, because the world does not have the reality or reliability that we think: it is heterogeneous. (Zourabichvili, 2012, pp. 50-51)

The outside *of* method is the immanent that cannot be planned because of its emergence in the middle of things—pure difference. To be open to starting elsewhere, and to be open to encounters that force thought, we have to “forget everything” (Williams, 2013, p. 5). We have to forget what everybody knows about thought and method: a destruction that happens by force and chance. In other words, thinking without method is conditioned by being open to the arrival of Method’s enemy: chance.

In my own work with the backflip, how did the conditions “forgetting” and “starting in the middle” function to enable thinking without method? What had to be destroyed to make way for the new? In a previous article, I (2016) wrote,

This cheerleading dance happened while I was a doctoral student at the University of Georgia, doing my dissertation. I had seen the backflip in different circumstances prior to the day it was performed at a pep rally. I had watched cheerleading practice many times and sensed the tensions and capacities that were to come. I was in the school’s parking lot, the gymnasium, the weight room, the cafeteria, the classrooms, and the locker room. I was part of the crowd during the event, too many of us compressed into bleachers, when the backflip happened. As far as I know, it was unplanned, random, chancy, and risky. Tumbling and nerve-wracking acrobatics were not part of the cheerleading routines at that particular school at the time, so the backflip stood out . . . [and] the backflip was an encounter that has stuck with me. (p. 192)

That the backflip was performed multiple *times* in multiple *places* didn’t force me to think about it. It wasn’t remarkable because it was always contained in appropriate places: performed on a trampoline, in a yard, in the gymnasium. But *this* backflip was inappropriate, out-of-place: a chance encounter. It emerged as an encounter—an intensity that I *sensed*—to force thought. We can return here to Deleuze’s spider strategy. A spider spins its web with no goal or aim. There is no finishing the web and waiting for prey; the spider is only interested in “making, undoing, redoing” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 31). An object of prey is not the aim. Instead, when

the slightest edge of its web starts vibrating, it moves . . . it responds to signals . . . to vibrations that move the web in the state that it is in at that moment . . . there is an outside object, but it does not intervene as an object, it intervenes as an emitter of signals. (p. 49)

The backflip intervened from the outside of thought and method as a vibration, as movement, as a force: It provoked the new. In other words, the backflip became an encounter enabled by thinking without method. “Forgetting everything” about Method conditioned my being open to a violent encounter that disturbed thought; I was not on a mission to search for an encounter using normative forms of social science research methods. In other words, a researcher does

not set out to “find” encounters. Stratified Method cannot predict when an encounter will occur. I wasn’t at the pep rally, waiting for the backflip to occur, pencil poised over a “fieldwork notebook” to observe, take notes, and represent (i.e., describe) or reflect upon an object separate from me, the subject.

Like a spider, I had not spun a web waiting for an object to arrive on the scene—the backflip. Rather, I was in the middle of relations—an immanent *outside* composed of arrangements of activities, gestures, materials, functions, territories, expressions, sounds, odors, and all sorts of bodies: a skirt, a gymnasium, a trampoline, a backyard, patriarchy, femininity—even gravity (Jackson, 2016). The encounter was the inseparability of all those things that moved through me, “a single chance that combined heterogeneous elements” with the proper name of *backflip* (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 10). And the “I” that was there, too, was a threshold: a middle, a phase, a passing. Not an empirical “I” with the aim to recognize and represent, but a subject in crisis, a “fractured I” who confronts, in an encounter, a signal of what I was “not yet thinking” (Zourabichvili, 2012, p. 209). That I didn’t know *how* to think—that I *sensed* my own thinking becoming a stranger to itself—signaled the involuntary emergence of thinking without method.

The backflip was an encounter because it signaled an eruption within a complex network, an arbitrary force that seized thought and affirmed the “outside *in this world*: heterogeneity, divergence” (Zourabichvili, 2012, p. 51). An unplanned backflip by a girl who refused to dance seductively avows the outside because the encounter cannot be recognized or classified (i.e., reduced and judged) via a method of description as simply part of a choreographed routine or agile skill; thus, its destruction of dogmatic images of both Method and thought forced me to think. My *relation* to ordinary thinking about the gendered politics of cheerleading and dancing bodies forced a confrontation with what is “monstrous, silent, and anarchic” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 141); these relations *formed* the outside: a thinking without method. This forced, involuntary encounter of the backflip conditioned my fragmented, emergent thinking *with* theory and concepts (e.g., becoming, the refrain)—and *without* method. Like the spider strategy, my thinking *without* method (and *with* theory) was more of a repeated “undoing and redoing” than a conscious, deliberate interpretation of the backflip. New creations flicker with each return.

What does this “undoing and redoing” look like, lingering always in the middle of thought?

Every beginning is also a return, but the latter always implies a divergence, a difference . . . never a return to the same. There is no arrival, there is only ever a return . . . [and] it is at the same moment that we both depart and return. (Zourabichvili, 2012, p. 206)

I have returned to the backflip in two previous articles, and the encounter persists as a problem—not a nagging problem

to be solved (i.e., understood and represented) but a *creation* that opens into the new. The backflip, as an encounter, forced thought to “think otherwise (the future)” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 119). Each new encounter—or return to—the backflip in my writing is a new relation to the outside of both method and thought: a thinking without method that takes thought into the future, and allows one to forget method entirely. I both “depart and return” in my previous writings as I experiment with a series of concepts such as becoming, milieu, rhythm, difference, territory, deterritorialization, lines of flight, force, and singularity. This different starting place—always in the middle of divergence—are spider-strategy improvisations of “undoing and redoing” and repetitions with difference. The works undulates in what Manning (2016) describes as a “cross-current”: a transversal operation of difference in which “making is a thinking in its own right” (p. 41).

