(RE)PRESENTATION: AN AFFECTIVE EXPLORATION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY FILM PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation uses various theories of affect to re-interpret and re-present the idea of ethnographic documentary film production through the lens of cultural studies. I put forth a more experimental understanding of production that examines the ways in which self-other relations inform the producer of the film, the process of filmmaking, and the product that is the film. Using my own experience filming an ethnographic documentary in Haiti as a case study, I examine the construction of my perspective as a producer, significant moments and encounters that informed the process of making a documentary, and the feedback from a viewing of the documentary. I employ a combination of methods to narrate the conjuncture of documentary film production, using a retrospective analysis of personal narrative as well as elements of autoethnography to construct a critically reflexive analysis of this case. Through this analysis, I connect significant moments that make up the conjuncture of documentary film production and put them in conversation with my own subjectivity through the language of affect theory.

This study incorporates my identities as a therapist, an educator, a nonprofit executive, a documentary filmmaker, and a scholar. In thinking deeply about my production process through this dissertation, I was able to identify ways in which I could make a better, more ethical documentary in the future. Ultimately, I conclude that an affective understanding of ethnographic documentary filmmaking can help producers--especially amateur ones--become more ethically accountable for the material consequences of encounters with the other that filmmaking facilitates for both those filming and those being filmed.
To my husband, Nate, and my best buddy, Russell.

For all the good affect you bring me.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework and Epistemology</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality and Personal Philosophy</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes for the Reader</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART 1: PRODUCER</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. COUNSELING: EXPLORING EARLY TRANSMISSIONS OF AFFECT</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Description</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Contextualization</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transference and Countertransference</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizing Themes</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. EDUCATION: THE ETHICS OF SERVING THE “LEAST LIKELY TO</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUCCEED”</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Description</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Contextualization</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>BEYOND THE BLOCK: HACKING INTO THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective Contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthesizing Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>HAITI: THE STORY OF MASON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neocolonial Interventions in Haiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective Contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mason’s Sickness as the Sickness of Modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthesizing Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>EDITING: THROUGH THE IMPASSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective Contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthesizing Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Narrating the Conjuncture of my Filmmaking through a Critically Reflexive Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Beyond the Block: Haiti Lesson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

“The concept of formal education is universally acknowledged as a major resource for maintaining and improving the social, economic, physical, and spiritual health of our world. Doctoral programs represent the highest level of such education, and dissertation work is the pinnacle event in them. Many educators, however, are not satisfied that this culminating product is really doing all that much to solve the challenges facing us in the twenty-first century.”


I entered this doctoral program partially out of frustration. Having been involved in K-12 education for almost a decade at that time, I had noticed and felt the rigid boundaries between the ivory tower of higher education and the K-12 urban public school system. I wondered what all those people were doing who were getting their PhDs. What were they writing about and why wasn't it ever trickling down to us? We were on the front lines every day as counselors, educators, and nonprofit service providers. What were they doing other than studying our statistics from afar and making judgments about our effectiveness, abilities, and motivations? When I did see representatives from universities, they were typically undergraduate students doing tutoring or interns that schools used for cheap labor in an underfunded system. I knew negotiating the red tape of K-12 was a deterrent to partnerships, but the universities had the money, the power, and it seemed to me the time to do it. Where were the bigwigs, the scholars? At the very least, where was their research and why didn't we have access to it? Any involvement they had seemed to stop at the administrative level, never to make it down to those of us who actually worked directly with students.

When I became a doctoral student, I did not want my work to remain alienated from those I sought to help. I wanted to make my work accessible, readable, and relevant to those seeking to change the K-12 urban public school system without sacrificing depth and theoretical
inquiry. In order to do that, I wanted to make all of my academic efforts applicable to the work I was doing with my educational nonprofit organization that I founded in 2007, Beyond the Block. Over the past seven years, I have written and produced three educational travel videos through Beyond the Block. *Beyond the Block: The Dominican Republic* examines the everyday lives, education, cultural values, and dreams and goals of students living in a small rural village in the Dominican Republic. *Beyond the Block: Serbia and Bosnia* is a travel narrative that reflects on the history of the Balkan war and the effects it has had on the region. *Beyond the Block: Haiti* profiles the lives, experiences, and dreams of several children who live in an orphanage in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince, Haiti. These videos, paired with a curriculum I designed, are used as teaching tools for students in grades 6-12 to fulfill Beyond the Block's mission of improving global awareness, increasing intellectual curiosity, developing critical-thinking skills, and encouraging completion of high school and post-secondary education in students at risk of school dropout. Having served over 3,000 students in Los Angeles and San Francisco, Beyond the Block allows me a unique perspective from which to examine various issues in K-12 urban public education, and having produced three educational travel documentaries for my students, I also have a unique perspective on documentary media production and reception.

In order to construct a study in which I could merge my varied observations, I needed to find an approach that gave me permission to speak from my own experience, but also provided guidance about how to root such an exploration in critical theory. As someone who has been involved in direct services for the entirety of my career, it was also essential to me to construct a study that could have an actual effect on people and have my contributions be, ultimately, positive. I was committed to creating a body of work that was truly based in praxis; sufficiently wrestling with and applying theory in order to create better practice. I found that the didactic
nature of traditional disciplines often truncates creative explorations into conversations between theory and pedagogy. Through American Culture Studies I was able to embrace creative interdisciplinarity and maintain my commitment to creating practical scholarship.

Cultural studies allows the space to explore, (re)conceptualize, and take risks with scholarship. In *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (2010), Lawrence Grossberg asserts that the goal of cultural studies is “to produce the best knowledge possible in the service of making a better world . . . making the world a more just and equitable place for all people” (p. 55). Grossberg's version of cultural studies is firmly rooted in what he calls an ethical commitment to “an obligation to an other” (p. 100). We should formulate our questions and identify a problem space based on ethics, while still allowing the conjuncture to challenge our questions and change them, articulating and re-articulating the relations that surface in our studies. Done ethically, even highly theoretical analyses can act as “a resource to be used strategically to respond to particular problematics, struggles, and contexts” (p. 27). Ultimately, he believes that there must be a balance between theory and practice, noting that “Cultural studies requires that you bring the conceptual and empirical . . . together, with the possibility that the latter might disturb the former even as the former leads to a new description of the latter” (p. 55).

The deeper I delved into cultural studies, the more I discovered its applicability to documentary film production. I had long struggled with questions of ethics while producing educational travel videos for Beyond the Block. Given that these videos are the crux of the organization, it was of course important to me that they be produced with some level of expertise as well as with the same thoughtful consciousness I wanted to evoke in my students. But I fell into documentary filmmaking through the entry point of pedagogy. I did not (and do not) associate my videos with a particular discipline, and I never attended film school. I was just a
school counselor who thought that video would be a useful pedagogical tool for helping my students. As such, I was not aware of formal ethics or standards by which to guide my filmmaking, except for the ethical standards I held as a therapist. My decision to enter graduate school then was motivated by one goal: wanting to continue to do what I was doing with Beyond the Block, but learn how to do it better.

Through cultural studies, I came to understand that the educational travel videos I had been making through Beyond the Block were actually considered to be ethnographic documentary films. And ethnographic documentary film has a bad reputation in some circles. This is because, as ethnographic filmmaker and anthropologist Jay Ruby acknowledges, “The popular assumption held by layperson and professional alike is that an ethnographic film is a documentary about exotic people” (2000, p.3). Ethnographic documentary filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall recounts how historically, ethnographic films placed a “diversity of faces, statures, costumes, and body decorations” before their audiences “constantly and extravagantly” (1998, p. 121). This had dire consequences for representations of culture, as the focus was placed on an objectified, exotic body, as opposed to “the experience of existing in it” (p. 121). The early colonial overtones of ethnographic documentary have lingered in how the genre is presently understood. Cultural studies theorists have likened it to exploitative pornography (Nichols, 1992) and condemned it as a projection of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994). Critics in film and cultural studies have suggested that ethnography’s historic problem of representation could be resolved by locating future production of ethnographic film not in the directive hands of white males, but in those of woman/native/Other (Minh-ha, 1989; Nichols, 1992; Rony, 1996).
As I absorbed the arguments cultural studies had about ethnographic documentary film, I started to feel defensiveness rise in me against critiques that ethnography could not be separated from its colonial roots and I have sensed similar defensiveness in the writings of other ethnographic filmmakers, such as the aforementioned Ruby and MacDougall. I wondered if I should continue doing what I do with Beyond the Block, if it is too problematic, if it is doing more damage than good? It was in this wondering that I developed this dissertation, asking myself: is there still a place for ethnographic documentary film in today’s cultural landscape? Is there a place for it in cultural studies? Is it necessarily problematic? Is it useful? If the practice is to continue, what are the ethical issues that must be considered? If I continue to make ethnographic documentary films, how could I develop an ethical framework that would help guide my production process in the future?

Within my first semester of my doctoral program, I was exposed to a reading that clearly articulated why I was feeling unsettled about my work. In “The Problem of Speaking for Others” (1995), Linda Martín Alcoff points out how “the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (p. 99). For Alcoff, “the problem of representation underlies all cases of speaking for, whether I am speaking for myself or for others” (p. 101). She provides the following example:

[I]n a situation where a well-meaning First world person is speaking for a person or group in the Third world, the very discursive arrangement may reinscribe the "hierarchy of civilizations" view where the U. S. lands squarely at the top. This effect occurs because the speaker is positioned as authoritative and empowered, as the knowledgeable subject, while the group in the Third World is reduced, merely
because of the structure of the speaking practice, to an object and victim that must be championed from afar. Though the speaker may be trying to materially improve the situation of some lesser-privileged group, one of the effects of her discourse is to reinforce racist, imperialist conceptions and perhaps also to further silence the lesser-privileged group's own ability to speak and be heard. (p. 113)

Because I had filmed in the developing countries of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Alcoff’s work forced me to confront my own positionality as a privileged, First world Western voice and the material consequences that voice could have on how my so-called Third world film subjects were perceived. I probed deeper into the discursive contexts of oppression within education and media. I considered the consequences of not having total control over how my media messages would be viewed by my film subjects and my student viewers. I also reflected on how “the listener’s social location will affect the meaning of my words” (p. 105). “A retreat from all practices of speaking for” loomed large for me when I began my studies. Ultimately, Alcoff’s conclusion regarding retreat became the starting point for this project. A retreat assumes “that I am unconnected to others in my authentic self or that I can achieve an autonomy from others given certain conditions” (p. 108). Such an assumption allows people to avoid responsibility and accountability for the multiple axes on which their actions affect others. As Alcoff states, “It is an illusion that I can separate from others to such an extent that I can avoid affecting them” (p. 109). Affect theory then, became the way in which I set about applying Alcoff’s suggestions to analyze “the impetus to speak,” interrogate our location and context, construct “hypotheses about possible connections between our location and our worlds,” and become accountable and responsible for what I am saying through my filmmaking and videos (pp. 111-112).
In an essay on reflexivity and the documentary film, Ruby asserts that “filmmakers along with anthropologists have the ethical, political, aesthetic, and scientific obligations to be reflexive and self-critical about their work” (1977/2005, p. 34). He draws on the three tiers of producer, process, and product that are examined in Johannes Fabian’s 1971 article “Language, History, and Anthropology” and applies them to the concept of reflexivity in documentary filmmaking. Ruby maintains that reflexivity is much discussed in documentary in terms of the product—the actual film itself, but “most filmmakers present us with the product and exclude the other two components” (p. 35). That is, many filmmakers insert themselves in front of the camera and thus consider the film “reflexive.” Ruby argues for a new definition of reflexivity in documentary film where “being reflexive means that the producer deliberately and intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his findings in a particular way” (p. 35).

This dissertation is my attempt to be reflexive about my filmmaking. Using my most recent film, *Beyond the Block: Haiti*, I examine what informs my perspective as a producer, closely interrogate the process of making a documentary, and analyze how the students I showed the video to through Beyond the Block interpreted the product that is the documentary. I do this by connecting significant moments that make up the conjuncture of documentary film production and putting them in conversation with my own subjectivity through the language of affect theory. Using affect theory, I am able to deeply attend to the embodied energy exchanges that constitute the filmmaking process. In this sense, I relocate the discussion of ethnographic documentary film from the discourse of representation to affect theory, reinterpreting a media genre that has existed since the 19th century. This dissertation is an attempt to produce scholarship that offers a
description “that, recognizing its contingency and contextuality, allows us to imagine other—better—possibilities and how we might get to them”—work that constitutes what Grossberg claims is “the very project of cultural studies” (2010, p. 294).

Theoretical Framework and Epistemology

This project is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing from Psychology, Education, and Media Studies; however, I seek to unify my analysis through a particular theoretical framework of cultural studies—that of affect theory. In order to keep my project praxis oriented, the theories of affect that I draw from throughout this dissertation are mainly related to the material feminist epistemology within which my work is located. Such an epistemology allows me to interrogate the material consequences of affective interactions as well as the subject-object relationship at the root of documentary filmmaking. For feminist scholar Donna Haraway, the fundamental perceived distinction between nature and culture has provided the basis for the “splitting of subject and object” which has served to “distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power” resulting in the Western modern “logic of domination” (1988, pp. 372, 378). Haraway does not completely abandon the concept of objectivity, but neither does she embrace an essentialist view of the world based on some “master decoder” idea of reality. Rather, she strikes a mediated middle ground, problematizing the traditional Western conception of the objective and subjective by suggesting that truth is a partial interpretation of material conditions that takes place within a “power-sensitive conversation”—what she calls situated knowledge (p. 377). Key to making this situated knowledge work though, is the understanding of object as agent. Envisioning “the world as active subject . . . permanently problematizes binary distinctions like sex and gender, without
eliminating their strategic utility” (p. 379). Collapsing subject and object into one situated knowledge deconstructs the most original and pervasive form of domination in the world—that of human over nature. By acknowledging that “we are not in charge of the world” material feminists render mastery, the ultimate tool of domination, an irrelevant strategy on which to base epistemology (p. 379). In removing this foundational binary, we open up the space to develop a new ontology that is not rooted in the various power relations inherent in anthropocentrism. Operating from the posthuman view that Western modern society is both phallogocentric and anthropocentric, a material feminist epistemology allows us to queer modernist constructions of the human subject. This opens up a space in which we can use theories of affect to imagine and explore alternative modernities.

Theories of affect are incredibly useful in cultural studies because they allow us to examine all of the fragmented parts of the self left in the wake of deconstruction, reconceptualizing our understanding of subjectivity outside the realm of representation. The appearance of affect theory in cultural studies can be traced back to the 1995 works of Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank (“Shame in the Cybernetic Fold”) and Brian Massumi (“The Autonomy of Affect”), but many trace the inspiration for these more developed theories of affect back to Raymond Williams’ idea of “structures of feeling.” In an interview with Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, Lawrence Grossberg describes structures of feeling as Williams’ contribution to interrogating that which existed beyond “the limits of signification” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 317). He relates how in his work with popular music, he felt that “theories of representation, of meaning, of ideology had little to offer any attempt to understand music” (p. 310). He discusses how Raymond Williams’ structure of feeling came the closest to comprehending “the ‘excess’ or ‘surplus’ that is always there through discursive production that
is not captured by notions of signification or representation” but that in the past it went undertheorized (p. 318). Williams’ work opened up the space in cultural studies to theorize beyond (and/or deeper within) the discursive, inviting us to reconstitute and rethink the ways in which we experience reality through feeling.

Today, affect is widely theorized with vast interpretations and applications, making it resistant to definition. In ”The New ‘New’: Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies [CAS]” (2008), Jenny Edbauer Rice points out, “The body of literature that comprises CAS is hardly unified in its rhetorical scope, methodology, or even a shared bibliography” (p. 202). Grossberg states that “affect simply covers too much ground” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 314). As such, there are varying definitions of what affect actually is. Gregg and Seigworth describe affect as “an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities” which circulate between and among the human and nonhuman (p. 1). Brian Massumi describes affect as bodily, autonomic responses that precede conscious perception (Clough, 2010). Ann Cvetkovich discusses the body of scholarship that is inspired by Deluezian interpretations that theorize affect as “force, intensity, or the capacity to move and be moved,” but describes how her own use of affect interprets it “in a generic sense . . . as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways (whether as distinct specific emotions or as a generic category often contrasted with reason)” (2012, p. 4). For Cvetkovich, this interpretation allows her to be “intentionally imprecise” in order to more fully capture the breadth of depression, the subject she examines in her work (p. 4).
My own understanding of affect draws from all of these, as the reader will see over the course of this dissertation, throughout which I articulate my understanding in numerous ways. But for the purposes of clarification, I would say that I most relate to Sara Ahmed’s straightforward definition: “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (2010, p. 29). In my interpretation however, I would prefer to replace “objects” with “subjects,” the reason for which will become increasingly clear as I interrogate the material effects of subject/object duality throughout the course of this study. I also relate to the interpretation of affect as a force or vibrational energy that can be transmitted. For Teresa Brennan the transmission of affect in the most basic sense refers to how "the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entails, can enter into another" (2004, p. 3). She also advocates, like Cvetkovich, for a more flexible understanding of what affects are or could be, arguing that "there is no reason to challenge the idea that emotions are basically synonymous with affects . . . or that moods and sentiments are subsets referring to longer-lasting affective constellations" (p. 6). I think this flexible definition of affect is important, because it allows us the theoretical space to apply it to various contexts.

The most difficult thing for me to do is to apply language to the experiences I have had as a result of filmmaking. It feels reductive in a way that is unethical, because so often the language we use to deal with film is based in the discourse of representation, as opposed to one rooted in senses, feeling, and the material. It is here that I believe theories of affect can help move ethnographic documentary theory forward. In his book Transcultural Cinema (1998), ethnographic documentary filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall attempts to articulate the undertheorized aspects of the documentary filmmaking process, describing it as a “resonance of bodies, verging on the ineffable” (p. 53). The filmmaking process engages the
senses “as the entire perceptive field of the body” and acts as “a probe that links us to others” (pp. 50-51). For MacDougall, what happens in the filmmaking process “suggests a synchrony between viewer and viewed that recovers the prelinguistic, somatic relation to others” (p. 53). Though MacDougall does not specifically use affect theory here, I think affect is exactly that seemingly “ineffible” thing he is attempting to articulate. If I had to succinctly articulate my understanding of affect, and in the context of this project, I would say it is a sticky emotion, feeling, or sensation that can be transmitted from one subject to another subject through both literal and metaphorical senses, a process which renders it persistent and transposable. This “definition” will become more clear as it is applied throughout the course of the dissertation. I consider film one way in which our sense of sight is enabled, disabled, and deployed. Through this dissertation, I hope to further elucidate the process of filmmaking through affect.

Methodology

I have already noted several questions that led me to this project: is there still a place for ethnographic documentary film in today’s cultural landscape? Is there a place for it in cultural studies? Is it necessarily problematic? Is it useful? If the practice is to continue, what are the ethical issues that must be considered? If I continue to make ethnographic documentary films, how could I develop an ethical framework that would help guide my production process in the future? These questions are all driving forces behind this dissertation, but in terms of specific research questions, I was guided by four main ones that focused on the producer, process, and product. First, as a producer, what affectivity do I bring to the filmmaking process? Second, what are the ethical issues that arise in the production of an ethnographic documentary film? Third, how did the product *Beyond the Block: Haiti* influence student viewers? And fourth, how
can I make ethnographic documentary films more ethically in the future?

This dissertation is presented as a retrospective, intrinsic, qualitative case study of the main moments and encounters that affectively informed the production process of *Beyond the Block: Haiti*. I am using a case study method to address my research questions because an emphasis on case description necessarily attends to the importance of contextualization. This project will retrace the specific contexts that surrounded the production and delivery of *Beyond the Block: Haiti*, making this a bounded, intrinsic case study. Intrinsic case studies allow for the focus to be on the case itself, which "presents an unusual or unique situation" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). Indeed, this dissertation examines a unique situation by positing a more experimental understanding of ethnographic documentary film production away from its traditional discourse of representation and exploring the production process as a mode of relationality that has the potential to facilitate affective encounters of force and intensity. At this point it is then necessary to clarify my interpretation of what an ethnographic documentary film is. I tend to follow the inclusive approach of Karl Heider (1974), who states: “It is probably best not to try to define ethnographic films. In the broadest sense, most films are ethnographic—that is, if we take ‘ethnographic’ to mean ‘about people’” (p. 1). This loose definition allows us to apply the theorization of ethnographic documentary ethics to any type of privilege a producer may be negotiating throughout the filmmaking process. It is not only Western privilege that needs to be considered, as when a Westerner makes a documentary about a non-Western culture, but also race, class, and gender privilege and their various intersections. These privileges could present themselves in multiple scenarios, regardless of the geographical location of the film. My own definition of ethnographic documentary then, is a documentary that focuses on the life/lives of another person or group in an effort to profile, learn, or understand something about them. In
Chapter Five I further discuss the controversy surrounding the definition of ethnographic documentary.

Methods

Although affect is an important tool in this analysis, it is not an exhaustive method in itself. In her book *Cultural Studies' Affective Voices* (2006), Melissa Gregg bluntly states: “Pure affect is not a method” (p. 23). Her book, however, stands as an example of a way to apply affect as a method of contextualization, as she examines “the potential for affects to be generated, disseminated and caught through a textual voice” (p. 9). The book explores the affective dynamics of the writing process, from author to subject material to reader (though not necessarily in that linear order). Gregg’s examination of key writers in cultural studies is “A way of accessing the affective relationships that develop in the pursuit of knowledge, particularly how a writer’s investment in their subject often transmits to the page and can spread to the readers of their work” (p. 7). In this dissertation, I apply affect as a method of contextualization that helps to describe how my positioned investment in those I am filming, as well as those who I am making the film for, transmits to the process of film production, and ultimately to the viewers who watch the film.

Lawrence Grossberg hesitates to define any specific cultural studies “methods,” but he insists that any methods used must consider “cultural studies’ own commitments to relationality, contextuality, and contingency” (2010, p. 52). He does however describe how conjunctural analysis can help us negotiate the complex, murky, multi-layered, multi-disciplinary work that needs to be done in order to perform the inherently political work of cultural studies. A conjuncture is a specific articulation of “different modalities of contextuality” (p. 40) that “has to be constructed, narrated, fabricated” (p. 41). In response to its construction, “conjunctural
analysis has to look at the non-necessary articulations of the socio-material, the lived-experiential, and the ontological realities of the conjuncture” (p. 43). By using affect as a theory to examine the film production process, I am narrating a conjuncture that opens the case up to conjunctural analysis—a space in which the context and relationality involved in the production process is examined in multi-modal and temporal spaces that problematize the ontology that lies at the heart of modern assumptions about self and other. The conjuncture I narrate positions the production of an ethnographic documentary film I produced within the context of K-12 urban education, the nonprofit sector, and documentary media studies. By connecting significant moments that make up the conjuncture of documentary film production and putting them in conversation with my own subjectivity through the language of affect theory, I am able to deeply attend to the embodied energy exchanges that constitute the filmmaking process.

I employ a combination of methods to narrate the conjuncture of documentary film production, using a retrospective analysis of personal narrative as well as elements of autoethnography to construct a critically reflexive analysis of my experience producing Beyond the Block: Haiti. My use of personal narrative draws from Ann Cvetkovich’s use of critical memoir in Depression: A Public Feeling (2012), which she used as one of her "research methods, a starting point and crucible for exploring my ideas about depression, an opportunity to figure out what kind of case history might have the richness and nuance I was looking for by actually creating one, and a way of presenting my understanding of depression as emerging from my ongoing daily experience” (p. 17). Dalene Swanson also uses a method of “critical reflexive narrative” in her arts-based dissertation Voices in the Silence (2006), performing “a critical exploration of the construction of disadvantage in school mathematics in social context” through writing her own narratives (p. 85). Her own experiences teaching mathematics and the narratives
she wrote about them form the foundation for her inquiry as she provides her own creative account “of a pedagogic journey towards understanding the pedagogizing of difference in mathematics classrooms” (p. ii). Swanson maintains that her use of narrative “is about noticing, attending and authentic listening, not only with the senses and the mind, but also with the heart” (p. 60). Both of these alternative research methods resonated with me because the authors were able to reflect and draw from the authority of their own experiences while maintaining a focus on the material impact of their research.

I have also been inspired by the work of the aforementioned David MacDougall, a visual anthropologist and documentary filmmaker who has written extensively about his experiences during the production process. His scholarship connects with my own experience when he describes film as “a form of thinking through the body, often affecting us most forcefully at those junctures of experience that lie between our accustomed categories of thought” (1998, p. 49). He seeks to describe “the tacit part of our film experience, which allows us to ‘inhabit’ the filmic environment . . . our sensory response to the content of film” (p. 49). His reflexive narrative method is incredibly unique and useful to my project because it is an example of a contextualization of the filmmaking process that incorporates relationality and emotion. MacDougall’s writing, however, is specifically intended to contribute to the field of anthropology, a discipline with a long and conflicted history in ethnographic documentary filmmaking (see Chapter Three). I am not looking to contribute to one discipline’s understanding of ethnographic documentary filmmaking. Rather, through this dissertation I hope to present a radical affective contextualization of the ethnographic documentary filmmaking process that can help anyone seeking to film an ethnographic documentary, whether or not they are associated with a specific discipline. Figure 1 on the following page provides a graphic
representation of the various locations from which I approached, and continue to approach, ethnographic documentary filmmaking, and how I am narrating the conjuncture of my own filmmaking through this dissertation

**Figure 1.** Narrating the Conjuncture of my Filmmaking through a Critically Reflexive Analysis. This figure illustrates the narrative organization of this dissertation, connecting work experiences to my role as filmmaker through the lens of cultural studies.

In order to construct a critically reflexive case study, I have reviewed and compiled multiple sources of narrative information, including my own personal journals, blog entries, and academic papers as well as forms, production materials, and student surveys from Beyond the Block. I consider my personal sources to be artifacts of affect—written documents that narrate past affective encounters. Through a case study format, I can put the alternative method of

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1 The student data referenced in Chapter 6 is pre-existing data that is the property of Beyond the Block. The data was anonymized by a third party associated with the organization. As such, use of these materials does not require HSRB approval per a review meeting with BGSU Research Compliance Officer Hillary Snyder on February 2, 2014.
critical reflexivity via the retrospective analysis of personal narrative in conversation with a more traditional and straightforward qualitative and evaluative analysis of student survey responses. Case study also allows me to consider each person and system I encountered through the production process as part of the case, and of course, I am also part of the case. Though this project does contain many elements of autoethnography, I have chosen to identify with the methods of critically reflexive narrative and case study because I do not see myself as the center of this work. The focus of this project is not to describe my own experience as a documentary producer: rather, the focus is to use my own experience to affectively describe the process of documentary filmmaking. I am arguing that this process is driven by affective encounters and so I am simply using myself as a source of information about these encounters since I am the one who filmed, edited, and presented the video.

This dissertation is about the affective process and experience that led to the creation and reception of *Beyond the Block: Haiti*, as opposed to being about the video itself. As such, there is no need to watch *Beyond the Block: Haiti* before you read this dissertation, however, having a general understanding of the structure and content of the film may assist the reader. For the purposes of clarity then, the following is a narrative description of the video *Beyond the Block: Haiti*. The video is separated into seven sections: Introduction, The Earthquake, Geography and History, Education, Culture, Dreams and Goals, and Conclusion.

First person narration guides the film, but is mainly used for transition. In the opening sequence, I try to describe how Haiti feels, but I reveal how I am at a loss for words and that Haiti does not present a simple story to tell. I briefly introduce the organization I spent time at and describe the children I interviewed. I end this sequence by stating: “This is not the whole
story of Haiti, but it’s the one they [the kids] told me, the one I saw, and the one I’d like to share with you.”

The second section, The Earthquake, describes the impact of the 2010 earthquake on Haiti, incorporating news clips showing the destruction and an interview at a mass gravesite. The children talk about their personal experiences with the earthquake as well as their understanding of how it affected their country and how it continues to affect them. This leads to a discussion by the children about how the government and NGOs have struggled to help Haiti and how many people a year and a half later are still living in tent camps. I transition with narration to photo and video footage showing the tent camps around Port-au-Prince as well as the still standing (at that time) ruins of the Presidential Palace. The children talk about what they want to do to help Haiti in wake of the earthquake.

The third section, Geography and History, begins by showing a map describing where Haiti is in relation to Los Angeles, CA. Children talk about the history of poverty in Haiti and narration transitions to a graphic depicting the impact of French colonialism on Haiti stating: “If you want to understand present-day Haiti, you have to understand its history.” Slavery, the Haitian revolution, and French indemnity are discussed as well as the three American occupations. The children talk about how the American occupations have affected Haiti’s culture and reflect on the importance of maintaining their culture and having the chance to run their own country.

In the fourth section, Education, we learn through an interview that education is not free in Haiti. A school in Cite Soleil, one of the poorest areas in Port-au-Prince, is profiled and the principal shows us around the classrooms. Education statistics are shared through narration. The
children discuss how important education is to them and how if they could change anything they would want free education for their country so people could make it out of poverty.

The children describe what they like about Haiti and their culture in the fifth section, Culture. They all describe how proud they are to be Haitian—their color, their language, their religion, their history as the first Black country. Narration transitions to photos and video that describe how busy of a city Port-au-Prince is. I reflect that “Life in Haiti is difficult, but also inspiring,” because there are so many people traveling around the city rain or shine to work and obtain resources.

The children describe their dreams and goals for the future in the sixth section, which largely include doing things that will benefit others such as becoming a politician or teacher and being able to help those who are less fortunate than they are.

In the conclusion, video footage shows the older kids at the orphanage teaching the younger ones a dance as narration plays. “Some of you may be wondering, how can I help Haiti? To be honest, there are no simple answers to that question,” I state. I recommend visiting, learning, and reflecting on how we can be better neighbors to Haiti and each other. I thank the kids in Haiti and end with our tag line: “Remember, there’s a whole world waiting for you beyond the block.” Our theme music plays as credits roll over end “behind the scenes” clips.

