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# Enactments of a Minor Inquiry

Lisa A. Mazzei<sup>1</sup>, Matthew C. Graham<sup>2</sup>,  
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## Abstract

In this article, we map conditions and enactments for a new plane of inquiry, what Mazzei named a minor inquiry. Informed by our collective thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of a minor literature and its attendant characteristics, deterritorialization, political immediacy, and collective assemblage of enunciation, we present the conditions for inquiry on this new plane, provide enactments from our individual projects, and conclude with incitements for escaping the dogma of prescribed method.

## Keywords

minor inquiry, Deleuze and Guattari, post qualitative inquiry, deterritorialization, collective enunciation

A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.

—Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986, p. 16)

In this article, we map conditions and enactments for a new plane of inquiry, what Mazzei (2017) named a *minor inquiry* in a paper that was published in a Special Issue of *Qualitative Inquiry* on Concept as Method, edited by Elizabeth St. Pierre and Hillevi Lenz Taguchi. Informed by our collective thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's (1975/1986) discussion of a minor literature and its attendant characteristics, *deterritorialization*, *political immediacy*, and *collective assemblage of enunciation*, we present the conditions for inquiry on this new plane, and offer incitements for escaping the dogma of prescribed method. Propelled by St. Pierre's (2019) admonition that post qualitative inquiry is a "creation of the *not yet* instead of the repetition of *what is*," we offer our experimentations in what follows. Drawing heavily on Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986; 1980/1987), the paper begins with a brief introduction of the characteristics of a minor literature, how a minor literature is different from a major language, and what this offers in mapping a minor inquiry. Each of the subsequent sections will present enactments of a minor inquiry according to one of the three characteristics within the context of our ongoing research.

The problem of expression is one that has haunted debates in qualitative inquiry for quite some time. Alecia Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2009) have written about attempts to solve the problem of voice in conventional, interpretive, and critical qualitative research, and methodologists have taken up various practices in attempts to "let voices speak

for themselves," to "give voice," or to "make voices heard" (see Jackson, 2003, for an epistemological perspective and critique). Such questioning of the promise, problems, inadequacies, and deficiencies of voice is not new terrain for qualitative researchers under the influence of poststructural and posthumanist theories; however, it remains tethered to the problem of communication or representation. "Communication, Deleuze and Guattari agree, is a questionable concept. Yet they hold to expression. 'What takes the place of communication is a kind of expressionism'" (Massumi, 2002, p. xiii). What we offer in a mapping on this new plane is not a mapping of representation but of expression. To map the assemblage is to refuse a representational tracing, or a simple empiricism. Instead, we account for expression not as a thing but as an enactment of forces as necessitated by our thinking with Deleuze and Guattari.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss the problem of expression in both *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987) and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975/1986). Rather than dwelling on the problem of expression, the problem itself incites for Deleuze and Guattari a new language. Propelled by this incitement, they develop what they name a *minor literature* and provide the following summation: "The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (p. 18).

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What, we ask, do these three characteristics offer in terms of thinking the problem of expression and the problem of the lingering humanist subject in qualitative inquiry. Is it possible to provide accounts of our research endeavors not bound by the lived experience of an individual subject? Within language, the *first* characteristic provides a deterritorialization, unsettling habitual usages of language that sediment thought. Deterritorialization in the context of inquiry is the process of un-coding habitual relations, experiences, and ordinary usages of language to separate the constructs of a major language that orients dogmatic thought and thereby method in a specific manner. This unfolding relational process emerges through a collective, which leads us to consider the *second* characteristic: Everything in a minor literature is political. The individual concern is not confined to the individual but allied with the collective—arrangements and rearrangements of processes and relations that are emergent (not determined in advance, or determining, but that signal potential). The *third* characteristic is that in it, all things assume a collective *value*: “There are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation” (Massumi, 2002, p. xxix) or individuated content/bodies prior to the assemblage; that is, there is no individuated author who authors expression. Put another way, “The subject does not express the system. It is an expression of the system. The system expresses itself [collectively]” (Massumi, 2002, p. xvi). Thus, expression moves through a territory of connection, and in a minor literature, “Every statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective assemblages of enunciation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 37). These three characteristics of a minor literature offer a way of re-thinking expression on this new plane of inquiry.

In a minor inquiry, the minimum real unit is not the words, the idea, or the concept of the signifier—but the *assemblage*. It is always an assemblage that produces utterances. Utterances do not have as their cause a subject that would act as an agent of enunciation any more than they are related to subjects as subjects of utterance. “The utterance is a product of an assemblage—which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/2002, p. 51). “Expression is not rooted in an individual body. . . . Expression is abroad in the world” (Massumi, 2002, p. xxi).

These expressions abroad in the world, or expressions-to-come (Mazzei & Jackson, 2018), not only take on a collective value but they also portend an expressive agency not restricted to language on which, “Expression is not in a language-using mind, or in a speaking subject vis-à-vis its objects. Nor is it rooted in an individual body. It is not even in a particular institution, because it is precisely the institutional system that is in flux” (Massumi, 2002, p. xxi).