Thinking without method uses concepts as relational, connective, and “*vicinal*” (i.e., neighboring) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 91) in the production of the new:

The concept’s only rule is internal or external neighborhood. Its internal neighborhood or consistency is secured by the connections of its components in zones of indiscernibility; its external neighborhood or exoconsistency is secured by the bridges thrown from one concept to another . . . to connect the concept with another in such a way that the nature of other connections will change. The plurivocity of the concept depends solely upon neighborhood (one concept can have several neighborhoods) . . . What concept should be put alongside a former concept, and what components should be put in each? (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 90)

Thinking without method, and with concepts in a chain-like manner, can be extended, then, to the use and function of concepts in inquiry—or, a thinking with theory that uses a “plugging in” methodology (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Concepts (instead of Method) keep thought moving: not a movement *toward* truth but an “infinite movement” that comes and goes, turns back on itself, folding into other movements (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, pp. 38-39). If an encounter forces thought, then concepts don’t bring peace to the violence; rather, they bring heterogeneity to the “neighborhood” of thought. That is, concepts and encounters reveal relations of the outside, or the unthought; together, they are “composing forces” of the outside—or strategies (Deleuze, 1988, p. 87). For example, I strategically built a junction between neighborhoods of the encounter (i.e., backflip) and the concept of a Deleuzian refrain (Jackson, 2016). Strategy here, again, is scrappy, experimental, and contingent—a construction of a new *function*, rather than a representation of knowledge. In this migratory strategy, both the encounter *and* the concept transformed in the relation between the two—as did thought itself. Variation and multiplicity, as well as spontaneity and receptivity, are the *conditions* of thought, when thinking without method.

Conclusion: Becoming Without

This special issue on “concept as/instead of method” calls for some final musings about the use of concepts in qualitative inquiry. What I have endeavored to do, in my contribution here, is offer some conditions for concept *creation* by exploring how I invented *thinking without method*. Concepts do not preexist thought (as in Method) but emerge in a dice-throw, an experimentation—so I am skeptical of concepts being used *as* Method, lest they become strata. “Concepts only ever designate possibilities,” writes Deleuze; they don’t represent or designate a thing (Deleuze, 1994, p. 139). Thus, thinking without method is not a search for concepts that fit neatly into a referential image of the encounter or Method; rather, “If thought searches, it is less in the manner of someone who possesses a method than that of a dog that seems to be making uncoordinated leaps” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 55). This implies a neighborhood of flat connectives that are sensed, each of which conditions the possibility of another in a “succession of partial relinkings”:

This is the outside: the line that continues to link up random events in a mixture of chance and dependency. Consequently, thinking here takes on new figures: drawing out particular features; linking events; and on each occasion inventing the series that move from the neighborhood of one particular feature to the next. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 117)

Thus, any work with concepts instead of method—or thinking *without* method—involves a pursuit of the outside, experimenting with emergent, fragmented, nonstratified strategies that may be insufficient but that nonetheless link up to take us somewhere (i.e., a new starting place) and do something (i.e., destroy habituated forms of method). The pivotal *without* in my phrasing signals both a thinking *with* theory and concepts (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) while on the *outside* of method.

Method, in the dogmatic image of thought based on recognition (what everybody knows) and representation (this is like that), is unlikely to produce the “new” whose immanence is only sensed, signaled, and never recognized. Thus, I have sketched the conditions that enable my invented concept of *thinking without method*: forgetting method, starting in the middle, and being receptive to chance encounters—all of which involve spontaneity. I contend that there is no recipe for thinking without method, “other than a very long preparation” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 8). I sense this long preparation in the random encounter of the backflip that won’t leave me alone. It vibrates as a constraining force and draws me toward it, pushing me to open it to the outside again and again, “multiplying its use” (Deleuze & Parnet, p. 5). The backflip persisted over the years as I read *A Thousand Plateaus*, and I re-encountered the backflip in the neighborhood of resonating concepts: refrain, becoming, territory, rhythm, and milieu. In this regard, thinking without

method is intensive in that it “possesses a unique speed and rhythm” (Colebrook, 2014, p. 182): It withdraws from rules, sets off chain reactions, and suspends finality.

I re-encountered the backflip with each new dice-throw on a line to the outside of thought, restoring “difference that thinking makes in thought.” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 266)

If the outside is always concerned with difference and the new, then “the outside is always opening on to a future: nothing ends, since nothing has begun” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 89). Thinking without method is conditioned by nonstratified strategies that stir up conditions for the new. Oriented toward the new, we are always in a relation (and practice) of emergence.

The line of the problem has been drawn: Qualitative research cannot accommodate the practice of thinking without method. Qualitative inquiry puts method *before* thought, and is thus shot through with dogmatic images to which we are to conform. How is it possible to follow an ideal path laid out before us, set by something external to us, to then create the new? As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) caution, “Never send down roots, or plant them, however difficult it may be to avoid reverting to the old procedures” (p. 23). In other words, if our movements are controlled and stifled by formulaic method, we remain mired in the plane of recognition and imitation. Appealing to the dogmatic image of Method obstructs difference; that is, if method heralds thought, then thought is not free to encounter involuntary misadventures.

In dialogue with Parnet, Deleuze said,

... proclaiming “Long live the multiple” is not yet doing it, one must do the multiple. And neither is it enough to say, “Down with genres”; one must effectively write in such a way that there are no more “genres,” etc. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, pp. 16-17)

In other words, critiquing method is not enough. Experimenting with method differently is not enough. We do not need method to think. Our task, then, is to keep creating the new without method: doing without method by staying on its outside in an act of creative destruction.

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Note

1. That is, not of the outside, and thus stratified.

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