Ethics

It should be made clear that this dissertation is not an explanation of how I made an ethical film because I am not sure I did. However in thinking deeply about the production process of Beyond the Block: Haiti through this dissertation, I was able to identify ways in which I could make a better, more ethical documentary in the future. This provokes the question, what do I mean by ethics? I am influenced here by Rosi Braidotti’s (2006) concept of nomadic
sustainable ethics. For Braidotti, ethics deals with “the question of what exactly a body can do and how much it can take” (p. 129). She assesses ethics, then, by determining the extent to which a subject’s potentia, or ability to become, is enhanced or depleted. She further describes potentia as “the freedom to affirm one’s essence as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies entities, being and forces” (p. 163). Braidotti’s ethics, then, is both decidedly positive and affective, based on an understanding of “interconnection and affectivity as the defining features of the subject” (p. 162). Applying Braidotti’s ethics to my study then, means that I assess all interventions by the extent to which they encourage connection and opportunities for growth in subjects. If interventions and processes enhance a subject’s power to grow, then they are ethical. If they deplete a subject’s power to grow, then they are unethical. Further, these interventions and processes must be assessed based on how they “sustain the processes of change without hurting self or other” (p. 178). That is, the limits of a subject’s ability or desire to grow must be respected. It is also important to understand that “growth” in terms of nomadic sustainable ethics, does not imply any psychological, spiritual, or ideological location such as “happiness,” “fulfillment,” or “success.” Rather, growth simply implies being open to experiencing the fullness of one’s affectivity, or “the awareness of one’s condition of interaction with others, that is to say one’s capacity to affect and to be affected” (p. 156). For Braidotti, the human experience “may require putting up with and tolerating hardship and physical pain,” but if the subject endures and continues connecting to others, their movement towards growth will ultimately be positive (p. 163).
Structure

Constructing every chapter in this dissertation has been a process unto itself—a discovery, a revealing, an unraveling. Case studies must include a case description as well as "case-based themes" (Creswell, 73). As such, Chapters One through Five each unfold similarly, with a case description that details an aspect of the production process, followed by an affective contextualization of that case that seeks to bring relational aspects of that particular process to conscious awareness, and ending with the identification of synthesizing case-based themes. Some of the chapters focus more on the case description than others. This is necessary in order to properly construct the conjuncture of documentary film production. Throughout the affective contextualization sections, I have drawn from works that specifically identify themselves with affect theory, but I have also curated an assemblage of spiritual, psychological, and feminist texts that can be read affectively. My case-based themes are the arrival points of my chapters and provide an ethical topography for my documentary filmmaking process. Chapter Six is a departure from the previous chapters. In it, I examine student survey responses to Beyond the Block: Haiti through a more straightforward and formal qualitative analysis in order to determine what students are learning from watching the documentary and the extent to which the documentary facilitates an ethical encounter with the other through the documentary. In the conclusion, I propose that the synthesizing themes from Chapters One through Five could be used by other documentary filmmakers as an ethical framework. I put these themes in conversation with the results of the student survey response analysis in order to assess the ethics of Beyond the Block’s ethnographic documentary film production.

To organize this dissertation, I have used Ruby’s aforementioned three aspects of reflexive ethnographic documentary filmmaking: Producer, Process, Product. The examination
of these three aspects allows me to explore the new definition of reflexivity that Ruby speaks of, where “the producer deliberately and intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his findings in a particular way” (p. 35).

Part 1: Producer, includes Chapters One, Two, and Three. Chapter One examines the affect curated through my counseling education. A close examination of this role I occupy is important because I found myself continuously relying on my counseling education skills throughout the filmmaking process. In this chapter I use the therapeutic concept of transference and countertransference to describe the way in which affect is transmitted from self to other, examining how modernist categorizations, such as class, can intersect with attempts at connection and empathy. I then use an academic reflection paper and a blog post I wrote as revealing artifacts of affect that begin to describe how my counseling education ultimately informed my filmmaking process. I end with synthesizing themes that articulate how people in certain professional roles that are based on relationality—therapist, ethnographic researcher, or ethnographic documentary filmmaker—have an ethical obligation to anticipate such encounters and ensure that they are equipped with enough skills to negotiate them in a way that, at the very least, does no harm.

In Part 1, Chapter Two, I contextualize the contemporary issue of dropout in urban public schools by locating it in the historiography of the Progressive Era of 1890-1930, a time of political and educational reform and expansion that constructed the public school system as we know it today. I end the case description with my own account of the time I spent working in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest public school system. Using
journal entries and an affective reading of Gregory Boyle’s book *Tattoos on the Heart*, I then describe how public education has institutionalized systematic obstructions in the name of progress that can discourage and dismantle attempts to affectively connect with students. I end by describing case-based themes that relate to ethical intervention design through ethnographic documentary films and service provision for marginalized and disenfranchised populations.

In Chapter Three of Part 1, I describe how students of color are often considered "the Other" when considering issues of structural and curricular diversity. I locate Beyond the Block in the debate on diversity education in urban K-12 public schools using the case of Ethnic Studies in Tucson, Arizona to illustrate the current crisis in culturally relevant K-12 education. The affective contextualization section continues to draw from examples such as the Ethnic Studies debate and the school-to-prison pipeline in order to illuminate how the modern student subject is created in today's educational system. I examine the ways in which postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern theories intersect in education and theorize the subjectivity of the students at the center of Beyond the Block by placing them in borderlands of education, occupying a nomadic subject position while navigating lines of force and lines of flight. I end by synthesizing themes, affectively situating Beyond the Block’s mission within border pedagogy, describing how Beyond the Block and similar efforts can be understood as deterritorializing hacks into the system of education that mobilize those who occupy the borderlands through shared affectivity.

Part 2: Process, includes Chapters Four and Five. In Chapter Four, I describe how the cultural trauma of colonialism and the lived experience of neocolonialism can shape American interactions with Haitians. I provide examples of particular Western neocolonial interventions that have negatively affected Haiti. I then detail an experience I had with one of the children I
met in Haiti, Mason. In the case description section, I do my best to describe this situation in a straightforward way, leaving out the emotionality so that the reader can clearly understand the details and sequence of events. In the affective contextualization section, I attempt to situate my experience with Mason not simply as an interpersonal exchange that evoked emotions, but as an example of the life and death impact that neocolonial interventions inscribe on individual bodies. I then describe through synthesizing themes how Mason’s story stands as a documentary filmmaker’s call to ethical responsibility.

Chapter Five of Part 2 interrogates how the discourse of representation is typically applied to ethnography and ethnographic documentary theory and considers why it remains stagnant. I argue that centering the relationality of self/other is crucial to undoing the ontology that underlies the discourse of representation. Ultimately, this can provide us with a new way in which to theorize ethnographic documentaries. I then affectively contextualize my own editing process for Beyond the Block: Haiti by examining it as an emotional impasse through which I had to make sense of my relationships to self and other in order to construct a narrative. I end by identifying themes that highlight the importance of using theories of affect to guide and explore processes that are dependent on relationships between self and other.

Part 3: Product, includes Chapter Six and addresses the documentary product. Chapter Six proposes an alternative to traditional methods of evaluation by demonstrating what an application of affect could look like in a traditional qualitative analysis. Using student survey data collected by Beyond the Block, I construct a study that sheds light on the affective impact of ethnographic documentary film. This chapter is a departure from the organizational structure of my previous chapters because I want to present a nontraditional approach in a traditional format in order to demonstrate the wide applicability of affective approaches.
In the Conclusion, I end with the construction of an ethical framework for aspiring ethnographic documentary filmmakers and anyone looking to facilitate an ethical intervention into the lives of others. I also recommend future areas of study.

Positionality and Personal Philosophy

If affect theory can be said to have a “foundation” it is one of posthumanism, a postmodernism that decenters the human subject, breaking down any hierarchical barriers between nature and human and technology. Postmodernism’s deconstruction of the Western modern human subjects and all that entails, including their associated socially constructed identities, has led to its biggest critique. That is, by dismantling modernist categories of race, gender, sexuality, and virtually every other construction of difference, it has/will do what modernism did; silence the voice of “the other.” The deconstruction of race and assertions that we currently live in or one day should live in a post-racial society is one of the most highly debated issues regarding race in the contemporary moment. Because this dissertation deals almost exclusively with non-white populations, it is essential to note that by relocating ethnographic documentary film outside of the discourse of representation, I am in no way attempting to erase the identity of the “other” through affect, but rather am seeking to transcend the modernist limitations ascribed to the human subject. It is important then, to firmly locate myself as a person who exists within those modernist limitations so that it is clear that categories and classifications of identity are very real to me and shape my own subject position as well. This may seem unnecessary, as it might appear that this entire dissertation is going to be about my own subjectivity. However, in the following chapters I will be discussing my subject position expressly as it relates to Beyond the Block (counselor, educator, nonprofit executive,
film producer) and the elements of that subject position that directly impacted the production of the ethnographic documentary video *Beyond the Block: Haiti*. The reflections that follow provide insight into the essential areas that make me who I am as a scholar, the values and philosophies I bring to this specific project, and why this work is so personally important to me.

In my childhood household, I grew up very conscious of my ethnic identity. My paternal grandfather immigrated to the United States from Puerto Rico, but he was light-skinned and by the time my father was born my grandfather spoke fluent English. Being white and white Hispanic, I clearly passed as white. But my father was persistent about our Hispanic ethnic heritage and always made sure that my brother, sister, and I understood the challenges, judgment, and racism my grandfather faced from whites when he arrived in the United States. Growing up in the metropolitan city of San Francisco, I knew that many Latinos were struggling with the challenges of recent immigration, poverty, and gang violence. My dad always reminded us that these people were "our Hispanic brothers and sisters" and we were to respect them. From a very early age then, I received the message that my color and my class allowed me to pass as white and that in most cases, that privilege saved me the pain of suffering from a multitude of social problems and injustices. Later, in college, when I tried joining MeCha and was not-so-kindly denied, I came to understand how my ethnic heritage, though important to me and my family, was at the least unimportant and at the most insulting to Latinos and Chicanos of color who could not pass and/or had endured oppression because of their nationality, their appearance, their language, their speech, and/or their class. It was a wake up call for me to maintain awareness of my privileges throughout my life.

One of the cultural traditions that shaped my life growing up was my father’s strict Catholicism, something he inherited from his father. Though I am not a practicing Catholic, my
own personal philosophies have been indelibly shaped by the 16 years I spent in Catholic school. Particularly impactful were the four years I spent at a Jesuit high school. Jesuits are an order of Catholic priesthood based on the tradition of St. Ignatius of Loyola that place particular emphasis on both academics and social justice work. High school was the first place I was exposed to Liberation Theology, a way of interpreting the Bible that understands Jesus as a revolutionary who fought against oppressive state powers in order to liberate the poor and marginalized from suffering. Liberation Theology emerged in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. Though the Catholic Church distanced itself from the perceived Marxist bias of Liberation Theology throughout the Cold War and into the 21st century, Liberation Theology’s main idea of creating a church with a “preferential option for the poor” is part of church doctrine, so many people were still able (though sometimes subversively) to practice ministries rooted in Liberation Theology without fearing repercussions from the Vatican.

My high school interweaved social justice studies into our curriculum while also making extracurricular service work mandatory. They encouraged and sponsored activities that promoted solidarity with the poor and marginalized. One such activity was “Immersion” which was a two-week period during which students traveled to, worked, and lived in an impoverished area. The summer before my senior year, I chose to go to Tijuana, Mexico. Growing up in San Francisco proper, I was familiar with poverty and homelessness, however this was my first time leaving the country and so also my first time visiting a developing country. I was absolutely shocked to see the level of poverty that existed only a few minutes from San Diego, a city very similar to San Francisco. We worked at a soup kitchen in Tijuana and made friends with the women who cooked and the boys who lived in the shantytowns in the mountains. We visited transgender prostitutes in jail and brought them sandwiches because, as our guide told us, they
were the ones no one wanted to talk to or do anything for. I came back from that trip not only understanding the importance of working with and for marginalized populations, but truly feeling obligated to do something about the vast inequalities in the world that were causing tangible harm to the very real people that I had now met and befriended. I decided to attend college in San Diego in order to be closer to Mexico. While majoring in sociology, I participated heavily in service learning, mainly tutoring at Juvenile Hall.

My immersion experience also planted the seed that inspired me to join Jesuit Volunteer Corps (JVC) upon graduating from college. JVC is a year-long service program based on the four Ignatian values of spiritual growth, simple living, community, and social justice. In a kind of religious “Real World” way, volunteers are matched with several strangers and live together in a house in an impoverished community while working at a job that is similar to the type of position one would have in Americorps or the Peace Corps. Rent is paid by the organization and volunteers receive a small stipend that is typically pooled in order to pay for food and other household items. In addition to working 40 hours a week at their jobs, volunteers are required to hold weekly nights of reflection and do service work in the community.

During the year I served as a Jesuit Volunteer, I attended four weekend retreats at which the young JVC staff taught workshops and led spiritual activities, the majority of which were based on overt Liberation Theology. We studied Howard Zinn and focused on the retelling of the Gospel through the lens of Liberation Theology. It was the perfect education to prepare me for a year of living in East Los Angeles, working in South Central Los Angeles, and running discussion groups at Central Juvenile Hall. It was during this time that I was introduced to Gregory Boyle’s work at Homeboy Industries, which I reference in Chapter Two. At the end of my year of service, I was burned out from my work and overwhelmed from all I had witnessed,
but I was also wholeheartedly committed to pursuing a career in the service of others. One year later, I started my graduate program in School-based Family Counseling at California State University at Los Angeles, which is when I first began to conceptualize Beyond the Block (a process I examine in Chapter One).

I detail all of this in order to illustrate how my work is not simply something I do for a job. Rather, it is the manifestation of spiritual beliefs and values that I grew up with and continue to hold dear. These days, my personal spiritual practice is based more in philosophies that explore the principle of mindfulness, or embodied engagement with the present moment. I was first exposed to this concept in a secular way through a therapist who guided me in the use of mindfulness in my relationships. I have since engaged with the work of Buddhist teachers Thich Nhat Hanh and Pema Chodron (the latter's work appears in Chapter Four) who have each adapted the eastern concept of mindfulness for the western world. However, I am not a practicing Buddhist, and my family history, education, and much of my life experience will always make me somewhat of a cultural Catholic. My commitment to social justice remains rooted in the Jesuit tradition in the sense that I feel called to live a life in the service of others, always keeping at my core a preferential option for those who are disenfranchised and marginalized.

It is also worth noting here that I strongly believe in the idea that education can improve lives and help us to create a better and more just world. I do not think we have a K-12 public school system that is there yet, but I encourage my students to stay in this system because I know the options that await them if they dropout. I know too many students who have faced incarceration and death to ever recommend to even one that they would be better off removing
themselves from the system of education than attempting to engage with it. For many of my students, staying in school is a life or death situation.

Conclusion

In *The Authentic Dissertation* (2008), Don Trent Jacobs states that authentic dissertations are “spiritual undertakings and reflections that honor the centrality of the researcher’s voice, experience, creativity, and authority” (Jacobs, p. 1). However, this centrality of the researcher cannot overshadow the responsibility we have to “challenge all forms of oppression . . . to make the world a better place” and “to integrate knowledge, scholarship, research, reflection, and practice” (pp. 1-2). Methods may be nontraditional, but if we embrace the idea that there are situated knowledges and alternative ways of knowing, “any format can be sufficiently ‘valid’ if it makes a unique and substantial contribution to understanding the world better or to making it a better place to live” (p. 5). For Jacobs, as well as for me, creating an authentic dissertation means “asking the question ‘What does it mean?’ instead of just ‘How does it work and what use is it for me?’” (p. 5).

Through an engagement with affect theory and my own affective engagement I demonstrate how documentary production when done through a critical awareness of method, context, and process can provide an opportunity for intervention and action. I examine and bring to conscious awareness the affective relationality between the filmmaker, those being filmed, and the viewing audience as it is often manifested through embodied energy exchanges (verbal and non-verbal). In the article “Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy” (1994), Renato Rosaldo states that, “One can be tempted into following the dominant culture's conditioning by separating thought from feeling. Consider that matters that are deeply felt can also be deeply
thought, and vice versa” (p. 406). I have attempted to create a body of work that thinks deeply about feeling in the process of media production and reception.

Though I am interrogating my role as an ethnographic documentary filmmaker throughout this project, it is important to make clear that I identify as an amateur documentary filmmaker who is ultimately using documentary as a form of pedagogy in the field of education. Though the multiple entry points into documentary filmmaking make it difficult to quantify exactly what makes one a “professional” filmmaker, I still do not consider myself to be one. I recognize that I am not only a nontraditional filmmaker, but I am also just starting out, having only made two films on location. As such, some may claim that I have no right to theorize about the field of ethnographic documentary. Let me be clear then that I am not seeking to change the field of ethnographic documentary through this dissertation, especially since my primary aim is to contribute to the field of cultural studies. If anything, I am simply seeking to humbly contribute my experimental understanding of the production process to the field of ethnographic documentary. It is certainly not a generalizeable experience, but some may find my theorization thought provoking. What I find more urgent than speaking to already well-established disciplines is the acknowledgement that more people than ever now have the capability to make films at their fingertips with the proliferation of mobile phones, wearable cameras, and the other portable and affordable recording and editing equipment. I am not as concerned with speaking to the “professionals” then, as much as I am concerned with speaking to the amateurs such as myself as well as to those who do not even consider themselves filmmakers, but still wield a camera and record people in various settings, with or without permission. Whether these videos are played in one classroom in Los Angeles, submitted to a series of film festivals, or simply uploaded to the internet, my interest still lies in interrogating the material consequences of the
affective encounters with the other that filmmaking facilitates for both those filming and those being filmed.

Ultimately, this dissertation is taking on what Lawrence Grossberg called the “task of cultural studies to offer a better (re)description of the context it is analyzing” (2010, p. 332). I hope to signal the potential for participation and engagement through material and affective interaction so that the text that emerges from this dissertation process produces opportunities for critical engagement particularly from novice but also from seasoned ethnographic documentary filmmakers. This work incorporates my identities as therapist, an educator, a nonprofit executive, a documentary filmmaker, and a scholar. It is a lot to think about, but even more to apply. As I leave graduate school and refocus on my nonprofit work, I will apply what I learned throughout this process to my next documentary production and attempt to make a better documentary in the service of my film’s subjects, my students, and all those who believe that fostering connections between and among people through the medium of film is important work.

Notes for the Reader

Self/other relations are at the heart of this dissertation. In some cases, I am specifically referring to a psychological or philosophical relationship between self and other. In many cases I am attempting to relocate and/or recontextualize the self/other discourse. Therefore, I will only capitalize “Other” when I am discussing the concept of the constructed postcolonial “Other” or where an author I am quoting has used such capitalization. Also, throughout the dissertation you will also notice that when writing about race, I leave “white” in lower-case while capitalizing “Black” and all other ethnicities. This is a practice I adopted from the journalist Touré, who states in his book *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?* (2011): “I believe ‘Black’ constitutes a
group, an ethnicity equivalent to African-American, Negro, . . . Irish, Polish, or Chinese. I don’t believe that whiteness merits the same treatment. Most American whites think of themselves as Italian-American or Jewish or otherwise relating to past connections that Blacks cannot make because of the familial and national disruptions of slavery” (vii). The intentional lettering patterns I use regarding race are in deference to the cultural disruptions that all people of color have endured as a result of oppressive whiteness. Lastly, the reader will note that I have italicized all of my personal journal entries in order to delineate them from the rest of my sources.
“I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen, heard, understood and touched by them. The greatest gift I can give is to see, hear, understand and touch another person. When this is done, I feel contact has been made.”


Introduction

The above quote by Virginia Satir, a pioneer of family therapy, indicates both a starting point and an ending point to this retrospective project. It indicates a starting point in that I became a therapist because I believed in the power of positive human connection from a very young age, based on my own lived experience. It indicates an ending point as well, though, because despite all of the structures and mediation that I put in place between my counseling education and today—the education system, my nonprofit, the medium of film—I still believe that my success depends upon facilitating contact and fostering connections between and among self, people, universe, and everything in between. I still thrive on the feeling of being seen, heard, understood, and touched by another. And I still believe that making myself available to see, hear, understand, and touch another is the most authentic expression of my soul.

In recounting the education and work experience that led me to ethnographic documentary film production, it is easy enough to say, “I received my Masters in Counseling in 2005 and went on to work for Los Angeles Unified School District.” But that matter-of-factness fails to capture how the transformative nature of the counseling education I received while in graduate school contributed to and informed the development of my belief in the importance of facilitating encounters between self and other. I did not even begin the process of making the
video *Beyond the Block: Haiti* until 2011, so how is this past phase of my life relevant to its production? Despite the number of other "official" roles I hold, my role as therapist has always informed my ethics, my interactions with others, and my worldview. Becoming a Marriage and Family Therapist is an incredibly long process. After graduating with a masters degree, one needs to gain 3000 supervised hours of postgraduate experience and pass two exams in order to complete licensure. I was employed as a school counselor during this time period; however, I was still a Marriage and Family Therapy Intern until 2014. During those 8 years, I was continuously studying and reflecting on my practice through clinical supervision while also preparing for two licensing examinations. While making ethnographic documentaries is clearly not therapy, it does involve elements of a therapeutic relationship. Certain bonds develop quickly and intensely. Others take more time to build and nurture. Issues of self-disclosure, ethics, exploitation, abuse, and death manifest through the filmmaking process.

For ethnographic documentary filmmakers who do not enter the field through film school or formal disciplinary traditions, cultivating the tools with which to negotiate the effects relationships have on themselves and others is a difficult prospect. Even I, a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, someone who has such tools, have struggled to deal with the effects of the affective experience of ethnographic documentary filmmaking. However, it is only through the retrospective analysis of my production process that I have realized how much I have drawn from my foundation in counseling in order to facilitate and foster positive connections through my filmmaking. The ethics, tools, theory, and experience I gathered as a counselor all contribute to my subject position as nonprofit service provider and filmmaker.

Sara Ahmed states that “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (2010, p. 29). Throughout this project then, my
experiences are presented more or less chronologically, not to indicate linear progression, but in order to identify the ideas, values, and objects that stuck with me and persevered throughout the film production process. This chapter examines the affect curated through my counseling education. A close examination of this role I occupy is important because I found myself continuously relying on my counseling education skills throughout the filmmaking process. In this chapter I use the therapeutic concept of transference and countertransference to describe the way in which affect is transmitted from self to other, examining how modernist categorizations such as class can intersect with attempts at connection and empathy. I then use an academic reflection paper and a blog post I wrote as revealing artifacts of affect that begin to describe how my counseling education ultimately informed my filmmaking process. I end with synthesizing themes that articulate how people in certain professional roles that are based on relationality—therapist, ethnographic researcher, or documentary filmmaker—have an ethical obligation to anticipate such encounters and ensure that they are equipped with enough skills to negotiate them in a way that, at the very least, does no harm. Through this chapter, I hope to elucidate how the intimate dynamics of the therapeutic relationship can help ethnographic documentary filmmakers be more considerate, honest, and ethical in their interactions with others.

Case Description

In the fall of 2003, I began a graduate program with a specialization in School Counseling, Child Welfare and Attendance, and Marriage and Family Therapy at California State University at Los Angeles (CSULA). Our cohort, made up of a diverse group of students in terms of age, ethnicity, and background, was led by the program’s co-director, who introduced himself on our first day as a feminist—the first male feminist I had ever met. Practically
speaking, my time at CSULA was my most significant entry point into ethnographic work. First, it provided me with a theoretical lens through which to understand my experiences of working with people in challenging situations. Second, it allowed me to develop my interviewing skills by focusing on therapeutic techniques such as rapport building, active listening, restating, reframing, and unconditional positive regard. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the program deepened my understanding of and connection to what became my nonprofit organization's target population: urban students of color who are at risk of school dropout.

Through curriculum, placements, and an on-site counseling clinic, the program specifically trained us to work with students and families who are often underserved in Los Angeles: minority populations with low socio-economic status. Our urban location allowed us to closely engage with Los Angeles Unified School District as well as the communities of East Los Angeles and South Central LA. The program was extremely practical, as are many counseling programs. But while other programs offering the same degree might have focused on issues facing the general population, our application of theory was almost exclusively focused on our target population. We were trained to deal with issues such as poverty, school dropout, domestic violence, immigration, teen pregnancy, racism, criminalization, gang involvement, incarceration, and substance abuse. We routinely had a waiting list at our free clinic and the issues that our clients brought to us were severe. We all worked unpaid at school and agency practicum placements while also working full or part-time jobs to pay for the program since the school did not offer assistantships or tuition remission. This was a population we were all committed to at least in part because there was an extremely high need and desire in the community for counseling services.
Though I knew upon reflection for this project that CSULA was where I first began to gain the skills, the theoretical insight, and the practical experience to make an ethnographic documentary film, it was harder to trace how this phase affectively informed my filmmaking process. I began by reviewing my class assignments—finals, projects, and papers—searching for any affective expressions or themes related to affect. I had not reviewed many of these papers since I had originally submitted them, so it was an enlightening process to re-engage with my academic work from that time period. I have chosen selections from papers that speak to the themes I wrestled with in making *Beyond the Block: Haiti*. What has fascinated me upon reviewing these documents is that they demonstrate how I have been grappling with issues of subjectivity, affective transmission, culture, identity, and structural inequality for at least the past 10 years. These ideas and their material consequences have definitely "stuck" to me as I continue to examine the effect of affect.

**Affective Contextualization**

In reviewing a theoretical orientation reflection paper I wrote as one of my first assignments in November 2003, I can see that the philosophies of psychoanalyst Carl Jung were already informing my postmodern way of viewing the world. In the paper I state that, "[Jung's] concept of the collective unconscious says to me that I am not simply Debbie—totally alone and independent. Rather, I am connected to the 'history of the species' (Corey, 2001, p. 82).” I remained interested in the theories of Carl Jung throughout my education and am struck by the connection between Jungian philosophy and affect theory. This connection is worth exploring in depth, as it indicates how my education exposed me to a paradigm that situated temporality, borders, and the self-contained individual as modernist inventions as opposed to inherent truths.
In Jungian philosophy, “the collective unconscious” refers to a mass of collective memory that lies beyond known consciousness, but is not dormant (Jung, 1959). Rather, it exists subtly, circulating, dispersing, informing, creating, and shaping our constructed narratives. This is how the transmission of affect is theorized as well, though with a less anthropocentric foundation. In The Transmission of Affect (2004), Teresa Brennan argues that "affects are preeminently social. And they are there first, before we are. They preexist us; they are outside as well as within us" (p. 65). The illusion of the self-contained individual in the West however, keeps us from being open to such ideas as temporal and physical permeability. Brennan notes that the "Western psyche is structured in such a way as to give a person the sense that their affects and feelings are their own, and that they are energetically and emotionally contained in the most literal sense" (p. 25). Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious was early evidence to me of the theoretical possibilities that exist when the notion of the self-contained individual is problematized.

In "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies" (2010), Patricia Clough describes how Brian Massumi’s work examining “the philosophical conception of the virtual” helps us to understand how affect exists in a virtual world of indeterminate and emergent possibilities where the act of consciousness becomes subtractive, corralling limitless options into one narrative of emotion (p. 208). Affect allows us infinite possibilities because it is based on an ontology of interconnectedness that puts us in constant interaction with human, nature, technology, etc. In a seemingly automatic process, our consciousness chooses a way of being from those possibilities, shaping the way in which we understand and express our feelings. However, an individual's lived experience can transform this narrative. As Brennan states, the "persistence of the affect in the individual" results in what she calls "endogenous affects" (p. 6).
These endogenous affects are constituted by the "affective histories" of an individual and "perceived as . . . emotional dispositions" (p. 43). Though Brennan differentiates somewhat between unconsciously circulating affects and these endogenous affects, fusing her understanding with both Massumi's and Carl Jung's we can theorize that a person's new lived experiences can create new affective possibilities, which then undergo a re-uptake into the collective unconscious, allowing individual phenomenological contribution to the cultural memory.

Problematizing the notion of the self-contained individual also challenges us to re-evaluate the consequences of lived experience. In the theoretical orientation reflection paper I assert that, “At the base of my orientation lies a strong belief in the phenomenological approach.” Phenomenology is typically understood as a qualitative research method that Creswell (2007) describes as being "focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants” (p. 59). But it is also a philosophy that can inform how one views the therapist/client relationship. Phenomenological approaches to counseling prioritize the client's subjective lived experience—if an experience is real to the client, then it is real in its consequences. "It strikes me as both arrogant and dangerous," I write, "to assume that my reality is the right reality, especially if I am a therapist! To me, there is nothing other than 'subjective reality' (Corey, 2001, p. 109). So putting myself within the client’s frame of reference is imperative.” A therapist who takes a phenomenological approach must accept the idea of multiple realities and attempt to connect to their client through empathic reflection and intervention. But is relating to and accepting the lived experience of someone who might be completely different from you as simple as choosing a theoretical approach? What are the ethics of assuming it is possible to accept multiple realities as if they could be your own?
How are realities changed through encounters, therapeutic and otherwise? What are the ethics of assuming empathy is possible?

Transference and Countertransference

Functioning from an assumption that the researcher/therapist/filmmaker and participant/client/film subject are not self-contained individuals necessitates serious re-evaluations of the dynamics that can occur through the research/therapeutic/filmmaking process. In therapy we have a name for this dynamic process of affective exchange between and among therapist and client: transference and countertransference. Transference refers to the unconscious, emotional bond a client projects onto a therapist. Countertransference refers to the unconscious, emotional response that the therapist projects onto a client. If any real therapeutic work is to occur, it is important that the therapist make this unconscious reality conscious and recognize that the feeling of connection between a client and therapist must be contained in a safe space.

Though the ideas of transference and countertransference originated in Freudian psychoanalysis, it is a process that is recognized in all practices of therapy. In a chapter titled "The Transmission of Affect in the Clinic," Teresa Brennan (2004) affectively theorizes the transference and countertransference between client and therapist. In the traditional understanding of the transference/countertransference process, the therapist receives affects from the client through transference and those received affects are transmuted and transmitted back to the client through countertransference. However, Brennan illustrates the circulatory affective nature of this process by discussing the idea of projection and projective identification. She describes a projection as "what I disown in myself and see in you" and a projective identification as "what I succeed in having you experience in yourself, although it comes from me in the first
place" (p. 29). If we assume, as affect does, that boundaries are an illusion and people are permeable beings, the process of transference/countertransference does not necessarily have to begin in the client. It is possible that I, as a therapist, disown a part of myself and project that onto my client, who in turn experiences that thing as his/her own. The inverse is also possible; the client could project a part of her or his self onto me and I could in turn believe that is something that is true about myself. In this sense, it is possible for both the therapist and the client (and the researcher/participant and filmmaker/film subject) to change each other's phenomenological experience of being in the world through both conscious and unconscious projection and identification. This exchange that occurs during the dynamic process of transference and countertransference clearly requires much ethical consideration.

An area of high risk for transference and countertransference issues is that of differences in class and/or ethnicity between researcher/therapist/filmmaker and participant/client/film subject. In "Psychoanalysis and the Disenfranchised: Countertransference Issues" (2002), Rafael Javier and William Herron acknowledge that the historical basis of psychoanalysis rested on "a depiction of the developmental phases and descriptions of a relatively single homogenous culture, a Western European-American identity that emphasized middle class, phallocentric, Anglo-Saxon attitudes and values" (p. 150). They candidly point out that although therapists regularly encounter pathologies "that the analyst has never personally experienced but has been trained to anticipate," differences of class, race, and ethnicity can greatly complicate the provision of services to clients who are in need (p. 152). They argue that a manifestation of this complication can occur through "disruptive countertransference" between a middle class therapist and a poor client whereby:
The consequences of poverty . . . can insidiously facilitate a distance between the poor patient and even the best-intentioned therapist. Most therapists are middle class, so it might be argued that they are too separated from upper-class patients to understand them sufficiently, but that is unlikely. Middle-class people frequently wish for more, and often try to achieve it, so upper-class identification is hampered primarily by a lack of wish fulfillment. In contrast, therapists have no interest in being poor, and despite social conscience, do not seek to identify with the poor. In essence, the poor patient is so unlike the therapist in most instances that regardless of the theoretical frame that influences the analytic technique, the potential for disruptive countertransference is high and prone to override egalitarian and altruistic desires as well. (Javier & Herron, p. 153)

In retrospect, I see this “potential for disruptive countertransference” in the words I wrote in my theoretical orientation reflection paper, because by insisting that “putting myself within the client’s frame of reference is imperative,” I am assuming that it is possible for me to inhabit the "client's frame of reference." I truly believed at this time that if I just learned enough and tried hard enough, I could connect to anyone in any circumstance. This naiveté betrays my inexperience and lack of consideration for the depths at which countertransference can function. Javier and Herron would argue that even if I am well trained and have an altruistic commitment to serving my target population, it is also possible that I have a latent desire within me as a middle class therapist to "never be poor." This causes me to look unfavorably upon the status of poverty and can trigger an unconscious projection of fear from me, the therapist, onto the client. This countertransference precedes any real issue or reality they bring into the therapy session and thus precedes any projections on the part of the client. Their class status is transmitted as a cultural affect that triggers the countertransference. Javier and Herron argue that the “biggest
need” in the treatment of the poor is “the resolution of countertransference,” which they admit is “not so easily accomplished” (p. 162). They suggest that the best approach to dealing with this type of countertransference is by integrating it into the therapeutic process, "acknowledging it first to ourselves and, if appropriate, to the patient" (p. 164). But they also point out potential challenges of doing so.