## Enacting a Minor Inquiry

In this section, we focus on each of the three characteristics of a minor inquiry drawn from our individual work, provide a context for the particular enactment of expression that haunts these problems, and map an enactment as prompted by *thinking with* Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of a minor literature. While we present illustrations from our separate projects and focus discretely on an enactment of only one of the characteristics in each section, a minor inquiry is that which is imbued with all of the characteristics. One does not merely “choose” to deterritorialize, or to consider an ontology of the collective, or to narrate the collective enunciation. All rely on the other to work and to provoke inquiry on a new plane.

We begin with an enactment of deterritorialization. Enacting Deleuzian concepts is in itself a deterritorializing move, and we will illustrate this as Matt attempts to shatter the coherence of social justice and assessment narratives. Philip Goodchild (1996) emphasized that Deleuze and Guattari enact the deterritorialization of language in their writing: “Although they may use some of the same words, ideas, and concepts, these are always ‘deterritorialized’—their meanings are changing, following lines of flight” (p. 42).

The second enactment presents a consideration of political immediacy through an example of the individual constituted of and by the assemblage. In so doing we refuse “a” singular subject, narrating instead the *whole contained within it*. The utterance is not treated as the product of the individual but of the assemblage. Expression exceeds language and actions emanating from a speaking subject. There are no individual utterances, all are of the collective.

The third enactment presents practices of collective enunciation. Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986) wrote that everything takes on a collective value. “There isn’t a subject; *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*” (p. 18). If all utterances are of a collective nature, the possibility of inquiry that emanates from a unique, essentialist subject is no longer thinkable, which is, of course, the assumption that grounds conventional qualitative methodology. Following a discussion of enactments, we conclude with a discussion of implications for inquiry.

### *Deterritorialization: Turning Away From the Territorial Side of the Assemblage*

Major and minor are not two different languages but rather two different treatments of a language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 103). A minor language, by its very nature, is not external to but a deterritorialization of a major language; Kafka does not write outside of German but in such a way as to make German unintelligible to itself. To speak of a minor inquiry (e.g., Mazzei, 2017) is not to reject the

methods and methodologies employed within the current epoch of social science inquiry but a call for experimentation from within research, constructing a continuum of variation around knowledge production. A minor inquiry seeks to (re)orient research not toward perceived structural invariants and constants (the objective of a “royal” science) but to the novel, the excessive, the “*regulated, continuous, immanent process of variation*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 103, emphasis in the original). A minor inquiry attends to the omnipresent “cutting edge of deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 57) of research by seeking to make its methods “stutter” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 107).

Research is always already a relative deterritorialization. Similar to how the crocodile does not resemble a log but instead steals bits of code from the tree (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 11), the psychometrician’s assessment apparatus deterritorializes the elements of one assemblage (the student) and reterritorializes it in another (the test). The test is not a measure of an attribute or ability but the theft of code. Similarly, the ethnographer’s field notes do not describe, but produce; the interviewer’s transcript is not a copy but a simulacrum. Within the apparatus of the test, the notes, or the transcript, this code no longer functions as it did in the student assemblage but forms connections in relation to new flows of desire. As Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) articulate, language is not communicative but commanding (p. 75). Research is never about something, but rather is always doing something.

If this is true, then how anemic the contemporary social sciences are. Much as Freud took the revolutionary concept of the id and hid it behind Mommy/Daddy/Me (Adkins, 2015, p. 36), scholars take the generative capacity of research and overcode it with the mundane. The Neyman–Pearson (1933) null hypothesis test, a cornerstone in contemporary quantitative research methods, perhaps best exemplifies this. The null hypothesis test is a technique that takes these deterritorialized elements and subsumes them within a recapitulation of what was already known—we reject the null hypothesis, believing the evidence suggests the world functions as we thought it would. Although this appeal to a transcendent ideal is clearly evident within these quantitative methods, this resonates with any scholarship—quantitative, qualitative, or post qualitative—that aspires for validation, be it content, construct, criterion, or convergent. Validity is an umbilical tethering research to a plane of consistency, not imminence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 24).

This is not a critique but an opportunity. If research is always already a relative deterritorialization, then a minor inquiry might disrupt this process of reterritorialization, keeping open possibilities through disruption and experimentation. Matt’s work developing a formative assessment to understand how pre-service and in-service teachers enact

social justice in their classrooms illustrates this potential. Rather than solely focusing on this study’s findings, Matt instead, also experiments with those deterritorialized elements that refuse to be overcoded—the excesses of a “royal” sciences that are often relegated to the limitations sections of a manuscript, if given any attention at all.

Critical in this project is the distillation and validation of a framework defining what practices exemplify teaching for social justice to provide feedback to educators. Traditional research methods, predicated on a logic of extraction and as outlined by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (1999), dictate that an initial constellation of indicators ought to be extracted from the extant literature. These indicators should then be subjected to triangulation with ideas expressed by experts in the field, current educators, and the curriculum taught within teacher education programs.

Although there exist many methods for doing so, one popular technique is to subject these attributes to quantitative review using what is referred to as the Lawshe (1975) technique. In this method, a panel of experts is asked to review each item and articulate whether it is essential, useful but not essential, or not a necessary component of the construct of interest. These results can then be evaluated, using a simple algebraic formula, to derive the content value ratio (CVR). A positive CVR represents that more than half of the panel members agreed that the item represents an essential element of the construct, whereas a negative CVR represents that fewer than half of the panel members agreed. Various thresholds for significance have been devised insuring consensus of the panel while accounting for the possibility of type I errors, or false positives (e.g., Ayre & Scally, 2014; Lawshe, 1975).

This approach describes a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Attributes are extracted from published works, enmeshed with attributes perceived as similar from the works of other scholars, and overcoded according to an extant theoretical framework. From the heterogeneous body of literature is extracted the presumed homogenous constants. The expert panel, the rational arbiters, are then tasked with evaluating the veracity of the results. Below a certain threshold, the work is invalid, an unfaithful reproduction. Above the threshold, there is evidence to suggest content validity. The project is Platonic in nature, for what is this mode of validation but the predation of “phantasmatic simulacr[a]” (Deleuze & Krauss, 1983, p. 48)? The omnipresent danger within traditional research is to be the illegitimate copy, to offer a representation that either distorts or is untethered from reality. As Lee Cronbach (1980) asserts, “the job of validation is not to support an interpretation, but to find out what might be wrong with it” (p. 103).

To intervene in this quixotic process of validation, we follow Deleuze and Guattari’s (1980/1987) critique of

Chomsky's universal grammar as what both Chomsky and this research uncover are not the deep structures abstracted out of heterogeneous elements, but simulacra. They are simulacra not because the attributes are unfaithful copies but because there was never the possibility of faithful reproduction, there was only ever theft. "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1).

The problem with research seeking to triangulate the homogenous out of heterogeneous systems, parallel the problem of Chomsky's search for deep grammatical structure, is not that it is too abstract but that it is "not abstract enough" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 90). That is, neither reaches the abstract machine that connects what a language is to what a language does. "The abstract machine as it relates to the diagram of the assemblage is never purely a matter of language, except for lack of sufficient abstraction. It is language that depends on the abstract machine, not the reverse" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 76). Abstracted universals are produced by extracting constants out of the substance and form of expression—by overcoding structure over variation. That which does not fit the model is relegated to the outside. However, one cannot simply turn away from structure and toward the pragmatic without the risk of extracting constants out of the substance and form of content—the limitation of poststructural linguistics (Bell, 2018, p. 77). Instead, what Deleuze and Guattari suggest is a minor research that explores abstraction at the level of abstract machines, exploring the co-constitutive variations of content and expression through which language functions. "To place the statement in continuous variation is to send it through all the prosodic, semantic, syntactical, and phonological variables that can affect it in the shortest movement of time" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 94). Here, we can see both language and research as a process, not product. The constant does not presuppose variation but, instead, is merely the territorial side of the assemblage. Within the context of this research, we attend to this process by turning away from this territorial side of averages and means and instead look at both the variances from which these constants are abstracted and the knowledge that is amputated by orienting the assemblage toward the constant.

In considering these two sides of the assemblage—the territorial and the "cutting edge of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 57)—we are left with two different orientations regarding how to conceptualize results. On one hand, we can aspire to produce a faithful copy and allow these deterritorialized elements to be subsumed by the mundane—the apparatus of capture of a "royal" science. On this front, this project succeeds as the necessary threshold for the Lawshe test is met (Ayre & Scally, 2014). The set of social justice teaching practices

extracted from the extant literature sufficiently captures the construct of interest and meets the established criteria for content validity according to the expert panel. Conversely, we can look at the data as simulacra, turn away from the transcendent ideal, and attend to this process of a becoming-minor research. We can look beyond abstraction to the level of the constant and move to the constant productive process of variation at the level of the abstract machine.

In reorienting research toward this productive process, we move from attending to the constant to diffusion and variation. Rather than examining the aggregate—looking for the constant out of our heterogeneous results—we can see the unique patterns of how these experts "plug in" to this process. What emerges is a different story than the aggregate, one in which each scholar differently adjudicates each indicator. These unique patterns disappear in the aggregate, as the sum of these scores is both in excess of and less than its parts—overcoding the constant over the heterogeneous.

It is at the extremes of these data that we can find particularly destabilizing results. One reviewer provides a point of disruption in this process of reterritorialization by identifying all indicators as not necessary components of social justice. Furthermore, within a section on the survey where reviewers are encouraged to provide qualitative feedback regarding other important indicators omitted from the survey, the same anonymous outlier offered this:

I completed the survey and responded thoughtfully, but I'm somewhat concerned with the initial premise of this research . . . When this formative tool is implemented, how will the results be used? Will it be a teacher-driven process used primarily for self-reflection, or an evaluative process of some sort?

Within traditional methods, this respondent's concerns are noted and carry weight, but only as a single data point in relation to the responses of other experts. This respondent's scores exert an influence on the overall result, but only fractionally and ultimately do they not disrupt the final conclusion.