“The concept of empathic failures” Javier and Herron articulate is one challenge to resolving countertransference that I have experienced personally (p. 163). When we are empathetic towards people, we are conveying to them that we understand them because we can relate to what they are experiencing—we have experienced something fairly similar. Using this type of empathy in therapy often requires a therapist to self-disclose his or her own experience with the issue at hand. Sometimes the therapist misses the mark, especially, as Javier and Heron explain, when it comes to empathizing with those who live in poverty. This is an empathic failure, and can greatly impede the therapeutic relationship.

As a dropout prevention counselor at a middle school in Los Angeles, I experienced such an empathic failure while trying to counsel a group of students who had just heard that their friend had been found dead, shot in the head by her boyfriend. In a blog post from 2007 I recount how my own experience losing someone close to me through gun violence did little to help me relate to these students who needed my help. I write: “I used to think that one day, my friend's death would help me be able to counsel kids who were going through the same thing. But other than feeling a searing pain of empathy, all I could do while they sat there was listen to them cry.” I note that all the training I received in school seemed useless in the face of their overwhelming grief: “I felt like a failure. I tried so hard to think back: 'What did my counseling classes say to do in times like this? What did I want to hear when I was in their position?' I
"couldn't think of anything. I offered them candy, like a dumb-ass. They took it.” Not being able to use my own personal experience in order to provide the needed therapeutic interventions to these students is a perfect example of disruptive countertransference. Though I thought that the "searing pain" I was feeling was empathy, the affective quality of my own experience was in fact not generalizable to my students. I had believed that my experience could help facilitate empathy with others, but when faced with that situation I realized that our class differences did affect how I could relate to the students. “This shooting,” I write, “unfortunately, is not the first, nor the last for many of these students. The difference between us is that they live in an environment where things like this happen. I don’t.” Part of my strong reaction to my own friend dying was exactly because things like that did not happen to people from our middle class neighborhood or people who attended our private Catholic school. For my students, losing a loved one to gun violence had always been part of their reality. Their reactions were perhaps not only a mourning for the loss of their friend, but also a lamenting that this reality continues to randomly assert itself as a possibility in their lives.

Javier and Herron insist that we must “accept the probability that these cultural differences, our Whiteness and ethnicity, and the patient’s otherness will at times create empathic failures that are resistive to repair” (p. 165). I do not believe this particular instance led to irreparable damage, but I do believe that it was the first instance in which I learned that, despite a phenomenologically driven belief in the importance of honoring the client’s reality as equal to the therapist’s own, sometimes I cannot satisfy the self-imposed graduate school imperative of “putting myself within the client’s frame of reference.” Javier and Herron recommend that, “Given the class discrepancies that involve experiential discrepancies, empathy through personal experience has to be limited” (p. 164). What they argue for instead is a
redefinition of empathy, as quoted by Tuch, as “the methods by which one comes to know how and why others feel as they do” (1997, p. 263). Among these methods they list theory, insight, and affect, with an emphasis placed on the understanding of context “so that the place of affect, style, and action in the person’s life can be comprehended and interpreted” (p. 164). This alternate definition of empathy requires “the need for the therapist to keep his or her personal urgencies under conscious control to allow for the patient’s narrative to evolve unencumbered” (p. 164).

Acknowledging that sometimes the same experience is not the same experience because of context (race, class, gender) was a difficult lesson for me to learn. I attempted to contextualize the empathic experience, putting myself in the literal same place as where the student’s body was found, noting that, “In broad daylight it didn't look so bad. My friend was killed in the parking lot of a community college. That didn't seem so scary either.” But still, my attempt to empathize failed. “How arrogant of me,” I write, “to think that one violent, senseless death makes me some kind of expert in dealing with the aftermath . . . It's all relative, and from their point of view I am lucky that I only had to experience this once. They don't have the luxury of wallowing in self-absorbed depression. They have to be strong, in case it happens again.” In the end, “All I could say was ‘I’m sorry. This shouldn't have happened. Stay here as long as you need to. Time will help.’”

This experience demonstrates how the nuances of context are essential parts of experiencing subjective realities, even realities that appear to be similar. This is tightly connected to issues of transference and countertransference. It is up to the therapist/researcher to loosen that connection so that we are aware of our own feelings and emotions about the client's context “while still allowing himself or herself to experience the feelings of the other” (p. 164). If
energy exchanges between therapist and client are inevitable, then bringing this unconscious process to conscious awareness while also considering the enhanced dimension of context is an essential part of creating ethical empathic encounters.

Synthesizing Themes

In her book *Transpositions* (2006), Rosi Braidotti states that “To be an individual means to be open to being affected by and through others, thus undergoing transformations in such a way as to be able to sustain them and make them work towards growth” (p. 162). This decidedly positive understanding of individuals is easy to embrace when we consider ourselves to be on the receiving end of such affectivity—those who are being affected by others. But the description takes on another ethical dimension when we consider ourselves to be the ones affecting others, especially if we are doing so under the auspices of a career or profession. For all humans, conscious and unconscious affective encounters are inevitable. For me, this means that people in certain professional roles that are based on relationality—therapist, ethnographic researcher, or documentary filmmaker—have an ethical obligation to anticipate such encounters and ensure that they are equipped with enough skills to negotiate them in a way that, at the very least, does no harm. By performing an affective contextualization of my experience as a therapist, I was able to discover certain themes that I believe were helpful to me in the production of *Beyond the Block: Haiti* and could be helpful for others hoping to engage in similar work.

- Believing that another's subjective reality is just as real as your own does not exempt you from affecting their reality.

Just as a therapist can affect the therapeutic encounter by unconsciously projecting a desire to "never be poor" onto their impoverished client, so too can ethnographic documentary
filmmakers and researchers affect their subjects with their own unacknowledged fears and judgments. As I discussed in the Introduction, I have a personal philosophical predilection towards solidarity with the poor and by the time I traveled to Haiti I had a good amount of experience with people in varying states of poverty. But when I traveled to Haiti, I realized that I had a great number of judgments about how someone who is poor should act. I had been in Haiti for only a few days when I wrote in my journal about my shock at seeing how the children on the street in front of the crumbling presidential palace were beggars, “tugging at my bracelets saying ‘Mine! Mine!’ . . . saying ‘Hey you! Give me food! Give me money!’ and holding out their hands . . . anything you offer them they take.” I was taught to see poverty as a state in which we can witness and experience virtue. However the poverty I saw in Haiti was something I was not prepared for. “That whole ‘They’re poor, but they’re happy’ thing?” I write, “Yeah that doesn’t really apply here. They are poor and they seem miserable.” Looking back on these writings, I can see that, although I do not expressly say it, I was offended on some level by the way in which the people I was meeting experienced their poverty. “Everyone has a hustle,” I write. “I do not get the feeling . . . that they care about us out of the goodness of their hearts. I get the feeling they ‘care’ because they are wondering what they can get out of us, what we can give them . . . It’s just a survivalist mentality here.”

Yes, I have worked with those in poverty and yes, I went into Haiti with a firm, demonstrated, and practiced belief in the validity of the subjective reality of others. As Javier and Herron (2002) say, I was “trained to anticipate” what I was about to witness (p. 152). But I failed to reflect on the multitude of ways in which my own subjective reality could manifest as a normative one before I traveled to Haiti. I am a middle class American who will likely never find myself in an environment in which imposed abject poverty is my own reality. How can I
unconditionally accept another’s reality if I have no conception whatsoever of what it is like to live in that reality, and certainly a strong desire not to experience it myself? My acceptance of their reality was conditional—if you fit into my understanding of what it means to be poor, then I can honor the validity of your subjective reality. But those who I first met in Haiti did not fit into my understanding. They projected discontent. They took too much. They “hustled” instead of working hard. I did not accept their reality. In fact I rejected it, because it did not respect my role of helper.

Witnessing the actual consequences of abject poverty “insidiously facilitate[d] a distance” between me and Haiti (Javier & Herron, p. 153). I projected my unwanted affects onto the people I encountered before I even had a chance to truly interact with them. My strong desire to not be poor and my strong desire to feel their circumstances were changeable by help, humility, and hard work created a dynamic in which I distanced myself from the Haitians through individual judgment. In retrospect I can see how these desires are actually evidence of the extent to which, despite my best intentions to the contrary, I actually have been influenced by the neoliberal ideology of individualism that permeates the Western world. This ideology promulgates the idea that every person is a self-contained, independent entity—one that exists in equal freedom and liberty with all others, allowing them to make the choices that determine the course of their lives. According to Henry Giroux and Susan Seals Giroux (2007), this ideology relies on “the myth that collective problems can only be addressed as tales of individual plight which reduce structural inequality to individual pathologies—fear, alienation, selfishness, laziness or violent predisposition” (p. 757). The individualization of collective struggle results in the depoliticization of systemic issues, thus perpetuating the privilege that initially caused the inequality. What I experienced my first two days in Haiti was a visceral affective reaction to the
material consequences of abject poverty, and in a desperate attempt to assign meaning to the wholly different state of being-in-the-word I was witnessing, I relied on ideology that separated me from that experience instead of connecting me to it.

I am intensely embarrassed that I ever even wrote the above things—they were never meant to leave my own personal journal. But I feel it is important to use my own experience to demonstrate just how deep our judgments and beliefs run and how aware and honest we must be when we enter into relationships with the other. Imagine what kind of documentary film I would have produced had I not confronted my own feelings? I end the entry writing “I just had to vent. I felt like I really needed to vent to someone and now I feel better.” But what happens when filming schedules don’t permit time for venting, for writing, for reflection, and for the acknowledgement of latent feelings that have come bubbling to the surface of the filmmaker’s consciousness? In a matter of days I began to adjust to Haiti. In my next entry I begin by admonishing myself that “I’m not here for me.” I discuss my previous feelings, writing “I just did not feel connected to Haiti. And if you base your view on Haiti solely on what you see, it’s not accurate. Yes, part of what I observed is true. There are beggars . . . But I love it here. I do. It’s a very exciting place to be. It’s a very scary place to be. A very loving place to be. A very sad place to be. A very happy place to be. It has every single range and level of human emotion that exists.”

Spending time with the children at the boys’ home, performing in-depth interviews with them, and trying to see Haiti from their perspective made me vulnerable to the intense environment of Port-au-Prince. I was able to feel Haiti and allowed it to affect me. Instead of distancing it through ideological construct and personal judgments, I was able to understand it as a country with its own unique complexity. The transformation I went through in Port-au-Prince
did not just affect me, however. The feelings I was experiencing in turn affected all of my
encounters. Javier and Herron (2002) state that “Transferences are altered both through
negotiating shared meanings and by contrasting views of the patient’s inner life” (p. 157). The
patient’s experience in turn is “influenced by both interaction and interpretation” (p. 157). The
patient is the subject of the therapist’s transference just as those who I am interviewing are the
subjects of my transference. It is critical then, that we be aware of how our own struggles to
understand the lives and experiences of our film subjects has the ability to affect how they
themselves view their own lives and experiences. Further, we must be mindful of the often
hidden ideologies, histories, and personal prejudices that are informing how we experience
interactions with our film subjects. Projecting the “unresolved and unneutralized aggression of
the dominant group” onto our interactions with others could provoke damaging introjections on
the part of our film subjects that reinforce “the control and often the domination of others” (p.
157).
• A new definition of empathy can help us connect to others in a more equal way.

Believing that we are not all self-contained individuals but are each open to affecting and
being affected by others does not mean that empathy through personal experience is any more
possible. One’s lived experience should be differentiated from the moment of affective
encounter. Ascribed modernist categorizations such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender are not
contained to one’s subjective reality nor to the Western notion of the self-contained individual.
Even if you view one’s being-in-the-world from the perspective of affective subject, the material
consequences of living within a society that recognizes these categories can be transmitted
through the collective unconscious, becoming cultural affects that are dispersed as trauma,
memory, and individualized projections. The risk of empathic failure ethically necessitates that
we expand our definition of empathy from one that relates to others based on personal experience to one that considers "the methods by which one comes to know how and why others feel as they do" (Tuch, 1997, p. 263).

In ethnographic documentary film, one of our main methods for how we come to know others is through the interview process. Thinking more deeply about the implications of our interview methods then is one way in which we can apply this new definition of empathy. I could not even begin to relate to the children I filmed in Haiti based on personal experience; that was clear. But empathic failures are still possible if we use our own culture or our own understanding of an event or social circumstance when we are constructing interview questions. When trying to understand people, the filmmaker’s perspective should only be centered to the extent that it serves as a reminder of the risk for normative paradigms to develop. If we are to truly try to interrogate “how and why others feel as they do,” then semi-structured interviews are important because they serve to direct the interview away from obvious constructions of sameness and differentness and towards deeper reflections on the ways in which people experience being-in-the-world (Tuch, 1997, p. 263). I adapted the interview questions I used in Haiti from a Child Interview Form that was used to use in our therapy clinic at CSULA. Documentary filmmaking is not therapy, but it requires the filmmaker to develop a similar level of rapport in a short amount of time. In therapy, we would say that these are “client-focused” questions. In documentary, we could call it subject-driven interviewing. The instructions at the top of the form state: "Hello! I am going to be asking you some questions about your life, your friends and family, your school, and what it's like to live in Haiti. You can look at me when you give your answer. Try to wait until both of us have finished talking until you answer and if you can, try to answer in a complete sentence. No answer is a bad answer, just speak from your
heart! If you have any questions please interrupt me and let me know!” The following is a list of the questions I asked all of the children I interviewed in Haiti.

- Can you please tell me your name and how old you are?
- What is it like living here? Do you like it?
- Describe what your life is like on a normal day.
- What are the most difficult things you have to deal with in your life?
- What are the best things about your life? What are the worst things about your life?
- If you could change anything about your life, what would it be?
- Do you go to school? What grade are you in?
- Is school important to you? Why?
- If you could change anything about your school what would it be?
- Tell me about your friends.
- What do you like to do for fun?
- Tell me about your family. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- Tell me about your culture. What does it mean to be Haitian?
- How important is your culture to you?
- What are some values that are important to Haitian culture?
- Do you feel proud to be Haitian? Why or why not?
- If you could visit anywhere in the world where would it be? Why?
- How do you think life in the US is different from life here?
- How do you think kids in the US are different from you?
- Do things that are going on in the world, like war or politics, have an impact on you?
- What would you like to do/be when you grow up?
• What is the biggest dream you have for your life?

Some documentary filmmakers are “issues-driven.” They are motivated by the events and social circumstances of an area and/or are chasing a story. Common practice is to write a script of the film before doing interviews in order to ensure that your interviews appropriately compliment your narrative structure (Hampe, 2007). In this sense, the subjects of the film are only useful to the extent that they help build that particular and predetermined story. By allowing the subject to tell his or her own story, the narrative of the film makes itself clear in a natural way. For instance, it is interesting to note that I never asked one question about the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, yet every child I interviewed for Beyond the Block: Haiti discussed the earthquake and how it affected their lives. This is not to say ethnographic filmmakers should not research, brainstorm, or develop potential shot-lists before traveling—preparation is necessary. But I believe that writing a treatment or script for an ethnographic documentary film before one has even talked to the film’s subjects is the equivalent to thinking you know the answers to your research project before you initiate the actual study. It makes the entire research process biased and, to a point, irrelevant. A director will already have control over the narrative during editing, so the least they can do to bring some equality to the filmmaking process is to allow their subjects to direct the narrative during the interviews by constructing questions that encourage them to reflect deeply about what is important to them, not what is important to the filmmaker.

A significant impediment to using a method of subject-focused interviewing is funding. Some funders are more motivated by story and event-focused documentaries. Funders are also concerned with the impact of having their names associated with a potentially controversial program. For these reasons, they often require treatments and scripts in advance of committing
resources. The next chapter will explore the damage done to the affective encounter when funders are allowed to influence the filmmaker’s interactions in such a way.
CHAPTER II.
EDUCATION: THE ETHICS OF SERVING THE “LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED”

"Much of the rhetoric of ‘rigor’ and ‘high standards’ that we hear so frequently, no matter how egalitarian in spirit it may sound to some, is fatally belied by practices that vulgarize the intellects of children and take from their education far too many of the opportunities for cultural and critical reflectiveness, without which citizens become receptacles for other people's ideologies and ways of looking at the world but lack the independent spirits to create their own."


Introduction

We all have those students who we just can't forget. The students who stir something inside of us and who leave a lasting impression that we cannot shake from our minds or our hearts. For me, one of these students was Miguel. I met Miguel when I was a dropout-prevention counselor at a middle school in Los Angeles. He was in the 8th grade and had failed all of middle school. He and his friends had already been written off by their compassionate, but overwhelmed academic counselors. As one of my Assistant Principals put it: “It's about how to best use our resources, Miss Ribera. These kids take so much time. We need to give that time to kids who have a chance at success.” So the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students who didn't “have a chance at success” were put on my caseload. Miguel was one of those, and he knew it.

He would come into my office every now and then. Probably just to get out of class. But I saw it as a success that he was at least talking to an adult in school rather than jumping the fence and going home, as he tended to do. Miguel was the type of kid that would be tough one minute and surprise you with his sensitivity the next. Sometimes he would come into my office, sit down, look me dead in the eye and say: “How are you, Miss? You look tired today. Did you sleep well?” Or one day: “Miss, what's wrong? You look sad in your eyes.”
His teacher told me that he was worried Miguel was using drugs. “He sleeps—actually sleeps—through the entire class. No kid is that tired everyday.” So I started digging a little. Miguel's two-bedroom house was crowded with mom, dad, older sister, sister's husband, sister's baby, older gang-involved brother, and younger brother. Miguel revealed that he wasn't using drugs, but that he didn't sleep. There wasn't a bedroom for him, so he slept in the living room on the couch. Older brother would have his friends over. Dad, an alcoholic, would stay up watching TV. Miguel was preoccupied about his father's alcohol abuse and how it was affecting his mom, who he loved very much. After that day, I made regular home visits to Miguel's house. His mother was a lovely woman and always welcomed me and any help I offered. But there was no simple answer for the home issues that Miguel faced. Economic issues, immigration issues, violence, addiction, power—these were complex problems that could not be solved overnight.

Towards the end of the year I would always panic with my 8th graders because I knew that if they failed through middle school, they would likely fail their first semester of 9th grade—a huge predictor of school dropout. I tried to prepare them for this and make sure that they knew that there were alternative paths to high school education and graduation. I was trying to sell them the dream of education so that when they ran into challenges, they would at least still have that dream. And maybe one day, when they were ready, they would return to it. During one of our conversations towards the end of the year, I was doing the best education sales pitch I could with Miguel. The following is a paraphrase of our conversation as I recall it:

“You know you don't have to have graduated from high school to go to community college. So if anything happens, and you don't finish high school for whatever reason, although I totally believe you will, you can ALWAYS go back to community college—LA City College is super close.”
“Nah, Miss,” he said.

“What do you mean, 'Nah'?? I believe you'll graduate from high school, but just in case, you should know that you can go there.”

“Nah, Miss. I can't go to college.”

“Miguel, I'm telling you that you can.”

“Nah, people like me don't go to college.”

“What do you mean people like you? People exactly like you go to college!”

“Nah, Miss, college isn't for me.”

“Ok, well, it isn't for everyone, but what else do you plan on doing?”

“Imma just stay here in my neighborhood.”

Miguel and I had talked about his gang involvement. With the influence of his older brother, he almost didn't have a choice whether to join or not. Almost.

“Miguel, I get the gang thing, I get that you feel you have to join. But you need to have a dream for yourself.”

“My dream is to die for my neighborhood, Miss.”

Over the course of the 7 years I spent working with children and families in Los Angeles, I heard many stories like Miguel's. Kids were able to find identity and purpose through their gang involvement and like Miguel, they were prepared, some even eager, to die for their neighborhood.

What makes a child feel he will never belong at a place like the local community college, which was, after all, created for the community? What causes a child to be so committed to their neighborhood that they would die for it, but to be so repelled by their neighborhood school that they would do anything to avoid it? Why is it that some kids do not even have the imagination,
the vocabulary, or the hope to dream about a future full of living rather than dying? Can we change any of these things? How? I spent a lot of time with Miguel and his fellow “Far Below Basic” classmates. Was it time well spent? Or was my Assistant Principal right—did I spend too much time with kids who just didn't “have a chance to succeed”? These are the questions that drove me into starting a nonprofit, and ultimately to a doctoral program in American Culture Studies. In this chapter, I explore the systemic roots to students’ disengagement and alienation from school and ask even more questions: What did we do wrong in the past, what did we do right, and how does that affect the present state of education? How can we improve our broken system?

Recent studies estimate that roughly half of all African American and Latino students who enter US public high schools do not graduate in four years, making high school graduation a 50/50 probability for minority students (Greene & Winters, 2005; Orfield, 2004). School dropout is not a static event. Rather, it results after a long process of disengagement and alienation from learning (Finn, 1993). Beyond the Block is dedicated to serving students who are at risk of school dropout. In order to properly contextualize the contemporary problem space of school dropout, it is critical to properly locate it in the historiography of public/formal education. As Lawrence Grossberg (2010) states, “Cultural studies starts by recognizing that context is always already structured . . . by relations of force and power” (p. 44). Public/formal education is a system that has and continues to structure and administer relations of force and power in modern US society.

The story we tell about the history of education is important. Every generation thinks it is dealing with new problems, when in fact the US public education system has remained faithful to its hierarchical power structure for over 100 years. The stories we tell about this system
influence what society thinks “real” education is and should be, but what is real are the consequences educational policy and practice have on the students who, by law, must attend these institutions until they are 18 years old. In this chapter, I contextualize the contemporary issue of dropout in urban public schools by locating it in the historiography of the Progressive Era, a time of political and educational reform and expansion from 1890-1930 that constructed the public school system as we know it today. I end the case description with my own account of the time I spent working in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest public school system. Using journal entries and an affective reading of Gregory Boyle’s book *Tattoos on the Heart*, I then describe how public education has institutionalized a system of blockages in the name of progress that can discourage and dismantle attempts to affectively connect with students. I conclude by describing case-based themes that relate to ethical intervention design through ethnographic documentary films and service provision for marginalized and disenfranchised populations.

Case Description

Discourse about the experience of the urban poor and students of color with the United States public school system often begins during the Progressive Era when increased industrialization, urbanization, and immigration caused leaders to reassess the cultural practices of the United States. Reformists took Horace Mann's idea of the common school and expanded it to create an institution that would assimilate incoming immigrants and train them to participate in society. Public school was envisioned as a place where the urban poor could be cared for, Americanized, and educated. Reforms such as the professionalization of school boards, compulsory attendance, standardization, and the cultural role of schools as places of social
assistance are all examples of educational policy implemented during the Progressive Era that continues to sustain the foundation of American urban public education today (Mattson, 1998; Jeynes, 2007).

Progressive Era education reformists were a diverse group but are often separated into just two camps: liberal (those who prioritized pedagogical reforms) and conservative (those who prioritized administrative reforms) (Tyack, 1974). The ideas of both the liberal and conservative reformists during this time period came together under the term “progressive education,” as each camp often supported similar ideas but for different reasons. One example of such a reform was the professionalization of school boards. Both conservative and liberal education reformists agreed that the large groups of community members that previously made up school boards made for an inefficient form of organization, so they united to recruit experts in education to serve on smaller school boards. The result of this reform highlighted the ideological differences and unified end goals of liberals and conservatives. The liberal end goal was accomplished in that professionalization brought more trained educators into the field, while the conservative end goal was also accomplished in that professionalization created a centralized administrative bureaucracy in education. (Tyack, 1974).

Curriculum standardization was another major reform instituted during the Progressive Era, debated in 1892 by the National Education Association’s Committee of Ten. The liberals believed that high school students should be taught a broad set of skills that prepared them for life, while conservatives believed a college preparatory curriculum should be standardized. This debate settled towards the conservative side, which standardized more traditional disciplines and pedagogical methods that were monitored by centralized administrators. The committee developed standards for high school education, such as four years of math, literature, and
science. Testing was implemented to measure students' progress. In the 1910s when students demonstrated record high achievement rates through those tests, politicians and policy makers credited standardization efforts for these results. (Jeynes, 2007).

Liberal education reformist John Dewey remains the most well-known educator of the Progressive Era. Dewey popularized and institutionalized liberal progressive education in American public schools through his pedagogy. Influenced by philosophers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Dewey questioned the essentialist definition of education. He believed that truth was relativistic, and that the scientific method allowed students to discover their own truths through experimentation. The teacher’s role was not to impart truths, but rather to guide a student’s experience and respond to their interests. Dewey believed that the public school could influence society, generate social change, and train children in how to participate in a democracy. To this end, he felt that schools should be the primary educator in children’s lives and that parents should reinforce school lessons at home. Dewey has remained an influential figure in education, but his contributions live on more in theory than in practice. The mercurial historiography of education shows us why. (Dewey & Small 1897; Dewey, 1900).

From the 1890s to the 1960s, works of educational history consisted mainly of laudatory narratives of progress (Cubberley, 1919; Rury, 1991; Tyack, 1974). However as the United States entered the early Civil Rights era, more scholars began to question the roots of the public school system. The Brown v Board of Education of Topeka decision in 1954 ended de jure racial segregation in public schools, but the attempts at integration that followed demonstrated that public education was never “separate but equal.” An achievement gap between white students and urban poor minority students became apparent. In The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts (1968), Michael Katz charged
that the public school system has never helped the urban poor, despite the fact that the progressive education movement has been mythologized as successful. According to Katz, educational reformists during the Progressive Era were actually an elite and homogenous group whose goal was to “re-make the rest of mankind in their own image” (p. 131). Katz believed that the failed reforms of the past led to the fails in urban education in his time. David Tyack builds on Katz's critique in The One Best System: A History of Urban Education (1974), reframing the supposed Progressive Era "success" of the professionalization of school boards. He argues that by relinquishing control of school districts from community boards to “expert” boards, schools gave up control to state regulators. This shift from rural to urban, community controlled to state controlled, took away the plurality of education. He maintained that “the search for the one best system has ill-served the pluralistic character of American society” and that if there is to be true change, Americans needs to admit that the universal public school system has systemically failed in its attempt to teach the urban poor (p. 11).

William Reese questioned the true power of liberal and conservative educational reformists in Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era (1986), arguing that it was only because of grassroots reformists that education did not become a wholly corporate system in the Progressive Era. He maintained that across the nation, groups of committed socialists, women, and certain politicians and educators relentlessly advocated for local control of education. He also noted the tensions the conservative and liberal leadership struggled with between efficiency and democracy, expertise and participation, and centralization and localism. These ideological tensions manifested in the schools, which were a contrast between industrialization (factory-like bells, time clocks, grade levels, standards) and social assistance (health services, food programs, moral guidance). In The Struggle for the
American Curriculum (1987), Herbert Kliebard also acknowledged the varying structures of power that influenced education during the Progressive Era, maintaining “that there was not one but several reform movements in education” and that the progressive education movement was essentially a battle between various interest groups for whose cultural and moral values would become dominant (p. xix).

This battle has continued into the 21st century, as we have seen the familiar Progressive Era themes of professionalization and standardization recur in regards to the school dropout crisis. School dropout has become a particular concern as it relates to the United States' ability to participate in the global economy (McNeil et al, 2008; Orfield, 2004; Peske & Haycock, 2006). Just as during the Progressive Era both liberals and conservatives were united as educational reformists under the term “progressives,” today, both liberals and conservatives contribute to the rhetoric of educational reform through neoliberal and neoconservative interventions. Interestingly however, one tactic to control the narrative of education history has been to conflate the terms "Progressive Era" and the resulting "progressive education" with today's progressive liberal politics. By creating semantic confusion, neoconservative educational reformists can attribute the current failures of the public education system to liberal politics.

An example of this neoconservative narrative is Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform (2000), in which Diane Ravitch argues that progressive education harmed America and that in order for schools to succeed they need to “return” to traditional standards-based education and “concentrate on their fundamental mission of teaching and learning” (p. 467). For Ravitch, “anti-intellectualism was an inescapable consequence of important strains of educational progressivism” (p. 15). This resulted in certain policies “packaged in rhetoric about democracy and ‘meeting the needs of the individual child,’” that "encouraged racial and social
stratification in American schools” (p 16). In *The Making of Americans: Democracy in our Schools* (2009), E.D. Hirsch mirrored Ravitch’s argument, advocating for centralized government control over school curriculum while divorcing himself from John Dewey’s “child-centered” progressive pedagogy. Dewey’s pedagogy, in his opinion, had maintained an impenetrable dominance in the American educational system since its inception in the Progressive Era. Hirsch and Ravitch both characterized John Dewey’s liberal pedagogical contributions to education during the Progressive Era as anti-intellectual, but they failed to acknowledge that curriculum standardization, arguably the most impactful reform institutionalized during the Progressive Era, was actually a conservative reform that continues to shape public education today.

Michael Apple attempted to counter Ravitch’s essentialized notion of education by framing it as a cultural construct. In his article “Comparing Neo-liberal Projects and Inequality in Education” (2001), he invoked Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, claiming that there is no neutral, true idea of education, whether they are neoliberal efforts (e.g., charter schools) or neoconservative efforts (e.g., strictly enforced standardization). Rather, for both sides, “a class habitus tends to reproduce the conditions of its own reproduction ‘unconsciously’” reinforcing the “ways of understanding and acting on the world” that each side perceives to be ‘normal’ (p. 420). Apple implores both sides to “analyse critically the production and circulation of these discourses and their effects on the lives of so many people in so many nations” (p. 421).

Interestingly, in 2010, Diane Ravitch herself admitted the weaknesses of a centralized and partisan administration of education. In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Ravitch chronicles the lessons she learned working as part of the US government’s educational policy bureaucracy. Formerly an advocate for standardization efforts, the subtitle of
the book immediately shows the extent to which she has modified her views: *How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*. Ravitch formerly dismissed the experience-based liberal pedagogical progressivism of Dewey, asserting, like her colleague Hirsch, that it was an anti-intellectual method that bred inequality. In a twist of irony, though, Ravitch uses that same pedagogical method to support her argument: “It is the mark of a sentient human being to learn from experience, to pay close attention to how theories work out when put into practice” (p. 2). Ravitch describes the intellectual crisis she had while working in the government’s educational bureaucracy, a time during which she began to see things less like a historian and more “like a state” becoming increasingly removed from the actual experiences of students at teachers at the schools (p. 11). She does not divorce herself from the idea that there is one true version of American education that we should return to, however, insisting that “we must preserve American public education because it is so intimately connected to our concepts of citizenship and democracy and to the promise of American life” (p. 14).