But by looking at the heterogeneous rather than the homogenous, this bit of datum can interrupt this process of reterritorialization. Instead of functioning merely as variance within a statistical model, this response destabilizes both the methods and results. At the level of method, we can see how this reviewer fails to conform to the intended function of the assessment, particularly in responding to the qualitative question regarding additional indicators. Rather than respond to the question of capture of a "royal" science ("what is social justice"), this reviewer improvises by deterritorializing the method and refusing the question. Instead, they reframe the project around the problem of social justice: "What are the connections that constitute it, and what further connections are made possible and impossible?"

(Atkins, p. 9). By doing so, this response cuts across both the impetus of the project and its results. As an interjection at the level of the problem rather than the question, this response disallows for an easy settlement on this logic of extraction, one that is content to overcode the constant over the heterogeneous. Reorienting research such that this result becomes the focus rather than excess necessitates *attending to the problem of social justice, not just the question*.

This enactment highlights three points. First, a minor inquiry and, by extension, the process of deterritorialization, does not stand in opposition to a major or “royal” science but rather is always already a part of research; “the task is not to categorize science as either royal or nomad [minor], but to recognize that all scientific practices will involve some combination of both royal and nomadic tendencies. The project of becoming, of creating the new, begins with seeing the nomadic in everything” (Adkins, 2015, p. 13). Second, although all research has both “royal” and minor tendencies, orienting toward the minor changes how traditional research methods and methodologies function. Whereas a royal science is fixated on ideals and validation (turning toward the territorial side of the assemblage), a minor inquiry instead focuses on the generative capacity of research or the “cutting edge of deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 57).

Finally, we have sought to demonstrate both the major and minor tendencies within Matt’s work in social justice education. Here, we see the value and power of a minor inquiry as not to sabotage this project aimed at understanding social justice teaching practices but to shake the certitude associated with traditional methods and methodologies—“it is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters, but vigilant and insomniac rationality” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983, p. 112). Instead of an either/or research approach, we aim to think with the “and”—“Thinking *with* AND, instead of thinking IS, instead of thinking *for* IS: Empiricism has never had another secret. Try it, it is a quite extraordinary thought, and yet it is life” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 57). Here, we try and think with AND to hold on to both the old and the new empiricisms (St. Pierre, 2016), to attend to the political immediacy of the present milieu in desperate need of social justice while holding open the possibility of new modes of relations not yet knowable. We intend to do this work and hold it accountable as both necessary and insufficient, to take traditional methods and methodologies under erasure (Derrida 1967/1976).

### ***Political Immediacy: The Assemblage as Content and Expression***

In this section, we elaborate on the characteristic of political immediacy. In so doing, we offer an enactment to illustrate the way in which a minor inquiry produces an analytic

practice bound by the ontological commitments of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the assemblage.

Deleuze and Guattari explicitly link political immediacy to an assemblage. Rather than think the assemblage as an arrangement of things, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) write of the assemblage in terms of “what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities” (p. 4). An assemblage is “not a thing in the world—it is [that which explains] the existence of things in the world” (Buchanan, 2017, p. 463). An assemblage then in their words, “is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 8). “In practice, the assemblage is the productive intersection of a form of content (actions, bodies and things) and a form of expression (affects, words and ideas)” (Buchanan, 2015, p. 390). Attuning to the contours of a minor literature and its characteristics on which Mazzei (2017) invented a minor inquiry, different methodological interventions are made possible.

In enacting a minor inquiry, there is no subject who speaks from a position of knower or acts independent of the assemblage. The source of all utterance is a collective, whether social, national, or political. Being collective, the utterance is always already producing and produced by the political immediacy: always an assemblage of forces, bodies, affects, and things that produce utterances.

A minor inquiry then can only ever be that which approaches sites of inquiry and analysis as a process of couplings and connections of an assemblage—as a collectivity. From the perspective of inquiry, the concern is not with what makes up the assemblage but how the assemblage functions and what is captured in its territory. “An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 23). It is these flows, both material and semiotic, that are the source of utterance with which we are interested. How these flows are deterritorialized and reterritorialized is how the assemblage maintains its center, producing as we describe reproductions of racism and White supremacy, reterritorialized.

In returning to the assemblage, and considering expression, the utterance is not treated as the product of the individual but of the assemblage. We turn now to an enactment based on a recent event with which many may be familiar. Because we map this as it is transformed by inquiry in a minor key, we cannot think it as a singularity, or an event, but as a product of the assemblage, always a collective in excess of the locale, the subject, the utterance, the event. Political immediacy, that is the assemblage.

Two black men walked into a Starbucks in downtown Philadelphia on Thursday afternoon April 12, 2018 and sat down. Officials said they had asked to use the restroom but

because they had not bought anything, an employee refused the request. They were eventually asked to leave, and when they declined, an employee called the police.

The arrests prompted a #BoycottStarbucks campaign and protests at the store, in Philadelphia's Center City.