Ravitch's experience witnessing the divorce of educational policy from classroom realities exemplifies that which Dewey points out happened in the Progressive Era. In his book *Experience and Education* (1938), Dewey spoke to the Progressive Era critics of his pedagogy, but his argument could just as easily apply to his critics today. He maintained that it is incorrect to place his idea of child-centered, experience-based education in diametric opposition to “real” education, represented by the standards. He stated that it was challenges in the implementation of his method that created confusion regarding his theories: “The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (p. 25). Dewey's challenges implementing pedagogical reform in the Progressive Era remain the same today. Somewhere on the way down from the bureaucratic top
to the teachers and students at the bottom, innovative ideas are corrupted, poorly implemented, or poorly supported. Still, this approach has largely worked for students who have the same cultural background as those in power: white middle and upper class children. However as history and current circumstance shows, it has consistently failed to provide services to urban, poor, minority students that ensure their success at a level equal to that of white students.

The implementation of the federal educational policy of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a clear example of how the public educational system is not organized in a way that ensures student success for children of color. In 2001, President George W. Bush's administration instituted sweeping changes in the field of elementary and secondary education through NCLB that mandates evaluating and categorizing students based on testing goals. Schools that do not achieve test score benchmarks that officials deem as “Adequate Yearly Progress” are financially penalized under NCLB. This can have dire effects on schools that serve marginalized and disadvantaged populations, such as students who do not speak fluent English. Historically, the performance of English Language Learners (ELLs), a majority non-white group of students, on these tests is low and “usually shows little improvement across many years” (Abedi & Dietel, 2004, p. 782). Therefore, schools that have a higher percentage of ELL students (read: minority students) have an increased chance that they will be denied funding compared to a majority white school, simply based on their higher population of ELL students. Even scholars seeking to give policy makers the benefit of the doubt by not interrogating the ideology that underlies the policy conclude that, “Although well-intentioned, NCLB’s subgroup accountability policies have the unintended effect of unfairly and disproportionately sanctioning schools serving the most disadvantaged minority students” (Kim & Sunderman, 2004, p. 39). Blame for low test scores is placed on teachers and individual students as evidenced by the innumerable strategies which are
provided to help improve classroom instruction and student learning (Abedi & Dietel, 2004).

In California, ELL students have a 17% lower graduation rate than the average (California Department of Education, 2012). This points to the impact that systemic issues such as school funding can have on marginalized groups of students. According to the US Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, every year in the United States our public school system produces more than one million dropouts (2012). A disproportionate number of these dropouts are students of color (UCLA, 2007). According to the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (Orfield et. al., 2004), which analyzed cohort data for high schools across the nation, the graduation rate for white students is 75% while students of color (Black, Latino, and Native American) have only about a 50% chance of graduating with regular diplomas in four years. One in four African American and one in six Hispanic students attend a high school “dropout factory” while only one in twenty white students attend such a school (Balfanz et. al., 2013, p. 18).

Dropout factories are majority-minority high schools (those in which children of color make up the majority of students) that account “for about half of all African American and Hispanic dropouts” (Balfanz et. al., 2013, p. 18). Though the number of dropout factories has been slowly declining since 2002, that may very well be due to factors other than school turnaround, such as schools being rebranded as charter schools or larger schools being separated into smaller learning communities that maintain their own enrollment statistics. For instance, Balfanz questions when states such as Texas boast sudden and significant reductions in their 4-year cohort dropout rate: “Does it give pause that nearly 15,000 students in the cohort left to be homeschooled and hence were removed from the cohort, and nearly half of these students were over-age for grade? Does it give pause that the greatest number of students who left to enroll in a
private school did so in the twelfth grade?” (p. 22). With repercussions for low graduation rates and high dropout rates increasing due to the policy of NCLB, schools have become more sophisticated in how they deal with students and manipulate data in order to avoid negative consequences. Some argue that NCLB has actually created an incentive for schools to "push-out" struggling students (Orfield et. al., 2004).

Working as a dropout prevention counselor for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in both a direct services role and administrative role, I was able to see, similar to Ravitch's personal experience, just how much of an impact institutionalized bureaucratic systems can have on individuals and groups. I knew throughout my time training to be a counselor in graduate school that I wanted to work for LAUSD upon graduation, simply because it was one of the highest need school districts in the country with notoriously low student performance and high dropout rates. I entered the district as an attendance counselor, helping schools increase student attendance, but I was quickly recruited to a new specialty counseling position as a dropout prevention counselor. Created largely as a district response to the bad press received for inaccurate record keeping and high numbers of school dropouts, the $10 million district-funded initiative created a formal Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery. Our department became responsible for educating school staff on and enforcing their compliance with accurate record keeping—even if it meant their dropout numbers got worse before they got better, we were demanding that schools report their dropouts honestly. That type of approach was previously unheard of in the district, which had become masterful at manipulating numbers, statistics, and the actual location of physical bodies to make their numbers look good in the eyes of the state and avoid penalization from the policies of the federal educational policy of NCLB. The department also funded 80 counselors who were assigned to the highest-need middle and high
schools in the district. Each counselor was responsible for creating a tailored intervention program designed to address the needs of the students at their school who were most at-risk for school dropout.

Through a regressive analysis, our department had identified which students were at the highest risk for school dropout: students with 10 or more absences, 3 or more Fails, 2 or more suspensions, and/or students who scored Far Below Basic (FBB) on their state standardized tests. Our 80 counselors were highly specialized and experienced. In addition to cleaning up records and creating systems of accountability for the staff at our schools, we were encouraged to be creative and develop unique counseling interventions for our students based on the context of our school environment and the role we had carved out for ourselves within that environment. At my schools, my main interventions were running group counseling sessions, visiting the homes of my students to interact with their families, hosting parent meetings at our school, and teaching personal development classes to students after school and on weekends. Many of our interventions were non-traditional, based not on whether we could achieve immediate results but on whether we could provide a systemic foundation for the long-term success of at-risk students.

Our counselors provided services to a high-need population that had been mostly marginalized from the caseloads of other service providers for one reason or another. It may be surprising to those outside of education that "generic" school counselors in large districts like LAUSD typically do very little counseling. They mainly focus on scheduling and discipline issues. School psychologists work exclusively with students who have Individualized Education Plans through Special Education. School social workers do counseling, but are often bogged down with crisis cases. They also have to account for their services under Medi-Cal (state-funded health insurance) making flexibility of services difficult. In this sense, our work was not
only innovative, but it was also filling a gap in services at the school site.

Eventually, I was promoted from a school-based position to a district position, helping to supervise about 20 dropout prevention counselors. I was also put in charge of our department’s evaluation efforts, soliciting proposals from various firms and working closely with them on evaluation design. As the media firestorm against the district regarding dropout and record-keeping died down, our department began to receive a large amount of pressure and critique from other previously established departments. Many of them felt it was unfair that we were receiving district funding as opposed to school funding. While these other departments had to continually prove themselves to individual schools in order to receive money and employ counselors, we were receiving counselor placement monies from the district without having to endure the much more precarious process of school funding. We were called upon to evaluate our program, formalize our interventions, and prove that our practices were evidence-based.

Implementing the evaluation program turned out to be more challenging than I thought it would be. I was receiving pressure from my boss, the message being that if we were not able to prove our effectiveness the entire program would lose funding. Additionally, I was receiving pressure from the counselors who found it time-consuming and near impossible to operationalize the various methods they used to intervene in myriad students’ lives. They had not been required to produce a certain numerical result every month or every year (such as a reduction in the number of tardies or an increase in overall attendance) like those who had to secure school funding were made to do, so they did not have much quantitative data to pull from. Many of the students we worked with who were failing had been failing since Kindergarten and moved through the system as a result of social promotion. To expect an increase in something numerical, such as grade point average, was unrealistic for our students who had received such a
small amount of targeted intervention. In many students, what we were trying to increase was simply their desire to stay in school, as many of them felt it was irrelevant to their lives. Such intrinsic motivation is difficult to quantify. Since the program’s inception, our counselors had been evaluated mainly based on qualitative data we collected from the counselors themselves, their students, their supervisors, their peers, and other staff. Because the work our counselors did was relationship-based and highly individualized to their school setting, it could not be generalized or duplicated.

In the first year of the program, there was high morale among the counselors, because they felt that their innovative interventions were setting a precedent for further work with students at-risk. And anecdotally, we knew the program was working. Our meetings were exciting and motivating as everyone shared what they were doing at their schools. As the calls for more “traditional” methods of evaluation increased though, their work was put under scrutiny in a quest for “proof” of immediate outcomes and results. This created an alienating dynamic between our counselors and administration. I became increasingly disillusioned with my district-level position as I saw the fidelity of our work sacrificed at the altar of politics and quantitative “success.” I eventually resigned from the district to move back to my hometown of San Francisco and commit myself further to my work with Beyond the Block. The evaluation program for the Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery continued to flail after I left. Eventually, due to political pressure from other departments and our inability to show that we were worth the money we were costing the district, the Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery was effectively dissolved and all 80 dropout prevention counselors were reassigned to other counseling positions.
Affective Contextualization

In a blog post from 2007 I discuss a night where, “I sat on my futon crying, thinking about all of the kids who have come and gone since my counseling career started. I remember most of them, and will never forget many. There is no better way to explain it, other than that they have all left a stamp on my heart and in my mind.” I call these kids my “stamp collection” as a way to describe how “I carry their stories and their smiles and their anger with me every day . . . I carry it all with me.” Again recalling Sara Ahmed’s notion of affect as “what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects,” my chosen metaphor of a “stamp collection” illustrates the stickiness of affect as well as how many individual stories can gather into one collective feeling (2010, p. 29). My blog entry begins by describing how I was overwhelmed with emotion, leading to me crying on the futon. Throughout the rest of the blog I name or refer to the collectivity of feelings that led to the sensation of being overwhelmed: sadness, guilt, humility, and gratefulness. Teresa Brennan posits that affects "constitute a connection" between subject and object and are transmitted through "sensing,” meaning "the deployment of smell and hearing as well as open vision” (2004, p. 19). Affects are also transmitted through "feeling,” which refers to "the accurate and rapid interpretation of this information via language" (p. 19). For Brennan, "Feelings are sensations that have found a match in words" (p. 19).

Gregory Boyle’s book Tattoos on the Heart (2010) most closely articulates through words the sensations I associate with my time at LAUSD. Boyle is the founder and executive director of Homeboy Industries, the largest gang intervention program in the United States. The title of the book alone is virtually analogous to my metaphor of a stamp collection, but a tattoo on the heart better captures that moment of affective transmission where a sensation sears itself
onto your soul, never to disappear. In explaining the phrase, Boyle shares a story about a former gang member who was so touched and surprised to receive a compliment from Boyle that he said, “Damn, G . . . I’m gonna tattoo that on my heart” (p. xiv). Boyle hopes that sharing the stories of the “homies” he works with will “tattoo those mentioned here on our collective heart,” in part beckoning us to “recognize our own wounds in the broken lives and daunting struggles” of the homies (p. xiv). And certainly by virtue of writing his book, Boyle has similarly experienced the tattooing of his own heart by those with whom he works. Boyle’s book then, can be read as an instrument of affect, designed to create a connection between subject (homie) and object (reader) by articulating feeling sensations though words. The book also creates an empathic connection between service providers, discussing in detail how and why he, as an executive director of a nonprofit organization, feels frustrated with the system that our organizations rely on for funding and determines whether or not they remain open.

Throughout the book Boyle discusses the “tyranny of success” that has infiltrated funding support for public service programs and, consequently, affected how and to whom services are delivered. Boyle recounts that “Funders sometimes say, ‘We don’t fund efforts; we fund outcomes’” (p. 179). This mindset pushes many service providers to only focus on those who will be responsive to their services. But where does that leave the most vulnerable? How does this idea of success affect “the belligerent, the surly, and the badly behaved” (p. 179)? Boyle warns, “If our primary concern is results, we will choose to work only with those who give us good ones” (p. 178).

His words give insight to the reactions I and other dropout prevention counselors received from school administrators at LAUSD (who were, incidentally, receiving our services at no cost to the school). At one school in which my target population numbered more than 400
students, the assistant principal smiled at me amusedly when I shared my list of students with him. “You’d be way better off spending your time on the kids who can be helped,” he laughed. “You’ll never see any results with those kids. Why focus on the FBBs (Far Below Basic testers)? They’re not moving up. You should be focusing on moving the Basic kids up to Advanced. The school will look better.” At a high school I worked at, the principal laughed as she yelled to me down the student-filled hallway, “I mean what’s the point of it all anyways? They can’t even read!” At another middle school, a teacher yelled at one of my 6th grade boys in front of the whole class: “Why are you even here? You’re not gonna grow up to be anything but a drug dealer!”

Boyle acknowledges that the search for results and outcomes is understandable, admitting “We all hear this and think how sensible, practical, realistic, hard-nosed, and clear-eyed it is” (p. 179). But he also laments how this search “can’t be bothered with complexity” (p. 169). He is not speaking of statistical complexity, but rather the complexity of the human journey through life. To illustrate his point, he tells the story of a gang member, Scrappy, who after twenty years of gang involvement and a stint in prison, approached Boyle wanting to turn his life around. Boyle saw how Scrappy had grown and gave him a job. Scrappy thrived in his new position, but shortly after starting he was found dead at his job site, shot through the head execution-style. Boyle asks, “What is success and what is failure? What is good and what is bad? Setback or progress” (p. 167)? He wonders if Scrappy’s life, in the eyes of funders, "counts" as a success for the organization because he experienced a personal transformation? Or “does he now appear in some column of failure as we tally up outcomes,” because in the end, they are a gang-intervention program and he died a victim of gang violence (p. 169)?
Boyle states: “I am not opposed to success; I just think we should accept it only if it is a byproduct of our fidelity” (p. 178). He believes one of the most important questions they ask of themselves at Homeboy is “Can we stay faithful and persistent in our fidelity even when things seem not to succeed?” (p. 173). This philosophy has led to many economic hardships at Homeboy (Mock, 2013). The program is not easily generalizable and funders continually criticize it for its lack of “sustainability.” However, the organization remains a blueprint for gang-intervention, receiving visits from service providers all over the world who are looking to address gang problems in their area. And certainly for current and former gang members in Los Angeles, it persists as a place of rehabilitation and hope (Mock, 2013). Despite pressure to demonstrate more clear and rapid outcomes, they persist in their commitment to “stand with the least likely to succeed until success is succeeded by something more valuable: kinship” (p. 179).

But how do we measure kinship? Boyle relatedly asks: “What is the delivery system for resilience?” then answers his own question stating, “In part, it's the loving, caring adult who pays attention” (p. 86). Should one set a benchmark to “become a loving, caring adult who pays attention to their clients” in a program evaluation of resilience? In his book *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Brian Massumi provides insight on why a linear method of evaluation based on articulated goals and a foundational notion of progress does not serve the evaluation needs of every program. In examining the ontology of bodily movement and materialism, Massumi discusses how “a linear trajectory made up of a sequence of points or positions” is insufficient to describe movement, because a path made up of points and positions does not account for the passage in between each point and position (p. 6). The continuity of that movement “is of an order of reality other than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed” (p. 6). We can relate this to the appraisal of Homeboy and the dropout prevention counselors by
comparing the results-driven models of funding and evaluation as being focused more on whether or not service providers and receivers hit certain measurable points. This point-hitting sheds light on only a small aspect of what is really going on, though. The true work takes place *in between* the locations of the points—it is, as Massumi says, a path “not composed of positions” but rather “a dynamic unity” that is nondecomposable (p. 6). This non-linear path that is not composed of positions is where affect is transmitted, the process that precedes relationship-building and the creation of new emotional states and calls to action. Any linear path then, like that which drives current program evaluation, misses the infinite world that lies between points—the world where all the work actually happens.

As dropout prevention counselors, we were engaging in what Boyle refers to as the “slow work”—that waiting and hoping and endless work that we believe will one day result in change. Receiving district funding as opposed to school funding allowed us the latitude to do that slow work. But perhaps the “slow work” of relationship building that Boyle describes is only slow when examined in the context of linear paths. From an affective perspective, the work is not slow, but rather infinite. Massumi contends that “points or positions really appear retrospectively, working backward from the movement’s end” (p. 6). We could say, then, that it is only after a student has experienced a desired change that we can plot the points and positions that got them there. This is what is known as “best practices” in education, which provides the basis for evidence-based models of intervention. But that does not mean that such points and positions will work for all students. It is in the inscription of a single “practice” as generalizable “evidence” that an infinite process is reduced to a linear one for others to follow. In this sense, “We are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movements. We are looking at only one dimension of reality” (p. 6).
Boyle’s story resonates with me because as part of the Office of Dropout Prevention and Recovery, I worked with those who were “least likely to succeed”—students of color who are at-risk of school dropout. When the initiative started, we were content to be what Boyle calls a “community of resistance . . . locating ourselves with those who have been endlessly exploded” (p. 177). At the heart of our work we were trying to reconnect students to a system that had outcast them. We were trying to show them that they had a place in education. We were teaching them to be more hopeful, to believe in themselves, and above all, to be resilient to the various family, peer, institutional, and environmental factors that made failure the easiest option. We were trying to instill in our students a certain feeling described by Rosi Braidotti as “potentia,” an affective force that is "power to repeat beyond negativity" (2006, p. 154). Potentia is a localized and immediate force of affect that "engenders the possibility of a horizon of hope, a productive consciousness that yearns for a future" (p. 154).

Boyle is steadfast in his commitment to his target population, maintaining that, “In the end, effective outcomes and a piling of success stories aren’t the things for which we reach . . . It’s about the disruption of categories that lead us to abandon the difficult, the disagreeable, and the least likely to go very far” (p. 186). I remain friends with many of my former co-workers, and we often look back on those first years of the dropout prevention program with much fondness. We recall a time when we felt like we had a purpose and were affecting change in individuals, communities, and institutional practices. But most of all, we remember the reactions of our students: How they felt when we reached out to them, how they reacted when they were no longer outcasts in the system, but a special consideration. The dropout prevention counselors were there for the students that no one else wanted to be there for. My time with LAUSD unfortunately gave me nothing hopeful to contribute to the historiography of urban public
education. It is a sad irony that our little community of resistance was cast out from the educational system just as our beloved students continue to be.

Synthesizing Themes

For more than 100 years, the US public education system has remained faithful to its hierarchical power structure, constructing knowledge at the top through state and federal efforts, and then disseminating it down to districts, schools, administrators, teachers, and finally students. This approach has consistently failed to provide adequate services to urban, poor, students of color. Pedagogical contributions during the Progressive Era, such as John Dewey's child-centered approach, resisted this power structure from the bottom up by creating an egalitarian classroom atmosphere focused on experience rather than hierarchical power structures. However, increasing standardization efforts over the years prevented the true institutionalization of these pedagogical reforms.

The historiography of public education proves that equality in process in public education does not guarantee equality in outcome. The quantitative assessment of students or programs through standardization is not neutral. Rather, it reflects a space in which “any so-called fact would point to a coherent regime of knowledge in which it counts as a fact,” (Jardine, 2005, p. 86). These regimes of knowledge, like the "tyranny of success," Boyle refers to are created “to serve the interests and circumstances of the human beings in each era” (p. 81). An affective contextualization of my experience serving those who are "least likely to succeed"—students of color at risk of school dropout—reveals two important themes. I believe these themes can assist anyone who wants to work with people—through ethnographic documentary production or through service provision—in developing ethical interventions.
• Style matters.

As exemplified above, public education has an incredibly long history of changing process without changing results for students of color. The dynamicunity that Brian Massumi mentions in *Parables for the Virtual* (2002) is inspirational for those of us seeking to provide interventions that induce change, and Massumi agrees that "The ultimate aim is to find a place for change again" (p. 69). But in terms of education, how do we imagine, much less describe, the infinite possibilities of what could happen in the "in-between" space of dynamicunity? The farthest educators have come is best-practices, which is essentially when we "back-project a stencil of the already-constituted to explain its constitution" (p. 70). If we are to plan interventions that work towards changing the system of education, how can we intentionally focus on the infinite world that exists between the positions and points of society's linearity without reifying the systemic practices that so limited us in the first place? For Massumi, in order for change to be conceptualized "as anything more than a negation, deviation, rupture, or subversion" we must provide a way "to conceptualize the in-between as having a logical consistency" (p. 70). That logical consistency of the in-between is "the being of a relation" (p. 70).

Massumi illustrates the logical consistency of this realm of relationality using the analogy of soccer. Once unformalized with "a wide range of variation," soccer as a practice pre-existed its inscription into sport (p. 71). With its inscription into sport, rules were applied retrospectively, taking precedence in how the game was framed and regulating the play. Massumi asserts, "It might be argued that all foundations are of this nature: ex post facto regulatory framings rather than effective foundings" (p. 71). If we apply this logic to the historiography of education, it is clear that we continue to base education on the "rules of the
The dropout prevention team was operating on an "already constituted" field of counseling and education that had rules and regulations, but "through stylistic, free variations" of method, we pushed the field to evolve. Our efforts were interrupted by the various referees of resentful departments and district politics "that open[ed] the way for an application of the rules" (Massumi, p. 78). But the point is that now the referees were applying the rules to a variation of the norm, so the rules had to change in order to accommodate us. Our unique variations were successfully contained by the foundational rules, but "Positively, it preserves the game for repetition" (p. 79). In this sense, we did succeed in that we expanded the possibilities for counseling students at risk of dropout. Just as people still study Dewey's pedagogy today, our
variation on the traditional form of school counseling will continue on in the methods used by counselors who were a part of our unit and who now train or supervise counselors in other units.

Ultimately, the work we did, the work Homeboy Industries does, and the work I try to do with Beyond the Block is about creating fields of potential for those who are "least likely to succeed," where they can experience their infinite potential through relationality. With the above example, Council acted as a space in which students could have such an experience. With Beyond the Block, the film viewing process acts as the space in which students can have such an experience. Such interventions can be seen as "differential emergences from a shared realm of relationality that is one with becoming—and belonging" (p. 71). Cultivating an environment that fosters moments of dynamicunity can lead to infinitely innovative, stylish practices.

- Ethical measures of success should be guided by the extent to which they disrupt categories that perpetuate the abandonment of the least likely to succeed.

The question remains, however, how do we evaluate these kinds of programs? How do we demonstrate that they work? Who will fund my dynamicunity program? Again, we can apply Massumi's soccer analogy here. If we are constructing our interventions around the problems and solutions already prescribed by funding agencies, we will be sacrificing potential at the altar of conformity. I believe that there are (stylish) ways to get around these foundational rules, but is important to remember that "The field of potential . . . is composed not of parts or terms in relation, but of modulations, local modulations of potential that globally reconfigure (affects)" (Massumi, p. 76). That is, infinite ways of being and doing things are always there for us to discover. When our style was regulated by LAUSD, I left. I chose to preserve the style of the game we were playing and did that through creating my own nonprofit organization. I am routinely overwhelmed at the number of people throughout the world who have done the same—
created a very niche organization that they control because they saw a need that was not being filled. These organizations, driven by small individuals or teams alike, are all examples of different fields of potential, local modulations that could have global effects through the affect they transmit. But one can also preserve their style within a repressive system like education through using alternative pedagogical practices or counseling methods. For instance, there are still teachers and counselors in LAUSD who continue to implement Council with their students, even though it is not necessarily an “approved” intervention in all departments.

I still believe that education is a field of potential that could change for the better. In order to do so, it needs to be more open to supporting not just individual innovation, but systemic innovation by ceasing its perpetual insistence and reliance on hierarchical methods of regulation and control. Of course those who are the most in need should not be guinea pigs for experimental methods of relationality; as Dewey said, not all experiences “are genuinely or equally educative” (1938, p. 25). Like Greg Boyle, I acknowledge "how sensible, practical, realistic, hard-nosed, and clear-eyed" the search for results and outcomes is (p. 179). But when it is so clear that traditional methods and structures of power are not addressing the needs of these students (and have never), a thorough, critical, and contextual examination of the ontology and discourse upon which education was and is constructed must be undertaken. Until it is, efforts to disrupt categories that perpetuate the abandonment of the least likely to succeed may need to focus on stylishly sidestepping the rules. I will further discuss how Beyond the Block tries to do this in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER III.
BEYOND THE BLOCK: HACKING INTO THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

"IN LAK’ECH: Tú Eres Mi Otro Yo…

Because you that read this
are me
and I who write this am you
and I wish you well wherever
you are"

– From Pensamiento Serpentino by Luis Valdez, 1990

Introduction

While teaching a personal development course for middle school students at risk of school dropout, I noticed that my students, who were in my class because they were disengaging from learning, always responded well when my co-teacher and I showed documentary videos. There was one video in particular that had a significant impact on my students that profiled students who were the first in their family to go to college. Those in the video represented diverse life experiences and my students related to their stories and felt connected to the students profiled. I began to use film regularly in my personal development classes—both fictional and documentary—with much success.

Concurrently, I was beginning to internalize a message I often heard when meeting with my students’ parents who were from Mexico and Central America: “If only my son/daughter could see where I was from, they would understand how lucky they are to be able to attend school here.” These parents were experiencing severe intercultural estrangement from their children. Many of them had not been able to attend school past the elementary level in their home country because they could not afford to pay the school fees or forgo earning wages at a job. These parents felt that their children did not understand the conditions their families faced
growing up in developing countries, a poverty unlike that of the United States with unstable
governments, civil wars, and an overall lack of general resources such as running water,
electricity, and free social services. Complicating this estrangement, many of the children I
worked with would never have the opportunity to travel to their parents’ homeland even if they
wanted to, because they were undocumented or lacked the financial means to travel. Their
geographical isolation extended from their national borders to the neighborhood boundaries, as
many could barely travel beyond the block their homes were located on due to the risk of
crossing into rival gang territory. Some students seemed to internalize this imposed isolation,
professing they had no desire to leave their neighborhoods because all they cared about lay
within a few square blocks.

Enough parents related the same message to me that I took note of this intercultural issue.
I realized that issues of identity and culture were not being addressed in the classroom. Based on
my observation that film was a useful and effective pedagogical tool for my population, I
developed the idea to make documentaries about places like the ones my students’ parents came
from. I was not attempting to be a documentary filmmaker; rather, I was attempting to use video
as a teaching tool in order to address a need that had been voiced to me by my students’ parents.
I started out thinking that this would be an excellent idea to incorporate into a comprehensive
dropout-prevention program at the school I was working at, but I saw how the creative freedom
of the dropout-prevention unit I was working in was becoming increasingly stymied with the
drive to standardize and regulate interventions (detailed in Chapter Two). I felt that starting my
own nonprofit organization would protect the program from the whims of district politics,
educational policy, and institutionalization.
I decided to create a nonprofit organization instead of a for-profit company because I had no intention of ever leaving my job with the school district, so I did not need a job, nor did I need to make (more) money at the time. I simply wanted to be able to raise enough money to create low-budget documentary videos while on vacation from my counseling position, edit them myself, and distribute them to schools and teachers. The first iteration of the organization was articulated in its Articles of Incorporation (approved by the State of California in September of 2007) where I wrote that "The specific purposes for which this corporation is organized are to develop and disseminate educational materials to the public, including, but not limited to, material relating to global awareness, intellectual curiosity, and cross-cultural relations through publications of video, curriculum, books, lectures or otherwise" (Beyond the Block, 2007). By 2008 the organization had still not commenced operations, but my conceptualization of the organization had deepened. As I became disillusioned with the institution of public education, I became more passionate about creating a meaningful learning experience for my target student population. In the narrative submission for form 1023, the required Application for Recognition of Exemption from the Internal Revenue Service I write:

The specific purpose for which this nonprofit corporation was formed is to produce educational travel documentaries and an accompanying curriculum for at-risk, school-aged youth. The documentaries will expose youth to other cultures, geographical areas, and life experiences. The curriculum will provide relevance and purpose to what the students see in the documentary. It will assist students and teachers in finding the connections between the people and history of the geographical areas in the videos and the current world in which we live, thereby broadening their global awareness and worldview. The goal of the videos and curriculum, as well as the overall mission of
Beyond the Block, is to foster positive cross-cultural relations, increase intellectual curiosity, develop critical-thinking skills, and encourage completion of high school and post-secondary education. (Beyond the Block, 2008, p. 4)

In one year then, I had moved from using the nonprofit to "develop and disseminate" learning materials to using the nonprofit to create curriculum with "relevance and purpose" and to help students and teachers find "connections between . . . people and history." Slowly, I was creating a program that not only spoke to the very specific intra-familial and interpersonal experiences of my target population, but also spoke to the cultural irrelevance of mainstream curriculum to students of color and the importance of engagement through connection for students who are at-risk of school dropout.

By 2009, I had left my job at LAUSD to move back to my hometown of San Francisco. I traveled to the Dominican Republic to film the first documentary for Beyond the Block, editing the video and creating the curriculum as I worked as a school-based family counselor for a charter school in East Palo Alto, California—made infamous for its title of "Murder Capital of the United States" in 1992 and still struggling with various social problems (Bulwa & Lee, 2011). Seeing the youth in East Palo Alto face many of the same struggles as my students in Los Angeles even while attending an "innovative" charter school, I became even more impassioned about the inequalities in the educational system. With the publishing of a website (www.beyondtheblock.org) and curriculum, we asserted a stronger mission statement:

To improve global awareness, increase intellectual curiosity, develop critical-thinking skills, and encourage completion of high school and post-secondary education in at-risk youth through the production of educational travel documentary videos, an accompanying curriculum, and other educational opportunities and materials.
Students of color who attend majority-minority schools in urban areas are particularly marginalized from the institution of education, as I demonstrated by detailing the existence of dropout factories and the high dropout rate of students of color from urban public schools in the previous chapter. In the case description of this chapter, I describe how students of color are often considered "the Other" when considering issues of structural and curricular diversity. I locate Beyond the Block in the debate on diversity education in urban K-12 public schools using the case of Ethnic Studies in Tucson, Arizona to illustrate the current crisis in culturally relevant K-12 education. The affective contextualization section continues to draw from examples such as the Ethnic Studies debate and the school-to-prison pipeline in order to shed light on how the modernist student subject is created in today's educational system. I examine the ways in which postcolonial, feminist, and postmodern theories intersect in education and theorize the subjectivity of the students at the center of Beyond the Block by placing them in borderlands of education, occupying a nomadic subject position while navigating lines of force and lines of flight. I end with synthesizing themes, affectively situating Beyond the Block’s mission within border pedagogy, describing how Beyond the Block and similar efforts can be understood as deterritorializing hacks into the system of education that mobilize those who occupy the borderlands through shared affectivity.

Case Description

The positive educational outcomes of structural, social, and curricular diversity in majority white four-year universities are well established (Alger, 1998; P. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & G. Gurin, 2002; P. Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Nelson Laird, 2005; D. Smith & B. Smith,
2009). In diverse educational settings, students show increased cognitive development in the form of academic self-confidence and critical thinking skills (Nelson Laird, 2005). They exhibit positive identity development due to an increase in perspective taking and self-reflection on their own cultural identity (P. Gurin et al., 2002; Hall, 1977; Piaget, 1985). They also experience social skills development through open-mindedness and feelings of commonality (P. Gurin et al., 2004; Nelson Laird, 2005). A student who is exposed to diversity will be more prepared to actively contribute to democracy and practice social responsibility (P. Gurin et al., 2004; Nelson Laird, 2005). Diversity then, through institutional population, campus social interactions, and course offerings, greatly contributes to the overall development and engagement of students.

But what exactly does “diverse” mean in these contexts? The involvement of students of color with diversity is typically reduced to their usefulness to majority-white institutions in adding population variance—structural diversity. Further, the proliferation of studies that focus on the importance of diversity in majority-white institutions center the white subject. “Diverse” then becomes coded as “non-white” or “minority.” For instance, many majority-white private K-12 schools and public and private universities have a “diversity requirement” for graduation that mandates completion of coursework that focuses on minority group relations or history. This university (Bowling Green State University) has a “Cultural Diversity in the United States” requirement, which mandates that all students complete one institutionally approved class related to the experiences of women, people of color, or other minority population in the United States. This coursework falls under the umbrella of curricular diversity, or diversity education, and includes the incorporation of “diverse” perspectives into the normative curriculum in the United States. Minority/marginalized voices such as people of color and women become coded as inherently “diverse” through this practice. In this way, the word “diversity” becomes
The narrow definition of diversity in education contributes to the lack of generalizable applications of diversity to non-white settings. As mentioned, curricular diversity, or diversity education, has significant cognitive and social benefits for students in majority-white institutions (Alger, 1998; Gurin et al., 2002, 2004; Nelson Laird, 2005; D. Smith & B. Smith, 2009). However there has been only a small trickle-down of the potential benefits of diversity education to K-12 educators in urban public schools that primarily serve students of color (D. Smith & B. Smith, 2009). Little to no emphasis is put on understanding the importance of diversity education to students of color in either teacher preparation programs or in the classroom itself (Worley, 2011). Students of color, especially those in majority-minority, underfunded urban schools, are deprived of the immense benefits a diversity education could have in such a high-need setting. The extent to which diversity education could benefit students of color, specifically those enrolled in K-12 urban public education, remains under-theorized, under-researched, and under-funded, while the extent to which it benefits white students in private and public universities remains well-established, researched, and funded.

One way in which we see the idea of diversity education applied to benefit white students is through the rhetoric of “21st century education.” A 21st century education necessitates that our students are globally aware, developing their critical thinking skills, mastering technological and digital skills, and understanding how to communicate within and between different cultures (Carano & Berson, 2007; Jackson, 2008, 2009; Jerald, 2009). Researchers state that students will need to possess skills in these areas in order to compete for jobs in a global economy (Jerald, 2009). Leaders in education and even President Barack Obama assert that the situation is urgent and that we need to enhance, enrich, and exceed the current standards in order to provide our
students with a 21st century education (Boutelle, 2009; Jerald, 2009; Obama, 2009).

Global awareness (also known as global competence or global citizenship) is a key 21st century learning skill that broadens students’ knowledge about various issues and cultures outside of the United States. Hundreds of well funded, mainly private schools across the United States have devoted programs to preparing their students to be global citizens and compete in the global economic market. Many educators question, though, why low-performing students should learn 21st century skills when they are still struggling to meet basic standards (Bell-Rose & Desai, 2005; Jackson, 2008). As I described in the previous chapter, many of these low-performers are students of color. Consequently, students of color in urban education settings are left behind once again, denied the opportunities their white and middle and upper class peers are provided with to prepare for future economic success and compete in the job market (Bell-Rose & Desai, 2005; Jackson, 2008; Jerald, 2009).

The recent attempt of the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) to make ethnic studies part of the required high school curriculum through a Mexican American Studies program (MAS) can be seen as an attempt at incorporating diversity education into a K-12 school system that primarily serves students of color. In the documentary film Precious Knowledge (2011), Director of Equity for TUSD, Dr. Augustine Romero stated that the dropout rate for the district's Hispanic population was more than 50% and getting worse, yet “we continue to perpetuate an educational experience that has been inadequate at best for a majority of Latino children” (Palos, 2011). The MAS program at TUSD was an attempt to change that inadequate educational experience. According to the former TUSD MAS website (ordered to be removed by law), the MAS courses were “formed specifically to enhance the academic success of Latino students, however the educational model and curriculum developed by the Mexican American Studies
Department helps all students.” Through a model of “Critically Compassionate Intellectualism,” they integrated three evidence-based approaches to increase academic achievement for students: teaching from a culturally relevant and academically rigorous curriculum, developing students' critical thinking and social critical consciousness through a dialogic pedagogy, and interacting with students out of respect, understanding, and appreciation to develop their academic identity. The curriculum created by the department intended to reduce prejudice and help students to develop more positive inter-group attitudes as well as increase graduation rates and school performance. (Banks, 1995).

The program reported positive results with increases in student test scores, graduation rates, and college attendance (Palos, 2011). But in 2010 the MAS program became embroiled in a political and legal battle with Arizona state officials. Opponents of the ethnic studies program believed that the MAS classrooms were indoctrinating their students with ideas of nationalism, fundamentalism, and a return to traditionalism that necessitated an overthrow of the United States government, stating, “Our suspicion is that inside these classes these students are being indoctrinated by people who are in power to have a certain mindset of us versus them” (Palos, 2011). Led by former Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction and State Attorney General Tom Horne and former state Senator and Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal, the battle to dismantle the MAS program resulted in numerous school board hearings and court battles. Two previous bills attempting to outlaw the MAS program (SB 1108, SB 1069) failed due to intervention from former Arizona governor, Janet Napolitano. Napolitano's replacement, Jan Brewer, supported the ban however. Horne drafted a new bill, House Bill 2281, and secured public support with numerous media appearances during which they described the MAS program administrators as “vehemently anti-American and anti-Western civilization zealots” (Palos,
Signed into law on May 11, 2010, Arizona House Bill 2281 prohibits a school district or charter school from including in its program of instruction any courses or classes that promote the overthrow of the Federal or state government or the Constitution, promote resentment toward any race or class (e.g., racism and classism), advocate ethnic solidarity instead of being individuals, and are designed for a certain ethnicity (Arizona House Bill 2281, 2010). Despite numerous protests by teachers, students, and other supporters regarding the subjectivity of the law and challenges waged in various courts about its constitutionality in light of the district's still-active desegregation order, the MAS classes, as originally conceived and practiced, remain prohibited in Tucson Unified School District. A list of banned books was generated by the state to ensure compliance that included Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Rudy Acuna's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*.

For postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon, colonization is not necessarily the traditional regime of oppression we associate with the commandeering of a sovereign nation-state by a foreign entity. The act of colonization can also be enacted “in capitalist societies” through “education, whether secular or religious” (Fanon, 1961/2010, p. 366). This type of colonization is meant to “instill in the exploited a mood of submission and inhibition which considerably eases the tasks of law and order” (p. 366). If we examine the ethnic studies debate from a postcolonial framework, the MAS program can be understood as an effort “to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation” that Latino students experience through education (p. 365). In the case of the Chicanos in the Southwest, the history of colonization runs even deeper than education, though.
As US Third World feminist Gloria Anzaldúa describes in “The New Mestiza,” many Chicanos “see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlan [the U.S. Southwest]” who are “originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest” (Anzaldúa, 1987/2010, pp. 552-554). Consequently, this is also a part of the MAS curriculum: teaching Latino students the history of their ancestors who lived here before the United States colonized the land. The MAS program understands this as an alternative way to teach history, from a Chicano perspective rather than a white perspective. Opponents of the program however believe that teaching students to shift perspectives is un-American. In a 2008 hearing for the original SB 1108, one supporter of the bill stated: “Mexico, I believe, is orchestrating this and they have an agenda known as la reconquista . . . many of our Chicano elected officials I believe are working directly for Mexico and the takeover” (Palos, 2011).

Considering the inability of the US public school system to ever adequately serve the needs of poor, minority, urban youth in addition to the long history of colonization in the US Southwest, the curricular intervention of MAS can be understood as a direct attempt at decolonization on the part of the Chicano teachers and students in the MAS program. The mere existence of the MAS program challenges dominant understandings of power and truth within the discourse of education—who gets to decide what American students learn and why? Who decides what are acceptable ways to construct knowledge, or pedagogical interventions, in the classroom and why? Arizona shows us how for a person of color, learning about his or her own ethnicity and cultivating a community of solidarity around their shared histories can be considered illegal. In a starkly ironic contrast, the field of research on diversity education demonstrates how, for a white person, learning about a minority’s identity and understanding “global culture” has become an educational imperative.
Affective Contextualization

The modernist limitations imposed on society by categories founded in dominance such as race, gender, sexuality, and virtually every other construction of difference are what has led us to code "diverse" as "non-white"—a seemingly small semantic issue that continues to have grave material consequences for students of color in urban K-12 public schools. It is essential, then, to interrogate how students of color who are at risk of school drop out fit into the current educational and political climate of diversity studies. Theories of affect can help with that because they provide us with a subject based not on the dominant Western cultural archive of language, power, or rational thought, but rather based on an ethics inherent in the relationality that exists when self encounters other.

Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describes the cultural encounter as *un choque*, or a cultural collision: “the coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference” (p. 78). By redefining the border not as a line of demarcation but rather a location of interaction, exchange, and becoming, she establishes the border as an affective space of relationality. She deterritorializes the border and redefines its location as “wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (p. 19). Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands refers to more than what is going on at the literal border in the US Southwest, the focus of much of her work. It refers to how individuals and subaltern groups interact with inclusion and exclusion, erasing imposed colonial lines by inhabiting a space of psychological borderlands in order to maintain a whole identity. For instance in “La Conciencia de la Mestiza,” Anzaldúa describes how la Mestiza—literally “the mixed woman”—is inherently intersectional and transnational, at once all races and no
races, coping with her “racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination” by “developing a tolerance for contradictions” (1987/2010, pp. 254-255). She declares: “(As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)” (1987, p. 80). By identifying her own experience with the exclusiveness of culture while also using the “edge” that she lives in to connect herself to the marginalized that exist in every culture, Anzaldúa is at once acknowledging and embracing her various group belongings while also transcending the power structures of modernity that insist on categorizing her identities.

Anzaldúa expressly refutes the modern Western narrative that privileges the individual over the group, while at the same time acknowledging that in order to combat racism, we need to understand ourselves: “The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society” (p. 87). For Anzaldúa, part of this inner change consists of educating Chicanos out of the “false racial personality that has been given to us and that we have given to ourselves” (p. 87). Here, she echoes Franz Fanon’s assertion in A Dying Colonialism: “It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates the negritude” (Fanon, 1965, 47). Modern ascriptions of race are limiting then only to the extent that they are uncritically accepted as the dominant powers assign them. In relocating race to the borderlands, however, it can be experienced as a mode of affectivity that provides opportunities for connection and a reconceptualization of power relations.

For students of color in K-12 urban public school, the repressive borders of modernity that Anzaldúa articulates function to create a powerless subject. Speaking specifically about the US Southwest, she explains that “the only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites
and those who align themselves with whites . . . Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they posses documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians, or Blacks” (1987/2010, p. 554). At the same time, she acknowledges that within Latino culture there are many fissures and that there is also repair work that needs to be done with Black and Indigenous cultures, stating: “The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history. Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people” (1987/2010, p. 260).

Anzaldúa accuses the white culture of being jealous of the Chicano—“It is our innate identity you find wanting”—and yet she also feels “ashamed that we need your good opinion, that we need your acceptance” (p. 261). For Anzaldúa, the key to resolving the cultural choque that modernism imposes upon its subjects is to unconditionally accept one's whole self, because “To rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves” (p. 262).

Anzaldúa’s work on the US Southwest comes from what is commonly referred to as “US Third World Feminism,” but what Gayatri Spivak (1996) refers to as the “Fourth World,” that is, “early civilizations that have been pushed back and away to make way for what we call the geographic lineaments of the map of the world today” (p. 274). In a discussion with Chicano Studies scholar Alfred Arteaga, Spivak makes the connection between the traditional colonial situation in which a power external to the nation-state exerts control and the conditions of internal colonialism in which powers internal to the nation-state exert control. Though she asserts that these narratives and interests are not the same, she does acknowledge that “Varieties of colonial discourse analyses . . . relate as different scripts: that is the nature of the solidarity” (p. 25). Spivak also acknowledges however that the language and systems of colonialism can
lead to anti-colonial movements motivated by nationalism, which “fetishizes the goal of winning, decolonization. Once it is won, the people want really an entry into the haunted house inhabited by the colonizers” (p. 27).

To combat this ironic form of assimilation, Jacques Derrida’s notion of deconstruction can help relocate the conversation of the colonized from wanting what the colonizer has to “a persistent critique of what one cannot want” (Spivak, 1996, p. 28). For Spivak, such conversations must have a goal and foundation of ethics, that is “the experience of the impossible . . . the impossibility of ‘love’ in the one-on-one way for each human being” (p. 270). Spivak’s notion of ethical singularity points to “the possibility of constructing a new type of responsibility for the cultural worker” that renounces any replication of the colonial encounter (p. 270). Ethical singularity can re-open “the possibility of learning from below” by acknowledging that such learning “can only be earned by the slow effort at ethical responding—a two-way road—with the compromised other as teacher” (p. 277). By stressing the importance of “the slow, attentive, mind-changing (on both sides) ethical singularity that deserves the name of ‘love’,” Spivak echoes Greg Boyle’s discussion of the “slow work” of relationship building and change while still acknowledging that in modern society this type of work should be applied “to supplement necessary collective efforts to change laws, modes of production, systems of education and health care” (p. 276).

While Anzaldúa’s concept of borderlands bridged an international gap by adapting and applying principles of postcolonial theory and Third World feminisms to the intracultural problems in the United States, Spivak provides us with an ethics through which to navigate Anzaldúa’s necessarily transnational borderlands. From there, theories of affect can re-interrogate how the subject functions in this postmodern/posthuman landscape. In her book
Transpositions (2006), Rosi Braidotti states, "The embodied subject’s sense of self depends on not being isolated from the environment, in so far as this subject is defined by the body’s capacity either to impede or to enhance its own power to interact with others" (p. 150). The poor urban areas where most majority-minority schools exist keep students of color geographically, economically, and socially segregated from dominant white culture. Students are expected to adhere to and excel at a school curriculum, structure, and standards that were created with a normative white student at its center. These students of color, relegated to the margins of dominant US society in multiple ways, are isolated on multiple axes. This isolation can rob students of their freedom to enhance their own power and sense of self. Such a sense of self should not be confused with the liberal individualist self of modernity however.

Braidotti’s understanding of self requires what she calls a nomadic ethics:

[T]he faithfulness of mutual sets of interdependence and interconnections, that is to say sets of relations and encounters. It is a play of complexity that encompasses all levels of one’s multi-layered subjectivity, binding the cognitive to the emotional, the intellectual to the affective, and connecting them all to a socially embedded ethics of sustainability. (p. 156)

But the play of this complexity is often reduced to a hierarchical, colonizing, disciplining relationship through the educational system. One example of such a relationship can be seen in the ethnic studies debate in Arizona, where students of color were reprimanded by the state for desiring a sense of power, freedom, and identity within the modernist educational system.

But an even more severe example exists. Out-of-school suspensions have been identified as an educationally unsound practice, with most out of school suspensions actually being for minor offenses (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Out-of-school suspensions result in higher dropout
rates, higher rates of entry into the juvenile justice system, and lower achievement while promoting school disengagement (Losen & Martinez, 2013). Despite the widely published research on this topic, schools continue to use out of school suspensions as a routine form of discipline, and this form of discipline, with all its known effects, is disproportionately applied to students of color. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies states that since the 1970s, “the racial gap in suspension rates between Blacks and Whites has grown dramatically, from fewer than six percentage points forty years ago at the secondary level to over seventeen today” (Losen & Martinez, 2013, p. 21). By actively supporting a practice that disengages those who are already on the margins even further from mainstream society, the educational system knowingly perpetuates a practice that disproportionately pushes students of color out of school and into the criminal justice system. This is known as the school-to-prison pipeline. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) defines the school-to-prison pipeline as "a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Many of these children have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are isolated, punished and pushed out" (para 1, www.aclu.org/school-prison-pipeline).

The school-to-prison pipeline has created a cultural climate in schools in which students of color are hypercriminalized, that is, they are treated individually and systemically as if they are always already a criminal threat. In the book Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys (2011), Victor Rios performs an ethnographic study of marginalized youth of color who are associated with criminal and/or gang culture. Rios interrogates the criminalization of Black and Latino boys in society and places particular emphasis on how the public education system interacts with the criminal justice system through the disciplinary structure of school. He
argues that the so-called deviant behavior of many of these students should not simply be understood as an "internalization of criminality," but also as a form of resistance against an unjust system: "they internalize criminalization, flip it on its head, and generate action that seeks to change the very system that oppresses them" (p. 104). For Rios, these students are not only victims or pawns in a system or misguided teens (though they might be all of those things as well). Much of the time, their criminal behavior is intentional, the purpose being to break the rules "in order to resist a system that seemed stacked against them" (p. 104). Using deviance as a form of resistance is risky, but Rios found the risk was worth the reward: dignity. "As the boys created a dignifying identity, despite punitive consequences, they changed the way in which they perceived themselves, determining modes of interaction and influencing the way in which the system 'dealt' with them" (p. 116). Here we see that the performance of criminality is not just stupid, vindictive, or "anti-social," but rather it is an action that allows the boys to make meaning out of their lives and convey their politics to the systems by which they feel oppressed.

The resistant performance of criminality in pursuit of dignity is one potential outcome of the school-to-prison pipeline, but so are school dropout, gang violence, and mass incarceration. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari explore how we unconsciously and consciously disrupt, pursue, and explore potential life paths in the virtual and actual world. Our lives are shaped both by imposed lines of force as well as dynamic and creative lines of flight. But from those lines one can encounter what Deleuze and Guattari call a "black hole," that is, "a star that has collapsed onto itself" (Message, 2005, p. 34). Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari cite gangs as one such example, a "mini-fascism" that can "threaten self-conscious acts of transcendence" (p. 34). In this sense, the act of consciously removing oneself from the repressive lines of force imposed by the State does not result in enhanced freedom.
Rather, the gang member is simply subjecting him/herself to another organization that is anti-State, but still organized by the same rules of hierarchy and modernity. Gang involvement and other intentional acts of organized deviance can be theorized then as "an ill-conceived (which often equates to overly self-conscious) attempt at deterritorialization" (p. 34).

Imagining our students as the rhizomes of education is another way to visualize this concept. A rhizome refers to a plant that has a horizontal system of roots that produces self-relying offshoots. The rhizome, like bamboo, is seen in contrast to the tree. The tree's root system is seen as being hierarchical. The roots grow, but they do not form self-sustaining offshoots. Many of the structures we have in our current society, including education, are modeled after the tree, but a tree eventually dies, because it is dependent on one trunk, one system. A rhizome on the other hand has the capacity to live forever, because it is constantly growing. Deleuze and Guattari see human experience as being naturally rhizomatic. In this model, education is the original bulb and its goal is to create baby bulbs that grow into their own independent, yet still connected, plant.

Switching from the tree model of education to the bamboo/rhizome model of education is not something that has to be passed through congress or legislated through No Child Left Behind. It is a systemic shift in perspective. It is a belief that there are unlimited possibilities for how we can exist in the world, and the more open we are to these possibilities, the more chance we have of embracing them. Politicians and educational policy administrators are setting up binaries for students based on what they believe proper knowledge looks like. Students are too often responding by disengaging themselves from the learning process, dropping out of school and into black holes of deviance. As Braidotti states, "The truth of self lies in its interrelations to others in a rhizomatic manner that defies dualistic modes of opposition" (2006, p. 161). As
educators, the best way we can effect change is by resisting power-based binaries as much as possible, looking to our students to understand the multiplicity of experience that exists in the world, and seeing them as rhizomatic vessels of infinite potential.

Compulsory education laws mandate that students in the United States attend school until age 18 or graduation. Despite the clear biases of the educational system, students of color must participate in the system. As they experience the process of disengagement projected onto them by the system, they begin to construct new ways of belonging and becoming for themselves. This behavior, though completely natural, is still operating within modernist understandings of identity and progress—as Spivak would say, they are attempting to make a home in the “haunted house inhabited by the colonizers” (1996, p. 27). As Deleuze and Guattari would say, some of them are falling into a mini-fascism. But it is here that we need to look to Anzaldúa and humbly admit that, “Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic” (p. 104). This “magic” is our inherent connection to the human and nonhuman other, which always already precedes the self, allowing for infinite connections between self and other.

Synthesizing Themes

- An antidote to the repressive system of education is to empower students to occupy nomadic subject positions.

Rosi Braidotti theorizes the nomadic subject as “a multi-layered entity that is not unitary and is still capable of ethical and political accountability” (2006, p. 144). Braidotti sees the body as an active entity that seeks connection, however “the limits of my body are the limits of my awareness” (p. 148). So those who exist in isolation from others are not able to fully become themselves because they are limited in their interactions with others. The key is understanding
that the body is always already interacting with others—this interaction will happen whether we are conscious of it or not through affective transmission. But the mind is capable of believing that we are in fact self-contained individuals. When “consciousness fails to understand its interconnectedness” our ability to grow in our own self-knowledge and enhance our own power suffers (p. 149). For Braidotti, “The crucial factor concerns the borderlines, or lines of demarcation, between my and other external bodies” (pp. 148-149). In Braidotti’s examination of Deleuze and Guattari, she notes that they “posit processes of becoming as the antidote” to “the sedentary gravitational pull of addictive and coercive consumption” (p. 153). Certainly one could argue that processes of becoming are not always positive, as is the case with gang involvement, but for Braidotti, “Affectivity is understood as intrinsically positive: it is the force that aims at fulfilling the subject’s capacity for interaction and freedom” (p. 148). Freedom in this case is defined as “the capacity to express and explore the subject’s ability to affect and be affected, i.e. His or her interactive capacity” (p. 148).

To that end, students of color should be empowered to see themselves as nomadic subjects inhabiting the borderlands of the world as opposed to being self-contained individuals who are subjects of the nation-state. Lines of force such as the system of education, with a clear foundation of institutional racism, can push students into black holes, as we see in the case of ethnic studies in Arizona and the school-to-prison pipeline in general. Beyond the Block is an attempt to help students resist lines of force, circumvent black holes, and embark on lines of flight, bringing all of these virtual choices and potential ways of being into the actual world of the student in order to redirect their path. Though these students may not have a choice to remove themselves from a system that marginalizes and alienates them, they can be encouraged to envision their own subject position as one that is "fully immersed in relations of power, but
ethically compelled to strive after freedom in the form of adequate understanding” (Braidotti, p. 151). We cannot change the modernist system of education overnight, but change is possible for individuals at any time once they are made aware of their subject position. If we work to bring students’ places in this world into conscious awareness by introducing them to a previously unknown other, we can inspire students to understand the infinite amount of possibilities that exist for their lives.

- Border pedagogy can act as a long-term strategy to change the system of education from the outside-in.

One of the most thorough and relevant applications of postcolonial, feminist, modern, and postmodern theory to education is Henry Giroux’s border pedagogy. In *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (2005), Giroux describes his goal of attempting to “engage the complex and dynamic force of the borderlands the people inhabit and cross through a range of pedagogical strategies and ideologies” (p. 6). He immediately advocates for the deconstruction of the meaning of globalization, “redefining it around democratic values rather than through the ideology of market fundamentalism and its ever-growing alliance with the forces of militarism” (p. 2). He then issues “a call for educators and cultural workers to become border crossers engaged in an effort to create alternative public spheres” (p. 14). In these spheres, “Citizenship can no longer ground itself in forms of Eurocentrism and the language of colonialism. New spaces, relationships, and identities have to be created that allow us to move across borders, to engage difference and otherness as part of a discourse of justice, social engagement, and democratic struggle” (p. 75). Giroux’s understanding of border pedagogy covers a broad spectrum of theoretical and political interventions that are grounded through ethics. Part of a “radical pedagogical practice,” border pedagogy:
[N]ecessitates combining the modernist emphasis on the capacity of individuals to use critical reason to address the issue of public life with a postmodernist concern with how we might experience agency in a world constituted in differences unsupported by transcendent phenomena or metaphysical guarantees. In that way, border pedagogy can reconstitute itself in terms that are both transformative and emancipatory. (p. 21)

Border pedagogy is driven by educators and cultural workers who are committed to being “transformative intellectuals.” Such teachers “must create webs of solidarity with those that share localized experiences and identities but must also develop a politics of solidarity that reaches out to those others who live in a global world whose problems cannot be dismissed because they do not occupy a local and immediate space” (p. 72).

Though Giroux insists he is not trying “to construct new topologies” by appropriating discourses of post colonialism, modernism, postmodernism, and feminism,” he is certainly extrapolating, adapting, and applying Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands to critical pedagogy (p. 14). I tend to think, however, that were Gloria Anzaldúa still with us, she would have either done this work before Giroux or meaningfully contributed to the border pedagogy concept. Giroux does not concretely make the jump from postmodern understandings of space, time, identity, and relationality to a theoretical focus on the affective encounter, so he does not analyze the impact affect could have on pedagogy, nor does he interrogate alternative pedagogies such as documentary film production. But by locating his work in the borderlands of education with the educator as cultural worker and the student as border crosser, he very closely describes the way in which I am trying to intervene in the educational system through Beyond the Block. The concept of border pedagogy “speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further
create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power” (p. 20). Beyond the Block is one such intervention. Its mission is to improve global awareness, increase intellectual curiosity, develop critical-thinking skills, and encourage completion of high school and postsecondary education in at-risk youth through the production of educational travel documentary videos, an accompanying curriculum, and other educational opportunities and materials. As an educational nonprofit organization, Beyond the Block locates itself as a provider of “diversity education materials specifically designed for students of color at risk of school dropout” (Beyond the Block, 2013). By prefiguring “cultural criticism and pedagogical processes as a form of border crossing,” Beyond the Block “signals forms of transgression in which existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and redefined” (Giroux, p. 20). By transgressing, challenging, and redefining borders that were formed in domination, Beyond the Block has hacked into the system of education, directly reaching the students who need help. This is a small, but targeted effort towards achieving equity in diversity education for students of color in urban public schools. Creating an alternative curriculum made specifically to include students of color in the diversity education movement that they have been marginalized from contributes to the “slow work” of changing US public school education from an institution based in repression and discrimination to one that encourages the freedom and potential of all students.
PART 2: PROCESS  
CHAPTER IV.  
HAITI: THE STORY OF MASON

"A person has only the most limited of his meaning through me: his true meaning is much huger . . . As for me, I can tell you of him only what I saw, only so accurately as in my terms I know how . . . Because of his immeasurable weight in actual existence, and because of mine, every word I tell of him has inevitably a kind of immediacy, a kind of meaning."


Introduction

Thus far I have established my location as an educator trained in the field of counseling. I have described the challenges faced by students of color in urban public school systems as well as the challenges faced by those who attempt to address systemic injustices from within the institution of education. I have given an account of why I founded a nonprofit organization in order to address the dropout epidemic that faces students of color in urban public schools. I have contextualized all of this through the language of affect in the hopes of constructing an affective foundation on which to proceed in this project. This section, Production, details key aspects of my experience producing a documentary in Haiti. It is here that I seemingly make the jump from one target population to another—from students in the United States to children in developing countries, specifically Haiti. However, I have never considered the children I encounter abroad to be a part of my target population. Rather, I relate to the subjects of my documentary more as teaching assistants. I explain to them what I am doing and why I am doing it—that I am trying to broaden the education of students in the US who are not doing well academically, who are having a tough time inside or outside of school, and who might be considering dropping out. And then I ask for their help in reaching these students.
The individual relationship between researcher/filmmaker and subject is not the only
dynamic taking place in ethnographic documentaries that are filmed abroad, though I will discuss
that further in the following chapter. In Haiti, the cultural trauma of colonialism and the lived
experience of neocolonialism shape any and all interactions that Americans have with Haitians.
In the case description section of this chapter, I provide examples of particular Western
neocolonial interventions that have negatively affected Haiti. I then detail an experience I had
with one of the children I met in Haiti, Mason. In the case description section, I do my best to
describe this situation in a straightforward way, leaving out the emotionality so that the reader
can clearly understand the details and order of events. In the affective contextualization section,
I attempt to situate my experience with Mason not simply as an interpersonal exchange that
evoked emotions, but as an example of the life and death impact that neocolonial interventions
inscribe on individual bodies. I then describe through synthesizing themes how Mason’s story
stands as a documentary filmmaker’s call to ethical responsibility.

Case Description

Neocolonial Interventions in Haiti

A review of high school history books confirms the thin story we tell Americans about
Haiti (Dunkel, 2004). The country gets at most one page of coverage in major US history
textbooks, and even then the focus is mainly on French General Napoleon Bonaparte, rather than
the role the Haitians played in the Haitian Revolution. What tends to be forgotten is that Haiti
was a country of slaves who overthrew their white masters in a deadly revolution that wiped out
half of their population; as the world's first Black republic, Haiti was not seen as a success by

2 Please note all names have been changed.
other countries, but alternated between being perceived as a burden and a threat. At the time Haiti gained its independence, slavery was still a highly profitable institution on which the United States economy completely depended. Blacks were not considered to be whole people. They were sub-human entities that could be bought and sold. In the eyes of much of the world, Black people were chattel, held in pens and put on display for the whites looking to purchase slaves. White people could abuse, rape, and murder Blacks, especially those who were enslaved, without much fear of repercussions (Nicholls, 1996).

Haiti, known then as Saint Domingue, was France's most lucrative colony and they did not give it up without a fight. Upon gaining independence in 1804 through the Haitian Revolution, France relinquished political control over Haiti; however, they managed to maintain financial control by forcing Haiti to pay them an indemnity of 150 million gold francs for their land lost in the Revolution. This exertion of control is the first example of neocolonialism that we see in Haiti. Neocolonialism is an idea originated by Kwame Nkrumah, which describes the way in which imperialistic powers exert financial and political control over other countries in ways more insidious than colonialism, but just as, if not more, destructive to the nation (Nkrumah, 1964). Haiti then not only entered into its independence reeling from the postcolonial effects of slavery (and all of the racism, violence, and inequality that engenders), but also with a neocolonial hold on its future as a result of the debt imposed upon them by France (Nicholls, 1996).

Soon, the United States began exerting its imperialistic powers over Haiti through neocolonial interventions. Though only three occupations are official, the United States has been directly and indirectly involved in Haiti since even before it gained its independence. American intervention in Haiti's government led to a revolving door of military leaders, violent coups,
resulting riots, with the United States routinely manipulating Haiti’s leadership to ensure that their own interests were supported. The American interventions in Haiti’s environment and natural resources are particularly disturbing due to the fact that they have completely altered the fabric of life in Haiti, its agricultural capabilities, and the physical land itself (Dunkel, 2004; Nicholls, 1996).