On May 29, Starbucks will close 8,000 locations to administer racial bias training for 175,000 of its employees. The move is a response to national outrage over the arrests of two Black patrons while they were simply waiting for a meeting to begin at a Philadelphia coffee shop. (Feldberg & Kim, 2018)

Reading the Starbucks event as the product of racist practices by an individual manager, or an individual company, is what prompted the boycott campaign and protests. And while we are not dismissing the importance of collective action to combat individual racist acts and practices, especially in the current political climate, we are arguing that to view this without the characteristics of a minor inquiry, thereby ignoring an ontology of the collective in the form of an assemblage, is to fail to consider how the Starbucks incident is claimed in a territory of white supremacy and racism, thereby reterritorialized. Starbucks customers can be outraged because they are generally well educated and affluent. They see themselves as well educated and sensitive to equity issues.

An article in the *Houston Chronicle* (Bean-Mellinger, 2018) reported that Starbucks' target audience "is often described as affluent or high income (\$90,000)" (para. 1). And while this is not the entire market base, five target categories are described: high-income, high-spenders; urban-ish, on-the-go; technology early adopters; healthy-ish professionals; socially conscious; flexible to change.

A customer base who falls into one or more of the aforementioned categories would necessarily be outraged at what happened in the Philadelphia store and justifiably voice their horror that such a thing would happen in a space that they frequent on a regular basis. What happens, however, if we are to re-think this episode as a minor inquiry would have us do given our understanding of political immediacy? We then have to consider this outrageous act as always already a product of the assemblage, always a collective in excess of the locale, the subject, the utterance, the event. Political immediacy, that *is* the assemblage.

In a minor inquiry informed by Deleuze and Guattari, there are no singulars, only connectives. The individual concern is of concern because of the whole contained within it. In other words, *the individual is of and is constituted by the assemblage*. To account for the whole, it is necessary to think what agency might be in an assemblage. There are no discreet acts or utterances, only those produced by the collective. What if we are to think of the Starbucks episode not as the action of an individual racist agent but in relation with and patterned by previous events?

On the recent anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, Kathleen Belew wrote this in an OpEd piece appearing in *The New York Times*:

When neo-Nazi and alt-right demonstrators attacked counterprotesters in Charlottesville, Va., last August [2017], killing one and injuring several others, many Americans responded with surprise that white supremacists were suddenly in their midst. But White-power activism is not new, nor has it been part of an underground history. We knew. And we forgot.

Twenty-three years ago, on April 19, 1995, a Ryder rental truck filled with fertilizer exploded in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The bombing killed 168 people, including 19 children—the largest deliberate mass casualty event on American soil between Pearl Harbor and the Sept. 11 attacks.

And yet, in these 23 years, the bombing remains misunderstood as an example of "lone wolf" terrorism. People repeat the words of the bomber Timothy McVeigh, an avowed white-power advocate who before his execution pointed out how scary it was that one man could wreak "this kind of hell."

But in fact, the bombing was the outgrowth of decades of activism by the White-power movement, a coalition of Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, skinheads and militias, which aimed to organize a guerrilla war on the federal government and its other enemies. (Belew, 2018)

Outrage is a legitimate response to any incident in which a person of color is targeted by law enforcement. One need only review the grim statistics of the number of Black men incarcerated in the United States, or the number of unprovoked shootings of Black males that fed the formation of #Blacklivesmatter. Or the disgraceful campaigns run by politicians seeking public office who are condemned by the president, not for their racist and inflammatory remarks, but because they are perceived as too extreme to win a general election against a moderate candidate. However, outrage, implicit bias training, and treating incidents such as the Starbucks debacle is to still focus on the action of individual humanist subjects. It is to revert to meaning to be found in utterances and actions by self-determining agents. In an assemblage, there are no singulars, only connectives. The individual speaker speaks and acts *from* the collective assemblage.

We go again to Deleuze:

The minimum real unit is not the words, the idea, the concept of the signifier, but the *assemblage*. It is always an assemblage which produces utterances. Utterances do not have as their cause a subject which would act as a subject of enunciation, any more than they are related to subjects as subjects of utterance. The utterance is the product of an assemblage—which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us

populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 51)

Inquiry and analysis, therefore, refuses “a” singular subject, narrating instead the *whole contained within it*. The utterance or act is not treated as the product of the individual but of the assemblage. It is not that individuals don’t speak or act, but in a minor inquiry, “direct discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 84).

In Deleuze’s semiotic, material, and social flows, there is no longer a division between the three orders of reality, representation, and subjectivity, which ground conventional qualitative methodology. We might then say that these enactments are examples of what St. Pierre (2011) has named post qualitative inquiry. In other words, the conventional hierarchy of a reality that exists that the researcher can find and represent in language is not thinkable, that is, language stands between reality and the researcher. Rather the collective, or “an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 23). The three orders are entangled on the same plane, not on separate levels, and act on and produce one another simultaneously. “Every statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective agents of enunciation” (p. 37).

In the following section, we illustrate an enactment of collective enunciation. Like that which has been presented in a discussion of political immediacy and the assemblage, there is no longer “a” voice of a humanist subject, but as Mazzei (2016) has written, simply voice “without origins or beginnings” (p. 158). It is an enactment of collective enunciation in which there are no singular subjects, or static places, or traceable times. It is not that the individual bodies or utterances disappear, but narration must be thought that enacts the social and collective nature of language and the subject. “There is no separate, individual person to which a single voice can be linked—all are entangled. In Deleuzo-Guattarian ontology, there is no present, conscious, coherent individual who speaks the truth of her present or her past” (Mazzei, 2016).