The United States intervened environmentally in Haiti in three ways: by building the Peligre Dam, exterminating indigenous Creole pigs, and competing with Haitian farmers by importing rice priced under market value. Built by the US Army Corps of engineers in 1956, the Peligre Dam promised to provide a source of hydroelectricity to remote villages in Haiti. Instead, it flooded the fertile Artibonite valley, displacing farmers who were offered nothing in return. The dam failed to live up to its promise to provide electricity to Haiti, providing only sporadic electricity that was diverted to the capital city of Port-au-Prince. The dam now sits in disrepair, polluting the river it flows into. Creole pigs were an important resource for the majority of Haitians, used not only for food and spiritual purposes, but also as collateral to pay for school, housing materials, farming supplies, and other essential materials. In the 1980s, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), established cause for concern that Haitian Creole pigs could pass along the African Swine Flu that was affecting the Dominican Republic at the time. USAID began a systematic extermination campaign of Creole pigs. As compensation, US pigs were distributed. They failed to thrive in Haiti, which inflicted a huge blow to the Haitian economy. The US government also manipulated another food item, rice. In order to obtain a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Haiti was made to lower tariffs on all imports into the country in 1986 and 1995. With rice farmers in the US benefitting from government subsidies, Haitian farmers were soon priced out of their own market.
by USAID rice. The destruction of Haiti’s rich agricultural legacy and future potential was complete. Unable to make a viable living with farming, many Haitians flocked to the new jobs becoming available in factories, making cheap goods for US companies and consumers. (Farmer, 2011; Kidder, 2004; Dunkel, 2004).

The 2010 earthquake in Haiti compounded the country’s pre-existing issues. Churches and NGOs flocked to Haiti in an attempt to “fix” the country. Such organizations have been involved in Haiti for years and have attempted to assist people in various ways: education, healthcare, and housing for instance. However, systemic change has remained elusive (Buss, 2008). By using heart-wrenching media images and stories to solicit donations to drum up support for their causes, presumably well-meaning helpers have contributed to the dominant narrative of Haitians as a people who are helpless, underdeveloped, and ignorant to modernity. This “third world” line of thought, so common in developed nations, promulgates the idea that Haiti can only be saved if they receive help from their outside, more developed, and more civilized neighbors. Consequently, many of these NGOs find themselves unwittingly caught in the web of neocolonialism that is holding Haiti hostage. Haiti has corruption of its own, but the country emerged from slavery and colonial rule only to be placed directly in the crosshairs of Western neocolonialism, most often executed by the United States. Any steps Haitians attempted to take towards self-sufficiency were made all the more challenging due to the imperialistic foothold other countries had in it. Though some NGOs operating from within Haiti have attempted to fight against neocolonialism, they have not been able to change the system that keeps Haiti subservient to its imperialist neighbor. Despite their uphill battle, Haitians are fiercely protective of their sovereignty (Daniel & Mendoza, 2012; Dunkel, 2004).
Mason

My host in Port-au-Prince, Cindy, was an American who ran a boys orphanage in Haiti. She lived in the United States and usually went to Haiti once every two months for a few weeks at a time to check on the operation. She employed a Haitian staff that took care of the boys, who ranged in age from 3 months to 17 years old at the time. I met and/or interviewed all of the boys on my first trip to Haiti in the spring of 2011. In the summer of 2012, I returned to show them a rough cut of the resulting documentary before I started showing it to students in the US. When I arrived in Haiti for the second time, Cindy picked me up at their airport with Frederic, the Haitian orphanage administrator. She told me in the car that Mason was sick and had been taken to the hospital the previous day because he was having "convulsions" that had lasted all through the night. She said that every time he "came to" after his convulsions he was confused and foggy. I asked what the doctors said. She said they thought he was very ill or he was “struggling with spirits . . . fighting for his soul." She said she could take me to her apartment or we could go see him at the hospital. I chose to go to the hospital. I asked her if she or the doctors had considered epilepsy. She said she did not know. I shared with her what I knew about it and she stayed quiet and seemingly contemplative.

The hospital was a very simple building that had only beds and none of the electronic equipment typically found in a United States hospital room, such as a heart rate monitor or IV machine. Mason was tired and seemed ill, but he remembered me and smiled. Within an hour of my arrival at the hospital, Mason had what appeared to be a grand mal seizure. He convulsed repeatedly, arching his back, eyes rolling into the back of his head. We had to hold him down to keep him from hitting his head and falling off the bed. He seemed to lapse into unconsciousness after the apparent seizure. Slowly he came to. He was extremely tired and did not remember
what had happened. Within the next two hours, Mason had two more seizures; another apparent
grand mal seizure, much like the first one and then a third one. By this time, I could recognize
the signs of when he was about to seize. He would get distracted and lose focus. I saw him
doing this and went to sit right next to him. I held his hands, I looked into his eyes, and I held
his gaze. He looked back at me, almost as if he was imprisoned inside of his body. He looked
scared. I told him he was going to be okay. I told him he was fine. I said "Shhhhh . . . don't
worry, don't worry, you're going to be fine. You are such a good boy. You're doing so well.
You're fine. You're fine." He held my gaze the whole time. That seizure was not as bad as the
last two had been. He came to, and after, would not let go of my hand for the rest of the night.
He laid in my lap and fell asleep holding my hand.

Mason's mother and grandma arrived at the hospital. It was at this moment that I realized
that Mason was not an orphan. He had a family—quite a large family in fact. His mother and
grandma sat at his bedside, sang religious songs, and prayed over him. I had to go home with
Cindy soon after they came. I was quiet for much of the car ride. I mentioned epilepsy. I
mentioned that seizures could cause brain damage. I asked if there was a better hospital he could
go to. She said maybe.

We returned to the hospital the next day. Mason had suffered two seizures that morning
before we arrived. The doctor came in to talk to everyone. She spoke only Creole, so I could
understand very little. Haitian Creole shares some cognates with Spanish, a language I do speak,
so I was able to pick out certain words. She said something about Mason making himself have
seizures and that he needed a psychologist and a psychiatrist. No one questioned the doctor.
Cindy does not speak Creole either, but I could identify enough of the Spanish cognates to know
that the doctor's words were not translated to her verbatim. Mason's mother, grandma, and aunt
were still there and were having a heated discussion. From what I could understand, they seemed to be discussing taking Mason out of the boys home. They eventually asked Cindy if they could take him home to his family for a few weeks after he was released from the hospital to help him recuperate. Cindy said no, citing liability reasons.

Meanwhile, it took one doctor and two nurses to insert an IV into Mason. He was in a great deal of pain because no one could insert it properly. There was no sanitation used to clean the needle or the skin they were sticking. Subsequently, he developed an infection at the site of the IV, leaving him in even more pain. The nurses gave Mason some "medicine" through the IV. Almost immediately, Mason became short of breath. This was not a seizure. He was writhing in pain and clutching at his chest. I felt his heart and it was beating extremely hard and extremely fast. The nurse had left the room and I told those who were in the room to go get her or a doctor immediately. The nurse came and said she had given him Valium. She said he would be fine. Mason continued to be in pain with a strong, rapid heart beat for another hour. Eventually the nurses gave him another shot of something and he passed out.

I told Cindy that I did not think the level of care at the hospital was good. I asked her if she had any contacts that might know a more reliable place to get care. They had only chosen this hospital because it was close to the orphanage and Mason had been in an emergency situation. She mentioned a few places, but was resistant to call them. That night Cindy talked to a doctor who spoke English and was friends with the doctor at the hospital. She said that Mason's problem was psychological and that he needed to be with his mother. After that conversation, Cindy was certain that the problem was psychological and spiritual and that it would not be good for Mason to be released to his mother.
I called a friend to try to get information about causes and treatment for seizures. I explained what was happening. My friend spoke to two doctors in the United States who said the seizures could be caused by infectious disease, but that there was no way to be sure without an MRI or a brain scan. Cindy was not receptive to any of this information.

Mason's mother lived in the Dominican Republic. I thought about going with her and taking Mason to get medical care there because, compared to the hospital we were at, the level of care there was much higher. Also, I felt I could advocate better for Mason in the Dominican since I speak Spanish. Mason was not permitted to leave the boys home, though. I spoke with Mason's mother a bit in Spanish and had an immediate affinity with her and Mason's grandma. They watched the video I had brought that had Mason in it. Mason watched it with them in his hospital bed. He was asking to go home a lot by this time.

The following day, Mason was released from the hospital. He was prescribed four medications. Cindy and the orphanage staff only picked up one. Mason had another seizure when he got back to the orphanage. The staff put him in a chair and began praying around him. I told Frederic that Mason needed his medication, one of which I recognized as alprazolam (Xanax). The doctor my friend had spoken to on my behalf had recommended an anti-anxiety drug in the same family, and I told Frederic that the medication would at least reduce the tension of Mason's convulsions. Frederic responded: "Science is okay for some things, but not this." "But why can't we do both?" I asked. "Why can't we give him medicine and also pray?" "Okay, okay," he said. He explained how if they were voodoo practitioners that they would take him to a witch doctor, but they were Christian so all they could do is pray. They believed Mason's father was sending him bad spirits. We ended our conversation and I waited outside, listening, as they performed what seemed to be an exorcism on Mason.
When we went home I encouraged Cindy to start asking around for better hospitals in the area in case things got bad with Mason again. She said no, that Mason does not need a doctor anymore. According to Cindy, Mason is doing very well now.

Affective Contextualization

*Mason’s Sickness as the Sickness of Modernity*

I had come to know Mason not only through our first meeting during my 2011 visit to Haiti, but also through the process of editing the video footage from that trip. The nature of editing involves repetitive seeing and hearing of one’s subjects. Being as though I had just finished an edit of the video before I landed in Haiti for my 2012 visit, I was feeling particularly close to all of the boys, but especially Mason. In my mind, he had become the star of the video. He spoke succinctly, intelligently, and passionately throughout, with a maturity that belied his pre-teen age. I was crushed, then, to hear upon my arrival that he was doing so poorly. One cannot think of Haiti without thinking of death, as so much of the news and imagery that we have seen in recent years has been about the earthquake or cholera. So when I heard the news about Mason not doing well, I immediately felt panic.

In a journal entry I wrote over the first four days I was in Haiti, I describe my experience with Mason as: “the worst thing I’ve ever seen. Mason is so precious and so small. He is so intelligent—he really was the standout star of my video. . . . He has amazing insight and ideas about what can and should be done to improve the country . . . to imagine his little brain being damaged is just an absolute heartbreaking crime and injustice. I don't want to think that that could ever happen, but as he lay seizing, as I held down his little legs—it was terrible.”
I am describing here a child that was vulnerable in body, but resiliently strong in his sense of self. The chance that his mind could succumb to the vulnerabilities of the body struck me as “an absolute heartbreaking crime and injustice.” Looking back, I think it was quite peculiar that I described Mason’s condition as a “crime and injustice.” In my state of panic, I was certainly not thinking deeply about the macro-structures and institutions working on Mason’s body, but I did know they were there. And in my hurried, scribbled writing, I grasped for the closest words that could articulate the utter tragedy of this situation. Upon reflection, I can see how Mason’s illness illuminates the deep bodily trauma of neocolonialism.

While in Haiti, I vacillated between asserting my privileged nationality in order to help Mason and denouncing my nationality for all of the damage it had done and continues to do in Haiti. I struggled between respecting Cindy’s desire to help others and questioning the ethics she used to make decisions for the boys.

"It's difficult to write all this stuff because Cindy really is a kind person and has a good heart. It's just frustrating to see this because I just know how different all of this would have gone in the US. Part of me also wonders though whether this is just par for the course. I've already come to the realization that everyone in international aid is crazy. Maybe these are healthy boundaries for her? Maybe it's the only way she can go on? . . . I wouldn't take kids for the orphanage if they had parents. Why would you take kids who have parents when there are so many who don't? I just don't believe that because we can provide them with a ‘better’ life that they are necessarily better off. Like with Mason. I think he should be with his mom. I think his sponsors should come down, look at where he's living, do a needs assessment on the family, and give the family whatever they need."
Witnessing Mason have what appeared to be a series of seizures in a hospital that was ill equipped and poorly staffed frustrated me. Blaming his seizures on a psychological condition without proper testing seemed like malpractice to me. The doctor in the US who my friend had contacted said it would not surprise him if in a place where they don't have those resources, they just convince themselves that it's not a physical problem. Because facing the fact that you don't have the proper resources leaves you helpless. Attributing it to something spiritual gives you agency. If the hospital did not have the equipment to give him an MRI or CAT scan nor have any resources to refer him to, he said, then they were doing the best they could with the resources they had. I understood this, but I was confused as to why Cindy seemed to believe this as well. I write:

“I can understand how Haitians would think that, but how can Cindy think that? I was confused as to why Cindy wasn't calling everyone she knew to get him into a better hospital. She seemed to have no contacts. What I don't understand is how you can have an orphanage without having a health care plan. How can you have an orphanage without an emergency plan. How, as an American, you can have so few American contacts. There have to be people down here doing medical work that could help. It's so sad. So that was frustrating. Just to see Cindy accepting this terrible level of care for a problem that was so severe—it was very frustrating. I am not saying Cindy is a bad person, but I just am confused. Is what she's doing better than nothing? Of course. But is she fulfilling the ethical standard she probably should be as an American? Absolutely not in my opinion.”

At the heart of my confusion lies a conflict over the role of international aid in Haiti. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere—assistance is needed there, especially since the earthquake (Dunkel 2004; Farmer, 2011). I agree with Lawrence Grossberg when he
states, "I do believe that we have an obligation to leave the world a better place, and I believe that requires us to enable others—everyone—to be able to fulfill that obligation as well . . . it requires us to seek a world in which all people have the material conditions of survival, the political conditions of freedom and justice, and the intellectual conditions of education and expression" (2010, p. 100).

But the struggle I detail in my journal entry articulates my conflicting feelings between the damage I knew America had done and continues to do to Haiti through neocolonialism and the responsibility an American organization has to the people of Haiti if they choose to take on a "helping" role.

Driving around Port-au-Prince, Red Cross vans and United Nations (UN) tanks are commonplace vehicles. While these non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claim to help Haiti, many Haitians question whether they have actually done more harm than good. In hushed voices, people told me about the often alcohol-fueled terror UN soldiers inflict on the community, using their power to gain complicity in order to satisfy their sexual desires. The Red Cross is regarded as suspicious. The Haitians know they collected a large amount of money through donations in the wake of the earthquake, yet the majority of them did not directly experience the effects of that capital. The UN has been implicated in the outbreak of cholera that killed many Haitians and continues to do so, with human rights lawyers attempting to file a lawsuit against the UN for bringing such a destructive, non-indigenous disease to Haiti (Watson & Vaccarello, 2013). Christian missionaries have a huge presence in Haiti as well, providing housing, schooling, and health care. Christian efforts combine with the Red Cross, the United Nations, and other NGOs to form a haphazard infrastructure, where basic needs are met by disparate organizations, some of which often have ulterior motives for providing care. Adhering
to Christianity is the most prevalent motive, with many Haitians having denounced their
traditional cultural and spiritual practice of voodoo in order to establish dependable relationships
with Christian aid organizations. Such aid organizations also generate opportunities for the
steady, paid jobs that are so difficult to obtain in Haiti. Conversion to Christianity, then,
represents a potential source of income and resources for Haitians, not unlike Creole pigs did for
them in the past.

The orphanage Cindy runs is one such Christian organization. I learned as result of
Mason’s hospitalization that many of the boys who live at the orphanage have families. Mason,
for instance, has a mother, a grandmother, and aunts, all of whom came to the hospital when he
was ill. A Haitian representative from the organization went around to various neighborhoods,
telling families that their children could get free food, free schooling, free housing, and free
medical care if they gave up custody of their children. Many of the boys in the orphanage are a
result of that initial “recruiting” trip. A few of the boys arrived through other means, like the
baby who was given directly to Cindy, who is white, on a trip she made to Cite Soliel, an
extremely impoverished neighborhood of Port-au-Prince.

The conditions under which Haitian parents give their children to orphanages are not
unlike the conditions under which American parents give their children up for adoption. They
hope for a better home, a better life, a better chance at health and happiness for their children.
They feel incapable of providing that to their children for various reasons, and believe they are
doing the best thing for them. But these situations are not entirely similar. Adoption in the
United States, presently, is by and large a choice made by the mother before she gives birth or
shortly thereafter. In Haiti, many children are recruited to orphanages at an older age. They
have already bonded to their families. Many of the parents do not make a choice to give up their
children until they are presented with a tangible opportunity to do so by these organizations. Especially after the earthquake, with so much of the country in ruins, it is difficult to say no to such an opportunity knowing that providing their children with the resources being promised would likely never be possible if the child remained in the family home. 

When Mason was recruited into the orphanage, he not only became the legal responsibility of an American organization, but he also generated income for that organization. In order to raise money to provide the children with the resources promised to them, the organization hosted missionaries who paid to participate in a trip to Haiti. The children and their personal stories were featured on the organization’s website, with the option to sponsor their educational needs, their food and health care, or both. The American organization was able to secure these funds largely through their Christian church contacts. This small organization was supporting 17 boys, a full staff, as well as transportation and housing. Haiti is surprisingly expensive and the organization was routinely in need of cash flow to keep the operation going. In this sense then, Mason had a certain dollar amount associated with him, and not a large one. I know that money was an issue during Mason’s hospital stay—there were complaints about his cost of care and the cost of medicine. It is possible that other options for care were not explored because they would have been too expensive. His care totaled around $400 US dollars.

If you are a part of an organization that has recruited children, taken custody of them from their families, and assumed financial responsibility for them, how far does your responsibility go when you are facing a potentially life-threatening situation? Do you treat them as if they were your own children and save them by any means necessary? Or do you consider what each child is worth, and how much you are willing to spend in order to save him? These are the complications invoked by neocolonial interventions and international aid. "In my dreams
I could take Mason to the States and get him the help he needs,” I write, “But he has family here and he is being taken care of by Cindy. What can I do?” I wrestled with the idea of volunteering to take him back to the Dominican Republic with his mother, because I knew the language and that the healthcare system was better equipped there, but without securing release from the orphanage that was not possible.

I initially saw Mason’s seizures as being a purely physical medical issue—after consulting with two friends who are doctors in the United States, I thought he needed a brain scan and proper assessment for possible infectious disease. The doctors at the hospital saw it as a psychological medical issue—they sent him home with anti-anxiety medications, a referral to a child psychologist, and a recommendation that he be reunited with his mother. Cindy and the staff at the orphanage saw this as a spiritual issue—they thought his estranged father was sending Mason “evil spirits” that needed to be “cast out” of him. As Frederic told me, their first option would have traditionally been taking him to a voodoo priest but because they were Christian that was not an option. Frederic’s words made me feel like Christianity’s treatment for Mason was a watered-down substitute to that of a voodoo priest. This treatment for Mason’s seizures was something like an exorcism. I watched while Mason sat slumped in a chair, surrounded by the Haitian women who worked at the orphanage. They yelled at the spirits they believed were inside of him as his head hung there. I felt overcome with emotion and I could not watch. I sat outside and listened as they screamed and chanted.

“At some point during the exorcism, I thought to myself, ‘You know, I think this is BS. I believe in prayer though. And I might as well get out of the way, just in case they do have any pull, any chance of having an effect on Mason.’”
I have no doubt that everyone who witnessed Mason’s seizures also felt transformed by the affectivity of his suffering. But because of our various understandings of the world and the other, we all absorbed this affect in different ways. Teresa Brennan discusses how affect has a long history of being identified as “demons or sins” in both Jewish and Christian traditions (2004, p. 98). For this reason, there is certainly precedence for both Cindy and the Haitians’ interpretations. My own initial interpretation clearly privileged Western medicine and science.

Though I still believe there was a medical component to Mason’s seizures, I have also come to believe that, to an extent, there were both psychological and spiritual elements to Mason’s illness. Brennan writes that “the projection outward of negative affects . . . results from a sense of peril and pain in which the nascent subject is attempting to defend itself by expelling bad feelings outside itself” (p. 95). For years the Haitian subject has been on the receiving end of the violent affects associated with colonialism and neocolonialism. Mason himself suffered the violence of separation from his family, unable to contact them at will or maintain a relationship with them in the name of attaining a “better life” and becoming an educated Christian—a good Western subject. It is worth considering then, that the historicity of Mason as a receiver of negative affects is associated with the trauma of colonialism. Despite his exceptional intelligence and understanding of the world around him, he was still trapped in the neocolonial legacy of this trauma, while simultaneously enduring new traumas. Brennan’s understanding of affect confronts us with the ironic possibility that while the colonial Christian was attempting to “cast out” Mason’s negative affects through exorcism, Mason was trying to cast out the negative affects he had absorbed from the colonial Christian through his seizures. Perhaps they had it backwards and the affects of colonialism were the true “demons.”
Affective Accountability

When I was holding Mason and maintaining eye contact with him while he seized, something happened. I describe in my journal this “crazy thing,” how “he just looked so scared.” In that moment “I could see him freaking out but he was unable to tell me he was freaking out. He wasn’t in control of his body, but I saw the fear in his eyes, like, ‘What’s happening to me? Help!’ And I just held his eye contact through the entire thing and kept telling him that he was going to be okay.” The moment was impactful and I write, “I don’t think I’ve ever felt so connected to a child actually. Just….it’s indescribable and I don’t think I’ll ever forget the look in his eyes or how that moment felt.” Upon reflection, the closest I can come to describing that moment is as a state of affective intensity that transposed language. We were “speaking” through our eyes. Many things were “said” in that moment: I am scared. I am here for you. What is happening? Why is this happening? Help me. I’m helpless. I’m sorry. After, when Mason slept in my arms, “It was the most beautiful thing because I was just happy that it seemed to indicate that he knew I cared, that he knew I wanted to hold him and care for him. And that meant a lot. Because it was the most I could do for him.” My sorrow for Mason was not sympathy, but what Teresa Brennan refers to in her book The Transmission of Affect (2004) as a “finer feeling” exemplified by the Spanish phrase “lo siento” (p. 123). Though it translates to “I’m sorry,” its literal Spanish meaning is “I feel it.” It indicates that “one is open to others in a way that wishes them well and would dissipate their anxiety or sorrow if one could. It is an opening through which one feels the other’s pain or joy as one’s own” (p. 123).

In that moment, Mason was indelibly inscribed onto my own body and consciousness. Now, this “indescribable crazy thing” makes sense to me as a transmission of affect—a becoming in which I came to not only intellectually know, but also to feel in a very embodied
way, my own culpability in neocolonialism. In discussing the philosophy of trans-individuality proposed by Etienne Balibar, Rosi Braidotti (2006) states that “by virtue of being interconnected to other human and non-human actors, we share in responsibility even for deeds we have not done ourselves” (p. 149). This moment was perhaps only a few minutes long—maybe even seconds—but in it I was implicated in the historicity of Mason’s suffering. I had studied how colonialism and neocolonialism had negatively affected the people of Haiti, but in that moment, as Mason seized, I saw and felt the violence of the colonial encounter and the very real effects it has on actual bodies. All of these colonial and neocolonial interventions colluded to place Mason at that hospital in that moment—the indemnity, the poverty, the Westernization, the aid. At the same time, during that moment, I was also connecting to Mason through what I can only describe as love—that feeling of “Please let me take your suffering from you. Give me your suffering so you don’t have to feel it. To see you hurting hurts me. It would hurt us both less if I could hurt for you.”

In her book Transpositions (2006), Rosi Braidotti uses what she calls a philosophical nomadism to describe alternate (non-modern/postmodern) ways of being in the world. For Braidotti, the subject is “non-unitary” and “processual” but also accountable (p. 137). Her nomadic sustainable subjectivity is “A robust new theory of the subject as a multi-layered entity that is not unitary and is still capable of ethical and political accountability” (p. 144). Braidotti’s understanding of affect is tied up in her idea of “nomadic becomings.” Such becomings “mark a qualitative process of structural shifts in the parameters and boundaries of subjectivity” (p. 148). They are “the affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, meant as a multiple and complex process of transformation” (p. 145) where “it makes the subjects into transversal and interconnecting entities, defined in terms of common propensities” (p. 148). Becomings
then, refer to the multitude of ways in which we can broaden and expand our understanding of how we function in the world, regardless of temporality. Becomings can acknowledge binaries of sameness and differentness, while also transposing them through “shared affectivity” (p. 148). What results is “intelligent matter” (p. 148) that has the power “to bring about an empowering present” (p. 154). Braidotti refers to this power as “Potentia, which is power to repeat beyond negativity” (p. 154).

My experience with Mason was a becoming, a moment “when the self is emptied out, dissolving into rawer and more elementary sensations,” and where “heightened levels of awareness and receptivity,” lead to an “intransitive gaze that marks the intensive state of becoming” (p. 172). Such becomings lead to “a more focused, more precise, more accurate perception . . . to ‘take in’ the world, to encounter it” (p. 173). I felt an interconnectedness with Mason based not on an understanding of sameness or differentness, but rather based on a transformation in which I saw myself as a “genealogical entity” who is not only responsible for the marks I make on others in the present moment, but who is also responsible for the accumulation of privileges and injustices that my embodied self represents and projects onto others both actively and passively (p. 150). The idea of affect as being a life force for connecting experiences is a positive one only in so far as it forces one to grow in our understanding of self and other, to the point where we see that there are no boundaries between us. However, the material consequences of boundaries created by inscribed identities, political systems, institutions of the state, and economic functions continue to influence our lives. Understanding that we are connected then, while “positive” for growth and world-being, can be full of negative emotions because in realizing we are inalterably connected to the other we realize that we are also ethically responsible to the other. This is not a paternalistic responsibility, but rather a
radical “awareness of one’s condition of interaction with others, that is to say one’s capacity to affect and to be affected” (p. 156). Mason affected me intensely, but my own passive and active participation in the history of injustices that led to his illness could also be experienced by him as an affective intensity, one that may or may not have manifested through his seizures.

My experience with Mason contributed to my minoritarian perspective, a continuous becoming that allows us to overturn “the dialectical logic that legitimates a central norm through hierarchically organized binary oppositions” (Braidotti, p. 133). Such a becoming “marks a shift from the dominant subject-position, but nevertheless remains tied to it” (p. 133). Becoming minoritarian does not mean that we seek to establish sameness with the other or that we should seek to flatten differences, because as Braidotti states, “The repair work of egalitarian politics is more necessary than ever” (p. 133). However, “one should not simply stop there” (p. 134). Indeed, becoming minoritarian demands “a radical disruption of this scheme altogether” while employing aspects of strategic essentialism in order to address the very real injustices facing humans and nonhumans in the current conjuncture (p.133). In order to become minoritarian we must transpose the modernist boundaries inscribed onto our minds and bodies such as identity, nation, race, and class, but these can only be transposed when affective intensities match. Such a transposition “is like a musical variation that leaps across scales and compositions to find a pitch or a sharable level of intensity” (p. 135). Though some may find the casting aside of such modernist constructs offensive, it is only in transposing them that we can make ourselves vulnerable and open to positive becomings. As Braidotti bluntly states, “What matters to my thought is the affective dimension, the affinity, not the political or theoretical correctness” (135). She admits however that, “One needs at least some subject position: this need not be either unitary, or exclusively anthropocentric, but it must be the site for political and ethical
accountability” (138).

As I faced the reality of returning home from Haiti, I felt tormented by the intensity of my affective experience, writing:

"I don't know, I don't know. The more I think about it, the more complicated it becomes. What is the best way to help? Should we help at all? Would they prefer it if we [Americans] all just left? . . . Do we have a responsibility to help them? I think yes. But what is the best way to do so? What is the best way to help? What is the ethical way to help? . . . Now I'm at the airport and I'm just sitting here, trying to make some sense out of this trip, out of my life. . . . What does Mason mean in the grand scheme of my life? How will I change because of what happened? How should I change? What can I change that will somehow honor his struggle/respect his struggle? I don't know. . . . I feel very confused about this trip and about Cindy and about Haiti. . . . I'm so disgusted with my life."

For Braidotti, “To be an individual means to be open to being affected by and through others, thus undergoing transformations in such a way as to be able to sustain them and make them work towards growth” (p. 162). Part of my political and ethical accountability in the wake of my experience with Mason and with Haiti, then, was to not let my negative emotions of guilt, shame, and anger shape my experience to the point where the growth I experienced through my affective becoming was rendered unsustainable. Braidotti points out that:

Minoritarian memory bears a close link to the idea of a traumatic event . . . the effect of a trauma is to flatten time out into a generalized sense of numbness that traces an oppressively linear and sustainable ‘now’. The tyranny of this linearity functions like a black hole into which possible future implode and disappear. (p. 167)

Feeling overwhelmed by the trauma of my experience in Haiti would keep me caught in the same
black holes my students from Los Angeles fell into. In turning my emotionality inward, I would be turning away from the other. I would be exercising an individualism that indulged only in my capacity to be affected, rather than simultaneously acknowledging my own capacity to affect affectivity. Such inward turning of my emotionality would render me to a passive way of living that limited my own, and by definition others’ freedom, with an understanding of freedom as “the capacity to express and explore the subject’s ability to affect and be affected” (p. 148).

As I sat in the Port-au-Prince airport waiting for my flight home, a Haitian man, Donald, approached me and struck up a conversation, asking if he could look at my passport. I gave it to him and he turned it over in his hands. Then he looked at me and said, “You show this passport, and you have power. You go to the American Embassy and you're safe. You show a soldier on the street and they take care of you.” At the moment, I was embarrassed by the power inscribed on me by my nationality. I wondered, “What am I going to do with my power? How will I use it?” Transposing the boundaries and limits of modernity through affectivity does not mean that our inscribed identities do not still operate on multiple axes. Mason made his mark on me, of that I am certain. However, relying on my experience as authoritative knowledge would only be another trap of the individualistic ontology at the foundation of much inter-subjective misunderstanding. As Braidotti states, “It is important to see the limitations” inherent in the “sacralization of experiential knowledge” (p. 133). Acknowledging my various privileges and locations and continuing to engage outward would be an essential part of my ethical accountability to Mason.
Synthesizing Themes

In *Practicing Peace in Times of War* (2007), Buddhist nun Pema Chodron asserts that our own individual reactions to strong feelings have consequences for the level of suffering experienced throughout the world, stating that “war and peace start in the human heart. Whether that heart is open or whether that heart closes has global implications” (p. 26). Such a sentiment may sound soft, uncritical, or romantically religious to some, but Chodron’s interpretations of Buddhist thought are an example of how we can deeply interrogate the individual subject outside of Western ideology—that is, without falling into the rhetoric of neoliberalism or individualism and further, without falling into self-centeredness or narcissism.

In an interview with Bill Moyers, Chodron discusses how the chain reaction of aggression can travel from one person to another person and then become transformed into acts of harm that affect family, society, and ultimately the world. She believes, however, that “if you come to your senses anywhere in the chain reaction you can interrupt this” (2006, para. 86). For Chodron, this process boils down to the Buddhist principle of attachment, or *shenpa*, “the root cause of aggression” (p. 55). She further describes *shenpa* as “the charge behind our thoughts and words and actions. . . . That sticky feeling” (p. 56). This concept is quite similar to the understanding of affect I am putting forth in this project, specifically the transmission of affect that I discuss in this chapter which Brennan refers to in the most basic sense as how "the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another" (2004, p. 3).

Looking back, I can identify two themes in my own experience that relate to the very practical recommendations Chodron gives us to get ourselves “unstuck” from *shenpa*. 
• Hold yourself accountable.

Through Mason, I was able to witness the material effects of the violence of colonialism. This caused me to not only want to personally lash out at the doctors, Cindy, and Frederic, but also to want to use the privilege of my nationality to intervene in Mason’s situation. I wanted to harness whatever power I had to control the situation. Chodron’s work forces me to ask myself: in what way is that attitude at all different from the original colonial encounter or the persistent neocolonial encounter? At the root of both of my desires is shenpa, that sticky aggression that “comes along with a very seductive urge to do something” (p. 56). Of course we can agree that aggressively lashing out at people who are only trying to help is a bad thing, but what about intervening in the situation on behalf of Mason? How would that have been aggressive? In both cases, the problem is not the desire to act, but rather the aggression that is motivating that desire to act. If circumstances had been different and I had been swept away by this desire to act, I would have only succeeded in becoming another conduit for the underlying aggression of colonialism.

Reading back on my journals, I am shocked at my hubris. Who am I to even begin to think I can assert my own power and control over a system that I have only recently begun to understand in order to change it to my version of “right”? Well, I am an American. And asserting power and control over others in the name of what is “right” is what we do, what we have done. In many ways, shenpa is ideology. It is the nation-state. It is modernity. It is whatever constructed normativity we are operating out of as subjects. When we are unaware that shenpa has been triggered, this ideology sucks us in like quicksand and activates through what Chodron calls “habitual pattern,” that is, those behaviors that perpetuate the separation from self and other. Chodron discusses how “In times of distress . . . we harden out of fear . . . we
automatically erect a protective shield and our self-centeredness intensifies” (pp. 69-70). An intervention motivated by the same aggression that caused the problem to begin with, then, is not really an intervention at all. It is just another enactment of an aggressive ideology that separates instead of connects. It is imperative, then, that we admit that ideology can rear its head at any moment and that we hold ourselves accountable when it does. By continuously reflecting on our interactions and decisions both in the moment and in retrospect, we can begin to notice when our habitual patterns manifest and over time stop ourselves before we unwittingly enact ideology.

- Feel your way through emotionally charged moments.

I can see now that I was upset at the systems that caused Mason pain—the poor health care, the orphanage, Christianity. Although all of the individuals I felt upset with were somehow implicated in the systems that were causing him pain, I know for a fact that none of those people wanted to see Mason suffer. So what good would it do to aggressively lash out at people simply for their well-intentioned participation in systems that are not working? That aggression certainly would not lessen Mason’s pain or his suffering. What could I have done, then, to interrupt the violence of colonialism in that situation? At the time I did not have enough wisdom to know what to do, but in retrospect I felt the right thing happening when I helped Mason through his seizure and he fell asleep in my arms.

When I reflect on my experience with Mason, I am grateful that I did not have the power of language to assist me in that encounter. Being without language forced me to feel, to sit with those feelings and not have the ability to express them. Without verbal communication, I could not make sense of the experience, but by feeling my way through the situation, I was given a very literal opportunity to “come to my senses” and face my own role in perpetuating the transmission of aggression through neocolonialism.
Chodron states that “When we’re putting up the barriers and the sense of ‘me’ as separate from ‘you’ gets stronger, right there in the midst of difficulty and pain, the whole thing could turn around simply by *not erecting barriers*; simply by staying open to the difficulty. . . . That is a revolutionary step . . . letting the sharpness of difficult times pierce us to the heart” (p. 71). It was very, very hard to be open to the difficulty and pain of Mason because I was so scared that he would die. Even as I sit here writing, admitting that it was a possibility, I feel my chest tightening with anxiety.

Bill Nichols believes that “the threat of death places interaction or affinity, commitment, and solidarity with those filmed on emotionally charged ground . . . they indicate what stakes exist when the filmmaker chooses to act in history alongside those filmed rather than operate from the paradoxically ‘safe place’ of authoring agent” (1992, p. 85). Being a filmmaker, being American—these things made me feel like I could be an authoring agent of what was happening. Identifying solely with those roles, so imbued with power, necessarily distances one from those who are experiencing the suffering, the threat of death. I am forever thankful that I abandoned the safety of authoring agent, because it opened me up to being able to simply be there for Mason in his suffering. Even the most political of us must ask ourselves at some point, what better way is there to alleviate the pain and fear of a child other than by allowing him to hold your hand and fall asleep in your arms? The proper interruptions to the aggressive system of colonialism then, and all systems of oppression for that matter, must be motivated by nonviolence and nonaggression. In short, the proper interruption is always love.

I have no doubt that the people like Cindy who intervene in Haiti through creating orphanages and other NGOs are motivated by love. Many of these people are choosing to sacrifice a life of comfort in the United States in order to provide desperately needed services in
Haiti. I am not necessarily arguing that they should stop what they are doing, nor am I arguing that they are not helping to relieve pain and suffering in Haiti on some level. But it is important to think about sustainability—whether a solution ultimately has the problem’s elimination as its goal or rather, if it is yet another function in a system that sustains the conditions for the problem. Many Americans who are intervening in Haiti are operating within an unexamined or unchallenged neocolonial ideology. Cindy was and is both agent and victim of neocolonial ideology. Sometimes intentionally (through religion) and sometimes unintentionally (through lack of education), they locate their love outside of the historicity of our country’s relationship with Haiti. The love that can fight systems of oppression is one rooted in ethics, responsibility, and humility. In order to make our love ethical, we must hold ourselves accountable for the all the pains caused by our current and former interventions, otherwise we are destined to repeat those destructive patterns. The knowledge we gain from reflecting on our accountability has the capacity to change our entire outlook on what it means to help others. In the following chapter, I will affectively explore how ethnographic documentary film in general can be held to higher ethics.
“There’s no reason why documentaries can’t be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them. Truth isn’t guaranteed by style or expression. It isn’t guaranteed by anything.”


Introduction

The field of ethnographic documentary film has languished throughout the 21st century. Jay Ruby notes that, “Ethnographic film remains a minor pursuit of the few and a pedagogical device used in a relatively uncritical manner by most teachers of culture” (2000, p. 2). Along with ethnographic film production, theoretical interrogations of documentary film have slowed. At the time of the publishing of Bill Nichols' Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary (1992) for instance, it had been 15 years since the last single author book on documentary. In New Documentary: A Critical Introduction (2006), Stella Bruzzi laments this theoretical stagnation, attributing it to the desire “to attain the ‘grail’ of perfect authenticity” in documentary film (p. 4). This search for authenticity has resulted in the style, form, and content of documentaries changing over the years from expository narratives featuring an assumably omniscient and objective third-person voice over, to avant-garde, reflexive films that straddle the line between fiction and nonfiction (Ruby, 2005). But this dichotomy between traditional documentary’s “conventional realism” and new documentary’s “personal and subjective expression” has placed borders on the field (Klotman & Cutler, 1999, xx). Like a pinball struggling to stay in play, aspiring ethnographic documentary filmmakers and theorists become caught in the trending boundaries set by the critical machine of reviewers, academics, audiences, and other filmmakers.
As an ethnographic documentary filmmaker I am one of those pinballs, and I often feel as though the gravity of the critical machine is working against me. Up until a few years ago when I began this doctoral program, my understanding of ethnographic documentary film was entirely based on practical experience. Through cultural studies I have been able to engage with my work on a theoretical level; however, along with that I have struggled to negotiate my place within the field of ethnographic documentary film. I have felt defensiveness rise in me against critiques that ethnography cannot be separated from its colonial roots and have sensed similar defensiveness in the writings of other ethnographic filmmakers. I have wondered if I should continue doing what I do, if it is too problematic, if it is doing more damage than good. It was in this wondering that I developed this dissertation, asking myself: is there a place for ethnographic documentary in cultural studies? Is it necessarily problematic? Is it useful? If the practice is to continue, what are the ethical issues that must be considered?

Visual anthropologist Sarah Pink asserts that ethnographic documentary film is “The best-known use of (audio-)visual media to represent culture”; however, its popularity has faded in the face of the frequent and unresolved criticism that "as stand-alone audio-visual documents, they often fail to sufficiently contextualize their representations culturally or theoretically" (Pickering, 2008, p. 144). Further, Bruzzi states that “theoretical writing on documentary, by and large, has not kept pace with developments in critical and cultural theory” (2006, p. 1). My goal in this dissertation is to address both of these issues: the lack of contextualization of ethnographic documentary films and the stagnation of the theoretical exploration of documentary. In this chapter, I interrogate how the discourse of representation is typically applied to theorizing ethnography and ethnographic documentary and how that is perhaps why the theorization of it remains stagnant. I argue that centering the relationality of self/other is
crucial to undoing the ontology that underlies the discourse of representation. Ultimately, this can provide us with a new way in which to theorize ethnographic documentaries. I then affectively contextualize my own editing process for *Beyond the Block: Haiti* by examining it as an emotional impasse through which I had to make sense of my relationships to self and other in order to construct a narrative. I end by identifying themes that highlight the importance of using theories of affect to guide and explore processes that are dependent on relationships between self and other.

It is important to reiterate here what I stated in the Introduction: although the multiple entry points into documentary filmmaking make it difficult to quantify exactly what makes one a “professional” filmmaker, I still do not consider myself to be one. I identify as an amateur documentary filmmaker who is ultimately using documentary as a form of pedagogy in the field of education. I recognize that I am not only a nontraditional filmmaker, but I am also just starting out, having only made two films on location. As such, some may claim that I have no right to theorize about the field of ethnographic documentary. Let me be clear then that I am not seeking to change the field of ethnographic documentary through this dissertation, especially since my primary aim is to contribute to the field of cultural studies. If anything, I am simply seeking to humbly contribute my experimental understanding of the production process to the field of ethnographic documentary. It is certainly not a generalizeable experience, but some may find my theorization thought provoking. Ultimately, whether professional or amateur, my interest lies in interrogating the material consequences of the affective encounters with the other that filmmaking facilitates for both those filming and those being filmed.
Case Description

In "The Death of Ethnography," (1998) Jay Ruby explores why ethnographic film is "undertheorized and underanalyzed" (para. 2). Ruby believes that the canonical confusion of ethnographic documentary film is at the root of the field's problems. He identifies two camps that have a vested theoretical interest in the genre: anthropologists who "tend not to be very knowledgeable about film, semiotic, or communication theory" and film scholars who "lack an adequate understanding of anthropology" (para. 2). He also identifies two camps that have a vested practical interest in the genre: ethnographic filmmakers who have "formal training in ethnography" and ethnographic filmmakers who are "non-ethnographers . . . people with little or no anthropological training" (para. 6). Ruby believes that in order for the genre to be saved, a more "narrowly conceived and restrictive conceptualization of an ethnographic film" should be established (para. 4). Clarifying what actually constitutes an ethnographic film would help unify the field theoretically and practically so it can become engaged "in finding solutions to the so-called 'crisis of representation'" (para. 3).

For Ruby, a true ethnographic film is one that is rooted in ethnography as a research method, and more specifically in the discipline of anthropology (Ruby, 1998). He cautions against making the word "ethnographic" synonymous to "a cultural study of the other," insisting that "while all ethnographies are cultural studies, all cultural studies are not ethnographies" (para. 7). Ethnography has "specific intentions, purposes, techniques, practices" (para. 7). As such, ethnographic documentary film should function "as a significant contributor to anthropological discourse about the human condition" (para. 8). Ruby makes a strong case for clarifying what ethnographic documentary film is and could be, but even he admits that, "If the genre is confined to films made only by trained ethnographers, a tiny field results" (para. 6). The hybridized status
of the genre cannot be ignored; both anthropologists and the film industry can lay claim to ethnographic documentary film. Though "Anthropologists started making motion pictures as soon as the technology existed," the film industry also harnessed its early appeal (para. 1).

Since Robert Flaherty's groundbreaking *Nanook of the North* (1922), filmmakers have been documenting culture around the world with the support of governments, tourist bureaus, private businesses, and organizations devoted to various social and political causes (Aitken, 1998). The documentary film movement in the 1930s further increased the genre's popularity, motivated by the movement's founder, John Grierson, who had a “desire to bring the working class experience within the sphere of representation” (Aitken, p. 34). This movement, which originated in Great Britain, coincided with the Progressive Era in the United States, a time in which cinema became institutionalized into American culture through professionalization, archive, and production (Smoodin & Maltby, 2007; Polan, 2007). Smoodin notes how the founding of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences research library in 1928, the New York Museum of Modern Art's film library in 1935, and the Library of Congress film collection in 1942 all contributed to the “birth of the film archive” in the United States (p. 3). Polan describes how this archive positioned film as a “record of the world—a veritable archive of human history's great moments” (p. 44).

Whether we are analyzing ethnographic documentary film from an anthropological framework or a film studies framework, the fact remains that both of these disciplines are rooted in a Western cultural archive, both literally and figuratively. Ruby asserts, however, that the criticisms of anthropology and ethnography coming from cultural and critical studies "apply more to the profession several decades ago than to contemporary practice" (2000, p. 4). Indeed, practices in visual anthropology, reflexive ethnography, and critical ethnography began in the
1960s and 70s, combating the traditional “colonial eye” of anthropology as well as any foundational assumptions of positivism and objectivity. These developments continued into the 21st century, where we now see a proliferation of critical visual methodologies in anthropology and other fields of the humanities as well as new conceptualizations of ethnography, such as sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009; Rose, 2012). Still, Ruby admits that, "Most people—in and out of anthropology—regard ethnographic film as simply a subgenre of documentary that concentrates on the representation of cultures exotic to the West" (1998, para. 7).

Representing “others” in documentary is an issue inherent in the genre. Both Robert Flaherty and John Grierson produced groundbreaking work in their attempts to bring marginalized others into "the sphere of representation," but their characterization of others in this sphere came to be seen as problematic. Flaherty was criticized for his “colonialist rhetoric,” casting his film subjects as “exotic” and “primitive” (Aitken, 1998, p. 8). Grierson was accused of having an “apparent animosity towards the feminine” both in ethical values and practice and of passing this mentality down to his “documentary boys” who were a team of university-educated white males who came from “predominantly middle-class and professional backgrounds” (pp. 6-8). Many early documentaries were dominated by the positivist “voice of God” mode of production, where filmmakers presented their subjective understanding of a subject in an objective way through the character of the omniscient narrator.

In Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary (1992), Bill Nichols presents us with a scathing critique of the ethnographic documentary's relation to representational issues in his chapter entitled “Pornography, Ethnography, and the Discourses of Power.” Here, he likens the representations of women in pornography with the representations of the “other” in ethnographic documentary. Nichols describes pornography as a “nether world”
which has “seldom done anything but represent women as the objects of male desire” (p. 201). He compares the “carnal knowledge” produced through pornography to the “cultural knowledge” produced through ethnography (p. 203). Pornography is constructed around the phallus as the “standard of power and authority” (p. 211). Similarly, ethnography makes the male “the star” who celebrates his own achievement through a “symbolic representation of power and authority” (p. 217). Nichols argues that as pornography objectifies women in both body and story, so too does ethnography objectify the other. Both are indefensible and both only serve “hierarchical, hegemonic, institutional interests” (p. 228). Ultimately, “Nichols is convinced the hope for the future lies with ‘individuals more trained in filmmaking than in anthropology’ (1994, 66)—specifically with films made by woman/native/Other” (31).

bell hooks provides an excellent example of how representational issues for ethnographic documentary films do not just apply to films made about non-Western cultures, but also to films made about people in the United States. In her commentary on the ethnographic documentary *Hoop Dreams* (1994), bell hooks argues that every documentary produced in the United States must be examined on some level as a discursive product of Western modernity, where white, heterosexual, middle and upper class males represent the dominant norm. hooks maintains that in the case of *Hoop Dreams*, the filmmakers, intentionally or not, project the values of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy onto the two young Black men profiled in the movie. The ideology of competition in basketball is never unpacked or interrogated: “Black and poor, they have no belief that they can attain wealth and power on any other playing field other than sports. Yet this spirit of defeat and hopelessness that informs their options in life and their life choices is not stressed in the film” (p. 79). In a quest to make the film relatable to the dominant white audience, hooks claims that the filmmakers have skirted the key political issues at play in the
lives of Arthur Agee and William Gates: poverty, education, and racism.

When making an ethnographic documentary, considering issues of representation is of the highest importance. Though I do not agree with Nichols’ damning assessment of ethnography, nor for that matter pornography, he is correct when he warns that, "For a great many people, these images and these representations will be, if not the sum total of their knowledge, a dominating factor in their awareness” (1992, p. 12). As filmmakers, we are the ones responsible for facilitating a relationship between our subjects (those who we film) and the audience. Issues of representation are not simply ideological political debates; they are ethical and material matters. Ethnographic researcher D. Soyini Madison reminds us, "Representation has consequences: how people are represented is how they are treated" (2011, p. 4). However, the overwhelming focus on issues of representation often keeps the scholarship and discussion of ethnographic documentary film couched in binary examinations of reality versus fiction, objectivity versus subjectivity. Such dualistic thinking prevents us from further interrogating the gray area that lies between these ideological polarities, much less the infinite possibilities that lie outside of them.

The assumption by audiences and some filmmakers that objectivity is or should be a goal of documentary is one that has persisted from the 1930s until today. In The Subject of Documentary (2004), Michael Renov explains how the exploration of subjectivity still remains “a slightly suspect act” as a result of documentary’s persistent Griersonian tradition (p. xviii). Further, he claims that, “the repression of subjectivity has been a persistent, ideologically-driven fact of documentary history” (p. xviii). Trinh Minh-ha argues that ethnographic documentary's anthropologic tradition has led to the field's preoccupation with objectivity, noting that "Anthropology as a Western science of man studies man as the human species . . . who knows
how to distinguish the *real* from the *false*" (1989, p. 56). Ultimately, ethnographers do not necessarily have to be trained in documentary filmmaking in order to use video as a method and turn it into an ethnographic film, just as documentary filmmakers do not necessarily have to be trained in anthropology or ethnography in order to make an ethnographic film. But no matter what tradition they are from or discipline they are trained in, they should all be held accountable for how they represent their subjects. To examine the ontology upon which documentary’s traditional understanding of objectivity and subjectivity is based then, is of the utmost importance to the future understandings of documentary theory and documentary media production.

Western understandings of the self/other dichotomy can be traced back to the ideas of Descartes. The Cartesian self is one that is based on an interior and an exterior, in which true and total knowing can only occur in the interior self. In this way the exterior other can only be represented by language. The Cartesian self is based on “the presumption that we can know what we mean, or what our verbal performances say, more readily than we can know the objects those sayings are about . . . we have a direct and privileged access to the contents of our thoughts that we lack towards the ‘external’ world” (Rouse, 1996, p. 209). Further, the Cartesian self is based on the idea of knowing as a total and conscious experience. The belief that knowing can be total is the basis for rational ontology.

In contrast to this, Michael Renov (2004) applies the ideas of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to documentary’s conception of the subject, imploring us to consider whether there is “a mode of thought outside the domain of rationality, one that is ‘better than knowledge,’ to which we in the world of media studies might profitably attend” (p. 149). Levinas is known as the first philosopher to formalize use of the term “the Other” in his works. In *Totality and Infinity* (1969)
and *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974), Levinas uses the idea of ontology to problematize the traditional Western conception of the self/other dichotomy. He proposes that the belief in the totality of knowing demonstrates how rational ontology itself is a philosophy. This philosophy is one of power, which proposes knowledge as possession, “the form in which the other becomes the same, by becoming mine” (Levinas, 1969, 51). Here we see what Renov describes as the “violence associated with the production of cultural knowledge” (p. 149). For Levinas, this kind of knowledge is “appropriative, aggressive, territorializing . . . and self-aggrandizing, in service of the ego” (pp. 160-161).

Levinas proposes a concept of the self based on the idea of infinity instead of totality, one that is “predicated on the inescapable encounter with the absolutely Other” (p. 150). That is, the other precedes the self and exceeds the self. It is only through meeting the other that we come to know the self. Here, Levinas distinguishes his philosophy from that of rational ontology; his is a philosophy of ethics rather than knowing. It is based on relation to the other rather than knowing of the self. In encountering the other, one becomes responsible for the other. Whereas for the Cartesian self, the founding moment of selfhood is in thinking (“I think, therefore I am”) and hence knowing, Levinas proposes that the founding moment of selfhood is actually in our understanding of our obligation to the other, what Renov describes as a “nonindifference to the other” (p. 160). Encounters with the other are unpredictable in their nature. This unpredictability creates an indeterminate amount of potential encounters; thus, encounters with the other are infinite in their contributions to the self and to being. Levinas’s mode of thought based on relation, ethics, infinity, and the other starkly contrasts the traditional Western mode of thought based on the Cartesian self, where interior thought and rationalist knowing constitute the totality of human experience. In the latter, the other is a possession to be dominated. In the
former, it is the precursor for the very act of becoming human, necessitating an ethical obligation to become nonindifferent to the other and work towards justice, which “depends on the willingness to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I” (p. 151). There is no self/other dichotomy for Levinas, only endless iterations of relational possibilities.

Continental philosophers such as Levinas made many important contributions to our understanding of the self/other and subjectivity; however, their texts were imbued with authority that came not necessarily as a result of unique academic achievement, but as a result of the privileging of the Western male voice. Close on the heels of Levinas’s landmark work on Western conceptions of “the Other” in 1969 and 1974 (English translations), Edward Said established himself as an important voice in cultural theory and specifically postcolonial theory with Orientalism (1978). The discourse of Orientalism describes how the West (Europe) positions itself as the “us” to the East’s (the Orient) “them.” The West’s constructed characterizations and conceptions of the Orient are based on stereotypes and a “binary opposition by which Europe’s own identity can be established” (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2009, p. 61). This inscription of an imagined identity onto the Eastern “them” became known as “Othering.” Orientalism asserts that “Western cultural institutions are responsible for the creation of those ‘others’,” however, the representation of the East as Orient/them/Other became a reality unto itself (p. 63). That is, because of the dominance of the West, the eastern Other became that “which then is considered either to have acquired, or simply be, reality” (p. 72).

Ultimately, the Other/Orient of Said’s Orientalism is conceptually close to that self/other experience of Levinas, though with a subtle, yet crucial difference. Whereas for Levinas the individual comes to more fully know his or her self through encounters with the other—an other that precedes the self—for Said’s Orientalism the self precedes the Oriental Other. For
Orientalism, the Western, male, imperial self exists before encounter with the other, rooted in his nationality, and is only more clearly defined in opposition to a cultural caricature of the other. The self/other experience of Levinas is not a false conception of the other which in turn reifies my preexisting worldview. It is an encounter that allows me to more fully know myself and my relationality to the world.

Said’s postcolonial “Other” became so popularized, the term in itself took on a “radical realism” within cultural theory, with some still using it to justify what postmodern feminist theorist Donna Haraway calls, “the search for the fetishized perfect subject of oppositional history” (1988, p. 586). However the vast complexity and contradictions inherent within the postcolonial Other cannot be overstated. In “Transnationalism and the Transformation of the ‘Other’” (2005), Mae Ngai proposes that a focus on the transnational in our understanding of culture is imperative to transforming the Other “from a representational construct to a social actor” (p. 60). Ngai’s argument recognizes the postcolonial contributions of Edward Said specifically, while also recognizing the epistemological limitations inherent in the theory, stating:

This is not to deny the significance of work on the constitutive role of Orientalism in Western cultures. But insofar as much of this work remains focused on the metropole, and the “other” remains an object and not a subject, it reproduces, albeit unwittingly, the privileged position of the Western, liberal subject and occludes the role of non-Western people as historical subjects in their own right. (p. 60)

Ngai's proposal of rooting our research in the transnational suggests a standpoint that postmodern feminist epistemology has been exploring for years. Such epistemology provides a clear example of how we can apply both Levinas' philosophical interrogation of self and other as
well as the postcolonial framework of Said in order to develop better research methods.

For instance, in “Research Through Imperial Eyes” (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith demonstrates how the re-centering of the indigenous perspective helps us to view the modern era not as the “norm” but as a largely colonial period in history that preceded our current postmodern time. She highlights the assumptions made in Western research based on naturalized rules of classification, framing, and practice while arguing that indigenous conceptions of the world can provide “stark contrasts” to these assumptions, necessarily problematizing our methods (Smith, 1999/2008, p. 59). She examines different ways in which we can decenter the Western understanding “of being human, of how humans relate to the world,” beginning with the cultural formations of Western research (p. 59). Here, Smith refers to the “cultural archive” that “represents multiple traditions of knowledge” but forms the basis for Western classifications, representations and practices (p. 59). She argues that the ideas underpinning the cultural archive are often difficult for the West to articulate because they are embedded in the culture as common sense ideals and foundational assumptions. Like Levinas, Smith traces the mind/body separation back to a Cartesian dualism, highlighting the philosophical historicity of the Western cultural archive while exposing the mind/body distinction as a cultural construct "based on centuries of philosophical debate” (p. 62).

Although Smith's work is specifically in reference to research and indigenous peoples, the concepts here could easily be applied to ethnographic documentary filmmaking. To be a researcher and ethnographic filmmaker is to be in a position of power; no matter how conscientious, one always runs the risk of seeing their subject through “imperial eyes.” It is imperative that we examine our foundational assumptions continuously throughout the course of a research project, but what makes this so challenging is that these assumptions are embedded in
our understanding of reality. Whether we are researching an indigenous population in New Guinea, children in Haiti, or two high school basketball players, we have to make sure that we decenter our realities and center those of our “subjects” in order to not continue the cycle of oppression. Such a centering is not simple, though, especially when we consider the possibility that the unconscious projection of certain affects can result in an unintentional othering of our subjects. In the following section, I demonstrate how important it is to reflect on and discern our own affective states by examining my own editing process for *Beyond the Block: Haiti*.

Affective Contextualization

The actual mechanics of how I edited the video for *Beyond the Block: Haiti* are quite straightforward. I first took a written transcript of all of the interviews and highlighted parts that I thought related to the Beyond the Block learning outcomes. Then I watched the footage numerous times and highlighted those scenes in my editing program, narrowing them down by choosing the ones that were usable and/or visually compelling. With both *Beyond the Block: The Dominican Republic* and *Beyond the Block: Haiti*, I storyboarded as themes emerged. For the former I had an elaborate sticky-note method that took up most of my wall space in my office, but for the latter I developed a system of colored-coded highlights of the transcript and footage. At some point with both films, the editing process reached a point of flow. Like puzzle pieces being arranged and rearranged, you know when you have a fit, you see what is working, you know what needs tweaking. It was in this state of flow that I wrote the narration. I had a rough cut of the video and the narration emerged all at once. I organized the rest of the footage around it and the video was done. This final stage of the editing process only lasted a few weeks.
Reading back through my personal journal entries I can see that coming to this feeling of “flow” was not a magical moment that happened out of nothing. In order to arrive at that place, I had to break through what Ann Cvetkovich, drawing from Lauren Berlant, calls an “impasse.” In *Depression: A Public Feeling* (2012), Cvetkovich examines impasse as a theoretical concept, extrapolating its spatial connotation into social, political, personal, intellectual, and spiritual contexts. For instance, Cvetkovich examines her own bouts with writer’s block as an impasse, describing how it devolved into a depression that kept her in “a state of being ‘stuck,’ of not being able to figure out what to do or why to do it” (p. 20). Similarly, I felt as though I was stuck during the years it took me to reach a final edit of the Haiti footage.

Cvetkovich explores what would happen if we examined “stuckness” not as a failure to progress, but as a state that provides a space in which we can experience potential, allowing us to maintain “a hopefulness about the possibility that slowing down or not moving forward might not be a sign of failure and might instead be worth exploring” (p. 21). Cvetkovich argues that if we let go of modernist understandings of linear progress and embrace queer, postmodern temporalities “that move backward and sideways rather than just forward,” moments of impasse can be experienced as generative spaces of creativity (p. 21). By privileging queer temporality and directionality, “creativity can be thought of as a form of movement, movement that maneuvers the mind inside or around an impasse, even if that movement sometimes seems backward or like a form of retreat” (p. 21).

Modernist understandings of temporality would lead us to assume that if we are not moving forward, we are not making “progress.” In her examination of time, Linda Tuhiwai Smith cites how the industrial revolution caused the Western perception of time to shift to an understanding of time as potential wealth. If time was not used for work, prayer, or education,
(but mainly work) it was wasted. Consequently, indigenous cultures were judged based on how they organized and “used” their time. Because their conceptions of time were fundamentally different from the dualistic, rigid, and mathematical Western conception of time, colonizers viewed native cultures as “being lazy, indolent, with low attention spans” (Smith, 1999/2008, p. 65). The Western ideas of time and space then are not objective, absolute categories. Rather, they are culturally constructed concepts that reinforce a “taken-for-granted view of the world” that is “encoded in language, philosophy, and science” (p. 63). The Western temporal conception of progress is not only used to judge other cultures, though. The lives of those within the West are also appraised based on the assumption that a healthy person should naturally be propelled in a linear progression towards his or her goals. Such a progression should lead a person to feel productive, accomplished, and ultimately, successful. One who is not naturally propelled is “stuck” and often seeks help or is deemed to be in need of help in order to fall back in with Western society’s natural inertia. As a result, blockages as simple as writer’s block and as serious as depression are often experienced by individuals and judged by others as undesirable states of being that warrant immediate change.

Cvetkovich also problematizes the modernist understanding of creativity, as she challenges its connotation as a process that results in a tangible product and instead theorizes it as a “more e-motional or sensational or tactile” process of movement and agency (p. 21). During my second trip to Haiti, I was overwhelmed by feelings, both good and bad. But they all gave me energy and imbued me with a desire to act. Upon my return, however, I retreated into myself. In my journal I write:

“The worst thing I could do is forget about this trip, but that’s all I want to do. I feel blunted. I’m confused. How do I make sense of all this? What does it all mean? All of a sudden
I feel more serious. I look back on my old entry of ‘I’m here [in graduate school] to have fun’ and I’m like, how elitist. How rude. How wrong. I think about my pop culture interests and I’m embarrassed. My nights spent with friends drinking and eating too much and I’m ashamed. . . . Am I making the most of my potential? And I no longer am referring to potential as this grandpa-God giving me impossible expectations to live up to. My potential is my experience. The sum of all my experiences, both with work and with people. Am I honoring my experiences with my work? How can I have the greatest impact? It’s times like these that my mind starts going a mile a minute and I feel like I should have started this train of thought yesterday—or 10 years ago.”

I was feeling overwhelmed, ashamed, and numb. In short, I was feeling depressed.

In *The Transmission of Affect* (2004), Teresa Brennan states that "The self-contained Western identity . . . depends on projecting outside ourselves unwanted affects such as anxiety and depression in a process commonly known as 'othering’" (p. 12). The importance of feeling in documentary has been viewed largely in terms of how filmmakers can construct a story that makes their audience feel something, but Brennan's insight makes one consider how unacknowledged depression can result in the unintentional othering of your subjects; we do not want to work through our own unpleasant feelings, so we project them outward. Brennan's understanding of affect calls attention to the affective state of all involved in the production process—from the director to the subjects to the audience: "The energetic affects of others enter the person, and the person's affects, in turn, are projected to the environment" (p. 8).