### *Collective Assemblage of Enunciation: Student Success in Higher Education*

Minor inquiries demand experimentation, movement, and immanence. When the actions of researchers are bounded by observation as they are in this enactment, the “glow” (MacLure, 2013) of collective assemblages of enunciation remains available through breaking open words and visibilities, however experienced (Deleuze, 1986/1988). As noted in the introduction and in our reading of political immediacy, in a minor inquiry, utterances are products not of

persons but of collective assemblages of enunciation. Collective assemblages of enunciation, or *expressions*, produce both forms and substances (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). These forms and substances include utterances, objects, persons, and other words and visibilities to be broken open. This enactment explores the *expression* of student success in higher education, cultures of data, and the constitution of its substance, the successful student.

The particular student success initiative studied here was justified through gesturing to expansive notions of success and operationalized as a 10 percent increase in the four-year graduation rate of the Class of 2020 against the Class of 2016. Both of these characteristics were important to the imagination of the initiative in its first year. However, the one that gave a clear measurement benchmark, and as such was made meaningful to the continued employment of several persons within the initiative, channeled decision making. The initiative was charged with both, and a 10 percent increase in the four-year graduation rate became its North Star. (“*Did they not get the memo? Have they not heard [about the 10 percent promise]?*”)

Taking collective enunciation seriously requires some shifting in the presentation style of empirical evidence. In what follows, quotations from observational field work within the first year of Great State University’s<sup>1</sup> (GSU) student success initiative are identified only relationally. Quotations in the following from persons within the initiative are labeled *administrator*; quotations from persons on the borderlands of the initiative are labeled *advisory*. For those still tracking persons, note that human membership in these groups are in constant movement. Administrators and faculty, from entry level to senior, from nontenure-track to full professors, occupy both groups in ever-shifting combinations. *Administrator*, when used to name speakers throughout this enactment, refers to a person in that context who was on the inside. *Advisory*, when used to name speakers throughout this enactment, refers to a person on the boundary between inside the initiative and outside of it. There is no presumed hierarchy between these two namings; sometimes advisory folk are below administrators on organizational charts, and sometimes they are above. There can be no naming of speakers who are purely on the outside, as those expressions escape the visibility of the initiative, the institution, and myself, Laura, the narrator of this enactment who is somehow implicated in both and neither of these groups. In practice, in a world of content and expression at GSU given shape by an assemblage of data-driven control,<sup>2</sup> these distinctions matter. In some cases, as in the previous paragraph, this indirect attribution will also fall away from quotations, leaving the only possible attribution to the assemblage. The aim of the larger project excerpted here is to map the orientations and disorientations of GSU’s collective assemblage of enunciation in search of possibilities of machining *content*, in particular

the material-discursivities that are *students*, differently. Through giving no attribution to quotations other than administrator and advisory, the ultimate attribution of quotations here is to the collective assemblage of enunciation of GSU's student success initiative.

The truth of student success in American higher education is produced by the system of relationships formed through student success as data-driven control. This assemblage in the national literature also holds true locally at GSU. The question of this enactment further interrogates the topology of this orientation: what constitutes the form of *expression* of student success at GSU? This was a live question throughout the first year of the initiative, as there was never a decided-upon set of student success knowledge, of strategies and tactics and dividuals<sup>3</sup> (Deleuze, 1992; Raunig, 2016) and flows in play. At a student success planning meeting in April, one administrator asked, "*Do we need to step back from the 2020 goal for a minute and go back to the research, to what impacts retention?*" "*The research*" was a phrase invoked throughout the year; it was a specter of affirmation hanging over the day-to-day minutia of such a large organizational undertaking. The research put into use most frequently by administrators came from white papers, conferences, and emails produced by foundations and not-for-profits. Traditional academic literature came into the initiative from time to time, but the literature generated by foundations and not-for-profits most swiftly moved practices within the initiative. The contours of the assemblage of student success expressed by the gray literature better aligns with student success as operationalized at GSU:

*Access, progression, retention, completion—those are the four [strategies]. We're mixing categories . . . those were what are the categories in the research that tell us what leads to retention. I think we also need to make sure best practices are on there. We have to include best practices."/*"*Those are tactics."/*"*The specific ones from Complete [College] America, from EAB<sup>4</sup>—those."/*"*Can you put a red one [tactic] under there for increase credit accumulation?"*

The assemblage of student success in operation in the gray literature and at GSU, data-driven control, produces a collective assemblage of enunciation, or *expression*, that can be broadly characterized as cultures of data. The utterances regarding student success in circulation are all *expressions* of the assemblage; some are actualized by GSU, others are actualized by the gray literature. Several forms of cultures of data are explored in the following.

**Form of expression: Flows of information from EAB and elsewhere.** To say EAB and GSU are entangled is a bit imprecise: EAB and GSU are forms of content produced by the student success assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). The successful student (the four-year graduate) is the form of

expression of this assemblage. This form of expression relates flows of information, many of these coming into contact with EAB. Here, let us explore the flows of information connected to EAB that re/create the successful student. EAB distributes a wide range of content, from white papers to a steady stream of quotes to higher education media outlets, to institutional reports for member institutions (paying customers, flows of dollars-universities-quasi-corporate entities) with strict nondisclosure statements. EAB also emails solutions provocations once daily during academic terms, and sometimes two to three times daily. These emails include listicles, *à la* BuzzFeed clickbait articles, of student success and generic corporatist solutions ("How to work 3 times faster in admissions,"<sup>5</sup> "5 problems with your open door policy"<sup>6</sup>), clickbait subject lines ("4 job skills students should focus on—and one they shouldn't,"<sup>7</sup> "Because 80 minutes per student isn't enough"<sup>8</sup>), invitations to webinars ("Laura, collaborate with faculty to source big ideas,"<sup>9</sup> "[Webinar] Tomorrow: How to scale student success through mobile technology and analytics"<sup>10</sup>), infographics ("100 principled, sustainable ways to reduce costs,"<sup>11</sup> "The 3 things today's donors want to see before investing in your institution"<sup>12</sup>), and solutions galore ("Learn how effective student communication can translate into increases in graduation and retention,"<sup>13</sup> "How to improve online student retention (Yes, it can be done),"<sup>14</sup> "How academic policies can help (or hinder) student success,"<sup>15</sup> "How one university created data-driven change on campus,"<sup>16</sup> "Maximize the graduation impact of summer enrollment,"<sup>17</sup> "Increase faculty participation in your student success initiatives with these 3 strategies,"<sup>18</sup> and "FW: Analytics and benchmarks your team needs make [*sic*] smarter decisions," a subject line for an email inviting the recipient to the following webinar: "Eliminate the Guesswork in Academic Planning"<sup>19</sup>). The sets of relations reinforced over and over in these emails, day in and day out, are those formed through data-driven control and the successful student. When a GSU administrator casually references that "*We're stuck in the 90s in EAB's timeline,*" it is an indication not only of EAB's effectiveness in disseminating the referenced infographic (Venit, 2016) but also of their alignment with GSU as forms of content produced by data-driven control. All of this information is shared face-to-face at EAB's annual CONNECTED conference for student success leaders, free (already paid) for their Student Success Collaborative member institutions. Several GSU administrators attended the conference in fall term, and the lessons they brought back lingered in meetings throughout the year, including this instance from April:

*One of the things that was neat at the CONNECTED Summit was to hear universities who were doing 25 things, and then the expert comes in and says, "do 5 things." How might we narrow our focus? So what details do we need to attend to moving forward? And for this piece about tracking, what are you looking at and how are you capturing it? . . . it seems like you*

*have some things from [institutional research] that say these are the KPIs we're looking for. . . we need some crispness about what we're messaging.*

EAB's solutions for producing the successful student are everywhere at once, contributing to an overwhelming enunciation of cultures of data at GSU.

An additional item of note regarding EAB is the myth they (and others) have built up about Georgia State University, another form of content produced by data-driven control. Georgia State was an early user of EAB resources, and for a variety of reasons, they have experienced large increases in their retention and graduation rates. Georgia State is frequently cited as a success story in EAB resources. For example, the lede to the previously mentioned article titled "Learn how effective student communication can translate to increases in graduation and retention"<sup>20</sup> begins: "Read stories that highlight accomplishments like an additional \$3M in tuition revenue at Georgia State University . . ." <sup>21</sup> Georgia State also appears with frequency in newspaper articles where EAB representatives are also cited (Treaster, 2017). Georgia State is cited frequently at the other GSU: "They're held up [by senior leadership] as: *This is the place that's turned it around. They've done it.*" They were given as the example institution in several meetings where the GSU student success initiative sought to implement the same tactics:

*Georgia State: imagine you have major 1, major 2, major 3—they just have students come in as majors, and then behind the scenes, they cluster . . . students, and a major may fit more than one cluster, and then deliver advising and other services to clusters . . . then they are able to have conversations with students starting at orientation, and maybe if they're not in the right major, we can funnel them into something else.*

Georgia State was referenced within the initiative as a favorite example of senior leadership on student success. There were lingering doubts by some administrators and advisory folks as to the comparability of the institutions. Specifically, Georgia State was thought to be able to experience such gains because they had a terrible graduation rate to begin with, and their non-Research I, non-Association of American Universities status allowed their senior leadership to make heavy-handed reforms: *If we want to be excellent, why are we comparing ourselves to Georgia State?* This disparity, ultimately, did not stop the comparisons: Georgia State was the form of content machined by the assemblage of student success that GSU hoped to be. As such, Georgia State was in constant circulation at Great State and within the initiative.

A class of information and a source of solutions one step even further removed from the primary policy documents or white papers of the gray literature are the higher

education-specific news sources. At GSU, the Daily News Update email from *Inside Higher Ed* in particular moved into and around and among initiative email inboxes. These emails allowed for quick comparisons between idealized forms of content of student success and GSU. Occasionally, morning student success planning meetings would start not with the scheduled topic but with a discussion of the *Inside Higher Ed* article, and the referenced university, forwarded to all by senior leadership early in the morning: "You saw the thing this morning about Indiana? . . . Why don't we count 15 as full time, Indiana does?" (cf. Smith, 2017). Outside of *Inside Higher Ed* and EAB, a forward of an Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities email linking to an article on "Using Data to Increase Student Success" also moved conversation, as senior leadership wanted to know how GSU compared with the institutions (forms of content, individuals) profiled in this article's case studies (cf. APLU, 2017). At this time, administrators had an important meeting with senior leadership on the direction of the student success initiative coming up, a meeting already anticipated to be tense. They decided to add these case studies into the flow of their prepared remarks: "One of the reasons to discuss the case studies to me is (a) to say we read them, because [they] sent them, and (b) to have a way to talk about these challenges without sounding defensive." Flows of information like this make a commonplace, mundane statement like "Research has shown that a student will be retained and will graduate if they are engaged" possible, valid, and sensible at GSU. In data-driven control, solutions promising the production of the successful student shape the utterances of its collective assemblage of enunciation, cultures of data.

**Observing enunciation, locating change.** Minor inquiry's commitment to practices of radical experimentation includes space for otherwise traditional research practices, so long as they are designed and attuned to reaching their assemblages. The research and analytic procedures implemented here particular to GSU allowed this enactment to break open the radically responsible individual at the core of "conventional humanist qualitative [and quantitative] inquiry" (St. Pierre, 2018). When quasi-corporate entities and administrators are no longer the radically responsible agents for problems, this leads us to different "solutions." In the case of the student success movement in higher education, producing an expansive student success—beyond simple increases in retention and graduation—will not come from hiring the right administrator or purchasing the right vendor product or emulating the right university, but through deterritorializing the collective assemblage of enunciation that produces success as retention and graduation. Minor inquiry shifts our orientation and calls on us to interrogate the conditions that create individuals and concepts as such.

## Future Mappings, Mapping Futures

In this article, we have mapped conditions and enactments for a new plane of inquiry, what Mazzei (2017) named a *minor inquiry*. Informed by our collective thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's (1975/1986) discussion of a minor literature and its attendant characteristics, *deterritorialization*, *political immediacy*, and *collective assemblage of enunciation*, we presented the conditions for inquiry on this new plane as illustrated through enactments from our individual projects. These enactments refuse a representational tracing of sameness and instead provide a mapping of content and expression on this new plane. Through these mappings, we account for content and expression not as things but as enactments of assemblages as necessitated by our thinking with Deleuze and Guattari.

Put differently, a minor inquiry takes the things of our field sites, the simple empiricisms, and maps their assemblages. In doing so, a different site of action opens. Viewing problems from their assemblages presents a new social field on which to play, to act, to exist, and to move. This social field is no longer merely a composition of individual things and actors, but rather the assemblages of singularities that form individual things and actors as such. Minor inquiries chart possibilities on how we might effectuate conditions for the formation of something else, be they different individual things and actors or a collapse of individualized subjects and objects altogether. They give us a social that is more than the sum of its things, and in doing so, present possibilities for creating our social and our individuations anew. The conditions for inquiry we present earlier cannot be meaningfully disentangled; together, they map this different plane of inquiry. And yet, these conditions are procedures for finding this social that eschew a proceduralism (Springgay & Truman, 2018) that would stifle the creative energy on which they thrive. Minor inquiries do not present solutions but rather keep thought moving (Jackson, 2017; Massumi, 2002), and it is this movement that opens futures beyond the imagination of simple empiricisms.

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### Notes

1. This is a pseudonym.
2. In American higher education today, data-driven control as the assemblage of student success places individuals, see the following, in continuous algorithmic variation in search of

the combination or collections of combinations that create desired outcomes.

3. Dividuals here are bounded and recombinable packets of information placed in continuous algorithmic variation to produce the successful student, a four-year graduate. These include commonly understood student data points such as grade-point average (GPA) and major as well as tuition dollars, units of time, assigned risk, predicted time-to-degree, and many others.
4. The company formerly known as Educational Advisory Board.
5. EAB (personal communication, March 15, 2017).
6. EAB (personal communication, March 21, 2017).
7. EAB (personal communication, March 7, 2017).
8. EAB (personal communication, February 15, 2017).
9. EAB (personal communication, February 21, 2017).
10. EAB (personal communication, May 10, 2017).
11. EAB (personal communication, March 1, 2017).
12. EAB (personal communication, February 3, 2017).
13. EAB (personal communication, June 14, 2017).
14. EAB (personal communication, March 29, 2017).
15. EAB (personal communication, March 23, 2017).
16. EAB (personal communication, December 15, 2016).
17. EAB (personal communication, March 9, 2017).
18. EAB (personal communication, March 13, 2017).
19. EAB (personal communication, February 26, 2017).
20. EAB (personal communication, June 14, 2017).

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