The process of othering that Brennan describes is largely unconscious, as "Projection directs affects outward without consciously acknowledging that it is doing so” (p. 11). Opportunity comes, though, in the process of discernment. Discernment, according to Brennan,
is a process that helps us to consciously examine our role in the transmission of affect by using our feelings. "The things that one feels are affects," she states, but "The things that one feels with are feelings" (p. 23). Though I was engaging in somewhat of a discernment process through my journaling, translating the experience of Haiti to friends and family through conversation was incredibly difficult for me, which left me despondent over how I would ever be able to translate the experience to my students through video. The following journal entry details the challenges I faced in conversation, as well as my ongoing struggle to integrate my lived experience of being in Haiti into my academic experience as a cultural studies scholar.

"This past weekend I was talking to [redacted] and her mom about my experience in Haiti. They asked me about it. I usually don't bring it up. Because it's a long story, too complex for simple chat around the dinner table. The same thing happened to me last weekend in San Francisco. Besides the irony of discussing Haiti over a frittata, it struck me that not only is the story too long and involved to be tied up and presented as a neat conversational piece, but it also disappoints people. People want to believe that I am helping somehow. Even before this last trip, I maintained that I wasn't helping anyone in my travels, I was just a witness. The real helpers were the people down there who were actually providing services. But now I'm not even sure they're helping. When I try to explain to people that I'm not helping, they think I'm just being humble. But when I try to explain that I'm not sure what help even means anymore, they just become confused. And they maybe think I'm a bit depressed from all of the 'difficult' things I've seen. And they assure me that I'm doing great work. And then they start to look a little bored. And then I change the subject and start to talk about the new One Direction album or something equally surface, because vapidity is familiar, safe territory for us and the post-colonial impact of American international aid workers is not.
I feel very uncomfortable, more so the longer I do this, when people treat me as some type of goodwill ambassador. Like, ‘We're glad someone's doing something for those poor countries because we are all here busy with our jobs and lives, so thank God you have the will and the time to go do something for those poor people because someone has to.’ I don't know how to refute this line of thought. Every time I try, it seems like I'm just playing the martyr. Usually the conversation just boils down to a lot of ‘I don't know...not really...well...’ and I try to refocus the conversation on the people I have met during my travels and their qualities. I never feel like I do a good enough job of representing them, though.

One line of thought that is particularly difficult to refute is the: ‘They are poor but they are happy’ one. Paul Farmer talked about this myth... ‘They do have nice smiles and good senses of humor, but that's entirely different.’

I still catch myself feeling this way sometimes because the children I meet are so incredibly resilient, it's difficult to see beyond their blinding smiles and joie de vivre. But then I look at their parents, who are less carefree. More tired. And then I listen to the kids, who indeed know exactly what they do not have. Who lament the hardships in their life, but move forward and smile anyway because why not? Why live in misery? If you have a moment in which you can experience joy, it is more fun to live joyfully.

Someone said to me over the weekend: ‘They don't know either way. They don't know what they're missing, so they're happy.’ No. No, this isn't it at all. Perhaps this used to be the case before television and film and immigration. But now there is enough cultural interchange that the kids I've met in the Dominican and Haiti certainly know they live differently than kids in the United States. True, they have an idealized vision of what life is like in the United States, but the point is that they know certain things in their country, like education and living conditions,
are not as good as they are in the US. They know that their government is corrupt. They know that making it out of poverty is a very, very difficult and lucky occurrence. And they know that not all things are equal or fair. The younger children know all these things but they are not cynical. For the most part, they are pragmatic.

But we want to think that this is true. They are poor, but they are happy. They don't know what they're missing. Those who think this way are typically well-intentioned, kind people who don't intend to be condescending imperialists. This line of thought is as safe as discussing the merits of One Direction's new single. It allows us to feel like the omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipotent gods of the world. Anything we give is a gift, because they don't have and they don't know. We who give are good. Those who receive are made better because of our gifts. I wish it was this simple, this easy, this black and white. The truth I am discovering is much more gray.”

Cvetkovich describes how an impasse "occurs at moments when the social relevance of what we're doing and thinking is not clear" (2012, p. 22). I could feel the personal relevance of my project in Haiti at this time, but as this journal entry makes clear, I could not comprehend the social relevance of the experience. I had seen so much, but what story should be told? What was my role? What should be said? What should remain unsaid? What was I expecting out of making this video? What were the risks and benefits to presenting this story to others—not for myself, but for the children I came to know in Haiti? My experience with Mason had left an indelible mark on me and my experience in Haiti. But how could I represent all of the intersecting feelings and issues of Mason in one 35 minute video? How could I explain Mason's story without video footage? Would attempting to discuss his experience even be ethical?
In November of 2012 I delved deeper into affect theory, noting in my journal how I needed to write to “get this excited/anxious lump out of my chest” because I was "overwhelmed by how much I relate to it." Cvetkovich writes, “Have I read anything that I liked? That moved me? That seemed true enough to haunt me? No. Then I'll have to make it up myself" (2012, p. 16). This had been my experience with documentary media theory and cultural studies. When I found affect theory, I found my bridge between cultural studies, documentary media theory, and my own documentary filmmaking practice. I realized that I did not need to arrive at a place of absolute knowledge and understanding in order to make the video. I only needed to be honest about how I was feeling. As Cvetkovich states, "My own experience is the antidote to all of those other descriptions I've read, whether in theory, or pop psychology, or memoirs” (p. 16) I did not know if I would ever progress beyond my conflicting feelings, but that did not mean I could not create. Letting go of modernist conceptions of truth, knowledge, and objectivity, I gave myself permission to make a video from a space of grayness. The question of objectivity began to resolve itself when I was reminded of what I knew all along, and what I think we all know on some level: that the only truth is that we are all always already connected to each other. All I was seeking to do was to bring that inherent connection to the conscious awareness of my students. I wrote in my journal:

“\textbf{The kids were happy} . . . that’s why they helped me more than I could ever help them.

And if I have that same spark in my eyes, the same open and accepting heart, the same playfully joyous spirit, that is the greatest service I can give others. . . . It’s not about guilt or feeling sorry for people. It’s about sharing joy, love, and peace. The greatest service you could do in this world is having a heart that is open and accepting of others and yourself. . . . I’ve mentioned serving others a lot. Yes, I feel compelled to do it, but that’s because connecting with others
makes me happy. It’s not really about serving others—that infers they need something or that I have something more than them. It’s really just about connecting. Telling stories about human life experience that may not otherwise be told. . . . I just need to remember to always, always, always stay connected to myself. Cultivate peace, love, and joy within myself. Or else I’ll have nothing to give/share when I try to connect with others! It all has to be equal. Let it be equal. That I can share as much as I’m given."

There are no guarantees that we are not going to unintentionally exploit or "Other" people when making an ethnographic documentary. But being scared into inaction is not progress. Affect helped me to see the video as a way to transmit the impression left on me by the relationships I formed in Haiti. My two years of emotional and intellectual sifting allowed me to arrive to a point where I was able to not focus on my own feelings in a hyperreflexive way, nor focus solely on "others" in an objectifying othering way, but to focus on discerning and then transmitting the feelings I was left with as a result of my various encounters with the people and environment of Haiti. That is not to say I accomplished that perfectly or at all, but I did my best to bring to my own conscious awareness the various paradigms that were informing my work and I of course will strive to improve that awareness in future films that I make.

Synthesizing Themes

The question of who can speak for who is fraught with complication. However, forgoing intercultural work due to its risk is as much of an ethical problem as doing such work without being responsible and accountable for our methods. By understanding that here in the US our ontology is inherently based in the Western cultural archive, we can acknowledge the inherent problematics of our Western point of view, identify with our own intersectionality, and mobilize
our located identities in order to do conscious, ethical work. We will constantly need to re-examine our standpoint throughout the course of our work. The following themes highlight two ways in which we can use ethnographic documentary film to address our positioned place within the West while maintaining our inherent ethical obligation to the other.

- The theorization of ethnographic documentary film needs fewer borders.

Is ethnographic documentary film dead? If not, should it be? Has the genre been so infected with what Trinh Minh-ha calls the "White Cancer" that it is too damaged to recover (1989, p. 54)? Should production be handed over to woman/native/other as a way to avoid perpetuating the colonizing, oppressing gaze associated with the white male West? Should it be produced by people from the discipline of anthropology or from the tradition of film? Should filmmakers be inside or outside of the academy? Should they be professionalized? I do not propose that I have the “right” answer for any or all of these questions. What I do propose is that as scholars interested in theorizing ethnographic documentary film—a genre dedicated to crossing borders—we need to take a step back and look at the borders that police our own disciplines and ways of knowing before we project them onto the practice of filmmaking.

Lawrence Grossberg believes that there must be a balance between theory and practice, noting that “Cultural studies requires that you bring the conceptual and empirical . . . together, with the possibility that the latter might disturb the former even as the former leads to a new description of the latter” (2010, p. 55). The question of who should or should not have the right to make what is referred to as an ethnographic documentary film is an excellent example of how this balance is negotiated in this field. For instance, Jay Ruby's desire to bring clarity to the field of ethnographic documentary film is understandable, but is it not possible that an ethnographic documentary film produced by a non-academic, non-ethnographer could make academic
ethnographers think differently, even better, about how they do their work? And vice versa. Do we need to create another, separate genre in order to contain “real” ethnographic film production within the privileged space of the academy? The reality is that currently, ethnographic film has multiple entry points. Who are we to police the borders of the field? I am not asking that question in a facetious or rhetorical way. I really think we need to answer that question. What does it mean to have borders on the field? What are our motives? Who is affected? Why are they affected? How are they affected? We can apply this line of critical reflection to the other key debates in the documentary field as well, such as that of objectivity and representation.

The traditional Western ontology of the self-contained individual has forced us into the construction of an object. Our struggles to establish objectivity come from our inherent desire to connect to this outlying other within the confines of the self-contained individual. The construction of an objectified other validates the impermeability of the self. When people lose this impermeability, it is "seen as a loss, a loss of objectivity" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 55). Minh-ha states that the proper ethnographer "should be trained for detachment in the field if he wishes to remain on the winning side" because identifying with those you study compromises the scientific validity of your work. An identification with the subjects of your study, those you film, is never seen "as a gain such that this man simply decided to opt for a different scale of values, a different way of living" (p. 55). It is seen as a fail by those who "cannot view relationship with the Other except as a yielding of presence-power" (p. 55). Teresa Brennan reminds us that failing to critically examine how Western ontology affects people can result in both conscious and unconscious projection of negative affects onto the other, explaining how:

The act of directing negative affects to the other severs my kin tie with her by objectifying her. I make her into an object by directing these affects toward her, because
that act makes her with affects that I reject in myself . . . I assume that she does not feel as I do. (p. 119)

If a filmmaker considers the establishment of connection and kinship to those being filmed to be an inspirational quality, does that damage the credibility or validity or the filmmaker’s work? If so, why?

Affective contextualization is not the answer as to how to solve the crisis of representation in ethnographic documentary film. But it does help us think more deeply about subject/object relations in any form of communication. Trinh Minh-ha reminds us in Woman, Native, Other (1989), not to forget "the presence of object in objectivity" (p. 55); that is, we cannot forget that it is the concept of objectivity that necessarily requires the construction of an object. Affect allows us to imagine a world in which there is no subject/object dichotomy, but rather an infinite amount of human and non-human interactions that continuously create subjects and construct subjectivities. Imagining an alternative modernity that is not based on the subject/object dichotomy, but is instead based on a mutually constitutive relationship between humans (and their environment) can help us to re-examine the key debates in documentary. As Audre Lorde famously said, “For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112). In this vein, we must be mindful of why we are undertaking the project of theorizing ethnographic documentary and the frameworks we are using to do so.

• Through conscious awareness, ethnographic documentary filmmakers can work towards the ethical transcendence of borders.

In Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about the
emergence of a new “alien” consciousness born from “racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination” (p. 77). This “hybrid progeny” is “a mutable, more malleable species” (p. 77). She calls this new conscious development “La Conciencia de la Mestiza,” (mestiza literally translating to “the mixed woman”). Anzaldúa describes how the subject-object duality of the dominant West keeps la Mestiza “a prisoner” within its rigid borders (p. 80). This oppressive ontology becomes an inner struggle as “The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out” become “entrenched habits and patterns of behavior” for individuals (p. 79). Anzaldúa states that “the answer to the problem . . . lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts” and calls for “A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness” (p. 80).

I believe a new kind of ethnographic documentary film production can develop and flourish through embracing Anzaldúa’s idea of Mestiza consciousness. In order to develop this consciousness we need “to act and not react” (p. 79) by intentionally becoming “a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (p. 81). Anzaldúa demonstrates how a simple “counterstance” to Western modes of thought is not effective because “All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against” (p. 78). In that sense, the debate of whether or not ethnographic documentary filmmakers come from the fields of anthropology or film becomes irrelevant. What is relevant is how much work filmmakers put into developing our consciousness in order to promote positive interaction with other people. This work must occur within the filmmaker before, during, and after the filmmaking and editing process.

Examining ourselves and our filmmaking from an affective perspective is a good place to start developing this consciousness. Teresa Brennan's description of affect would indicate that in
order to avoid othering our film subjects, we must be conscious of the energy we bring into the pre-production process, the interviewing process, the editing process, and the screening process. We must be aware that “the illusion of self-containment is purchased at the price of dumping negative affects on that other,” that is, it is not just about acknowledging how we feel as individuals, but also about critically confronting the ideologies that inform how we habitually exist in the world (Brennan, 2004, p. 119). This awareness, or lack thereof, is what influences the overall project. Negative affects in particular have dire consequences. In judging others, “I simultaneously direct toward her that stream of negative affect that cuts off my feeling of kinship from her as a fellow living, suffering, joyful creature” (p. 119).

No one is a blank slate and energy exchange in an intense process such as filmmaking is entirely unavoidable. So it behooves us to engage in discernment by examining our feelings, talking about those feelings, and processing those feelings. I relied on my professional ethics as a counselor, my academic knowledge, and my own personal belief system (detailed in the Introduction) to help me negotiate my feelings and privileges. I used journaling as a reflexive method, writing, reading, and re-reading my entries in order to get perspective on my experience. But in retrospect, I absolutely wish I had been thoughtful enough to construct more of a reminder, to be mindful of the inevitable emotional challenges and power negotiations I would face making an ethnographic film. To that end, creating a new consciousness for the practice of ethnographic documentary filmmaking in the form of ethics could help to hold filmmakers accountable for the material consequence of the affect we bring into the lives of those who we film as well as our audiences. The energy of Mestiza consciousness “comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” and is meant “to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended” (Anzaldúa,
1987, p. 80). By bringing to conscious awareness our own power as a permeable, affective being, we can transcend the rigid borders of modernity and commit ourselves to facilitating and nurturing positive human and non-human encounters between self and other through our work.
“The purpose of the painter is simply to reproduce in other minds the impression which a scene has made upon him.”

– George Inness, American landscape painter, 1825-1894

Introduction

In my second chapter, I used Gregory Boyle’s book *Tattoos on the Heart* and my own experience working in a dropout prevention program for a large school district to discuss how the rigidity of program evaluation does not always work in every case, even if the methods are qualitative. Although qualitative methods have gained solid ground in program evaluation research, they still remain rooted in strict disciplinary borders in an attempt to legitimate their methodological choices. There are scores of texts aimed at teaching outside evaluators how to quantitatively or qualitatively assess an organization. Though evaluators are now allowed and even encouraged to collaborate with stakeholders on evaluation design, an evaluator must maintain a level of detachment from service delivery itself, lest the evaluation appear invalid, self-serving, or biased. Indeed, the field still rests heavily on the positivist tenets of reliable measures, evidence-based practice and policy, validity, and statistics (Wholey et al., 1994; Patton, 2008). The reality of the situation for nonprofit organizations such as Beyond the Block is that in the “hard” data versus “soft” data debate, funders prefer the former. In that sense, small programs on a limited budget that serve the client who is “least likely to succeed” often find it difficult to “succeed” themselves.

This chapter proposes an alternative to traditional methods of evaluation by demonstrating what an application of affect could look like in a traditional qualitative analysis.
Using student survey data collected by Beyond the Block, my goal is to construct a study that sheds light on the affective impact of ethnographic documentary film. This chapter is a departure from the organizational structure of my previous chapters because I want to present a nontraditional approach in a traditional format in order to demonstrate the wide applicability of affective approaches. In a traditional qualitative dissertation, every section of this chapter would be its own stand-alone chapter and the example I am providing here could certainly be expanded upon and turned into a formal program evaluation or an audience reception study. As a formal program evaluation, a study taking an affective approach could elucidate the results or effects of program delivery likely to be hidden by traditional qualitative and quantitative analyses, or as Brian Massumi calls it, the “dynamicunity” that lies *in between* the points and positions typically examined in program evaluation. As an audience reception study, it could fill a gap in scholarship. Jay Ruby highlights the need for such studies, stating that: “Indeed, the reception of most nonfiction films is a subject that has only recently caught the attention of scholars. As strange as it may seem, we literally do not know what, if any, impact these films have on their audiences” (2000, p. 15). This chapter then assists me in understanding the impact *Beyond the Block: Haiti* had on student viewers, but it is also meant to encourage both alternative program evaluations and audience reception studies.

Though affect is weaved throughout the study in various ways, Donna Haraway’s work on vision is a guiding force for this specific chapter. I am particularly drawn to her theorization of “visualization technologies,” the things that metaphorically enable our sense of vision. Here, I interpret this idea to apply to the camera, a film, and a facilitated encounter with the other. This metaphor lends itself well to affect, as it allows us to describe what is happening in those spaces in between linear points and positions and the processes that are allowing us to arrive at those
points and positions. As a person who works in the field, I have a strong commitment to the practical application of theory. In fact I feel it is my ethical obligation as a scholar rooted in service provision to make connections between high theory and practice. My application of affect throughout the course of this dissertation has helped me traverse the space between the points and positions that led up to the moment of showing *Beyond the Block: Haiti* to students. By formatting this chapter as a more traditional analysis, I hope to bring to conscious awareness affective opportunities for critical intervention in both program evaluation and documentary media studies.

**Theoretical Framework and Epistemology**

A general sense of my postmodern feminist epistemology has been weaved throughout this work and put in continual conversation with theories of affect. I will continue to draw from numerous theories of affect in my analysis of student survey responses. For the purposes of this study, however, I would like to specifically draw upon Donna Haraway’s metaphor of vision in order to articulate how postmodern feminist epistemology will inform this work. In “The Persistence of Vision,” a section of her larger work “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1988), Haraway theorizes vision as a metaphor that “allows one to go beyond fixed appearances, which are only the end products” (p. 683). She encourages us to reframe our discussion of vision from one that focuses on “a conquering gaze from nowhere” to one that insists “on the embodied nature of all vision” (p. 677). She asserts that the western White male gaze has become a disembodied, unmarked signifier of objectivity in modern society and argues that this has resulted in vision becoming “a much maligned sensory system in feminist discourse,” which limits the stories we tell through
our research (p. 677). By reclaiming vision, we can begin to take a stand “against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims” (p. 679).

In order to reclaim vision as a process that “goes beyond fixed appearances, which are only the end products,” we must challenge the ontology that allows us to construct the objects that enable objectification. We must necessarily reconstruct the definition of objectivity. For Haraway, “objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment . . . only partial perspective promises objective vision” (p. 678). This is not a relativist theory that Haraway is putting forward, but rather a direct challenge to the modernist assertion that “universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (p. 683). Haraway believes that a feminist objectivity “about limited location and situated knowledge” should be the basis of rationality (p. 678). This alternative to relativism consists of “partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (p. 680). Haraway “invites us to investigate the varied apparatuses of visual production, including the prosthetic technologies interfaced with our biological eyes and brains” (p. 683).

From its colonial roots to its focus on traditional conceptions of objectivity, ethnographic documentary film is a perfect example of a media form that can be examined as a reclaimed “visualization technology.” Its historic formats using “voice of God” narration to describe the “exotic Other” can be understood as “the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (p. 677). Remaining unmarked while marking others, the discourse of representation, then, lays an escape route for whoever or whatever is behind the gaze. Examining ethnographic documentary film as a visualization technology does not shut down
intercultural work, but instead forces filmmakers to take “accountability and responsibility for translations and solidarities linking the cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledges of the subjugated” (p. 684). By locating ethnographic documentary film studies in the discourse of representation, we are only looking at “the end product” of what is seen in the film (p. 683). But by thinking deeply about ethnographic documentary film as a visualization technology we can “find metaphors and means for understanding and intervening in the patterns of objectification in the world” (p. 683). I include this analysis of student survey responses in an effort to identify the “patterns of reality for which we must be accountable” (p. 683). Using affect as an interpretive theoretical framework to examine the encounter with the other that students experienced through watching the film will help to further interrogate the material consequences of affective interactions as well as the subject-object relationship at the root of documentary filmmaking.

Methodology

_Type of Qualitative Inquiry and Research Procedure_

As part of the larger case study that is this dissertation, this chapter examines audience receptions to the ethnographic documentary film _Beyond the Block: Haiti_. I analyze qualitative student survey responses for pedagogical relevance, and then apply affective interpretation to identify conclusions. The student survey responses are pre-existing data that is the property of the educational nonprofit organization Beyond the Block. The surveys were anonymized by a third party working on behalf of Beyond the Block and entered into a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet contains the data I will be using and there is no identifying information on it. Beyond the Block has collected other data on the Haiti video, but I chose to work with this
dataset for a number of reasons. First, the students surveyed were in the 8th grade as opposed to the 6th or 7th. My feeling was that 8th graders would be better writers, more articulate, and more accustomed to worksheets than their 6th and 7th grade peers, allowing for more clear responses. Additionally, I felt that it was significant that these 8th graders were closer to high school. The transition between 9th and 10th grade is when the majority of students drop out of school, so I wanted to take a closer look at a population that was more urgently at-risk (Balfanz et. al., 2013).

The student survey responses were collected from a Los Angeles middle school, known here as the pseudonym of UMS. UMS is located in an urban area, has a student population of more than 2,000, and is 99% Latino. The current dropout rate for the area is about 26% according to the California Department of Education. UMS feeds into a high school that has historically had one of the city's highest dropout rates, averaging around 40%. Based on grades, test scores, and behavioral patterns, an administrator I spoke with at the middle school estimates that 30-40% of the students currently enrolled at UMS are at high risk for school dropout.

In this chapter I will be examining 144 surveys that were administered to students after seeing the video Beyond the Block: Haiti. These surveys were administered in a classroom setting over the course of one day. In each of six 55-minute periods, I taught a short lesson on global awareness, presented the 35-minute film, and concluded the class with question and answer. The students were given the surveys immediately after the short lesson. A graphic summary of this lesson as it was presented to the students is presented on the following page as Figure 2.
Figure 2. Beyond the Block: Haiti Lesson. This figure summarizes the global awareness lesson taught to students before viewing *Beyond the Block: Haiti*.

I instructed the students to take notes and fill out the front of the page during the video in the categorical spaces provided. These categories were Education, Culture, History and Geography, and Dreams and Goals, all of which corresponded to different sections of the video. Students were also asked to think about the two questions on the back of the page, and after the video the students were asked to respond to these two questions:

1) What did you learn from watching this video? Think about the four parts of global awareness: understanding yourself, understanding others, critical thinking, and imagining a better world for yourself and others.

2) What changes can you make today in your life that will help to create a better world for yourself and others?

The categories of understanding yourself, understanding others, critical thinking, and imagining a better world for yourself and others corresponded to the global awareness lesson taught before
the film, so the students had a contextual understanding of how the terms should be applied.

*Personal Subjectivities and Validity*

My own personal subjectivities have been thoroughly elucidated throughout this work. Though evaluators are now allowed and even encouraged to collaborate with stakeholders on evaluation design, it is expected that an evaluator still must maintain a level of detachment from service delivery itself, lest the evaluation appear invalid, self-serving, or biased. In that sense, it is understandable that my involvement with the production of *Beyond the Block: Haiti* and my personal implementation of the global awareness program at UMS could be seen as compromising the validity of this study. From an affective perspective, however, it is essential that I perform this evaluation instead of an outside researcher precisely *because* I was the sole person involved in the creation and delivery of the education materials. Therefore, I functioned as the main transmitter of affect between the children in Haiti and the students in Los Angeles. An outside evaluator would be able to use the student surveys as data, however, they would not be able to retrospectively interrogate any affective states I felt from myself, others, or my environment, which possibly informed the students’ responses. In some sense, however, I am looking at these materials from an outsider perspective because when I created these materials I was not creating them for research. I was functioning in the role of a nonprofit service provider. Now, as I seek to examine these materials and understand their effect, I am functioning in the role of researcher and using academic and theoretical tools, rather than the praxis I used as a nonprofit service provider.

Another potential threat to validity is that there are certain aspects that make my audience different from a general audience of a documentary film. I have a captive audience in the students who watch the video. They have not freely chosen to watch the video, but are
essentially mandated to watch it as part of their school curriculum. They know that they are not being graded on the surveys they fill out, but they also know that if they do not pay attention and fill out their surveys they will get reprimanded. That being said, these students were under no requirement or enforcement to be reflective or thoughtful in their responses, so although they were mandated to watch the video and write something, the sentiments reflected in their responses are their own. In that sense, I believe the knowledge we can glean from their responses can contribute to the field of ethnographic documentary film by demonstrating the impact such films could have on specific populations.

The last threat to the validity of this study is that it was not initially designed as a formal program evaluation, a formal audience reception study, or for any academic purposes in general. This data was gathered for informational and curricular purposes for Beyond the Block. Here, I am repurposing it for use as an example of what an affective program evaluation could look like and also what an affective audience reception study could look like. However, the design of this project, like this dissertation, has been constructed retrospectively. Were I to do this over again, I would go into survey design with a more nuanced and detailed research intention, as the surveys I am using for this study were not designed to be used as sophisticated measures. One of the major changes I would make is to collect consistent demographic data from the individuals. Different presentations I have given have used different worksheets. This is in addition to the fact that I rely on students to self-report this information, leaving it incomplete even if I were consistent in asking. But I think that makes this analysis even more relevant to actual service providers. Many small nonprofits cannot afford to work with outside evaluators in order to design reliable systems to measure effectiveness, but all funders require some evidence of program evaluation. Perhaps this study can demonstrate to smaller nonprofits that there are ways
to interpret their pre-existing data, even if it was not designed for a specific evaluation plan.

**Coding System and Data Analysis**

When I first began this project, I started by looking at the data being analyzed here. I wanted to code these student responses for affective expressions of emotion such as “sadness” or “guilt.” I began to do that and quickly realized that being so literal with my interpretation of affect was not going to work. It felt wrong to ascribe a feeling to someone’s words when they themselves had not articulated it. Some students had no feeling words at all in their responses. Others wrote about their impressions of what those in the video were feeling. For instance, student AR520, “I learned that although Haiti is a poor country, their people does not give up hope. They are also proud to be Haitian.” It would be inaccurate to code that as “hope” and “proud,” but other than those words we do not know how the student is feeling. In order to address this, I began coding phrases the students used and started to compile the data by phrase similarity. The number of phrases quickly ballooned to an unmanageable number, however, and I began to wonder what, ultimately, that type of data organization would tell me anyway.

At this point I abandoned my data and returned to writing my chapters. I reconceptualized my project from a more straightforward data analysis to a critical memoir that performed an affective exploration of the media production process. After writing four chapters, I came back to my data and looked at it with more informed and thoughtful eyes. My understanding of affect had grown. I now understood affect not only as the energetic aspect of feeling and emotion, but also as a moment of encounter between self and other. Examined outside of linear temporality, the close examination of such a moment could provide insight not only about how we connect to each other, but also about what boundaries keep self and other separated. It was at this time that I developed my data research questions:
1) What are students learning from this documentary?

2) How do students experience their encounter with the other through this documentary?

Now that I had a clear set of questions, I was able to move forward in my analysis of the data.

The first page of the survey features one sentence: "While you watch the video, write down or draw what you are learning about the earthquake, geography and history, education, and culture." Underneath that sentence is a box separated into those four sections. I chose not to assess the responses given in those four sections, because the intention of this tool, and the way I instructed the students to use it, was to assist the students in note-taking and encourage them to follow along with every part of the video. I have done presentations where students are not asked to take notes during it and many tend to lose attention or forget details by the end. The responses that the students give in this section are typically taken straight from the film (e.g. "Education is not free in Haiti.") and do not reveal what lessons the student actually internalized from watching the video. But I realized that the two questions on the back of the student survey could be mined for information about self/other encounters and decided to focus on the language of the questions themselves as an initial method of grouping the data.

The second page features two specific questions, with space to answer each:

1) What did you learn from watching this video? Think about the four parts of global awareness: understanding yourself, understanding others, critical thinking, and imagining a better world for yourself and others.

2) What changes can you make today in your life that will help to create a better world for yourself and others?

In order to code these questions, I first had to think about my intention behind the questions. I coded the first question "Learn" because the purpose of the question was to assess
what the students were learning about the four aspects of global awareness that had been highlighted in the pre-video lesson. The second question was coded as "Change" because the purpose was to assess what, if any, transformation the students experienced as a result of watching the video. For the first question, "Learn" became the "Parent Node" in NVivo, or what I am calling a first-level node. Coding the second level of "Child Nodes" was a straightforward process because the question was specific in wording and intention. The second-level nodes for "Learn" became the four aspects of global awareness: Understanding Yourself, Understanding Others, Critical Thinking, and Imagining a Better World for Yourself and Others. When I started coding, I thought each answer would fit cleanly into one category, or that I had to choose the category the response most strongly related to. I quickly realized that was not going to accurately represent the variety of sentiments represented in one answer, so I determined that a single answer could be coded more than once, however a single phrase could not. Further, even if there was more than one phrase that lent itself to a specific category, the category could only be applied once for the entire answer.

Once I had categorized everything according to second-level nodes, I created third-level Child Nodes, coding the data within the four aspects of global awareness. I went through each statement and attempted to identify the main idea of what the students were saying and coded the entry based on that idea, identifying and coding emergent themes as I read through the responses. For instance, student JD528’s response, “I learned that life is not easy everywhere. In Haiti life is so difficult. They have a very poor education and life is tough. They don’t have good food to eat,” is coded under Parent Node Learn, as second-level node Critical Thinking, third-level nodes Comparing Economic-Material Conditions and Understanding Difficulty, second-level node Understanding Others, and third-level node Economic Status. I ended up with a total of 25
third-level nodes (APPENDIX A). After these categorizations were complete I felt I had enough
detail and saw no need to further categorize the responses.

For the second question, “What changes can you make today in your life that will help to
create a better world for yourself and others?” "Change" became the "Parent Node" in NVivo, or
first-level node. Coding the second-level nodes was again a straightforward process because I
drew the categories from the question wording and intention. The second-level nodes for
"Change" became "Self" and "Others." “Self” indicates when a student articulated in their
response a way in which they could make a change today (the day they watched the video) in
their life that would help to create a better world for themselves. “Others” indicates when a
student articulated in their response a way in which they could make a change today in their life
that would help to create a better world for others. I again followed the practice of coding single
answers more than once, but not coding single phrases more than once.

Once I had categorized all of the Change responses according to second-level nodes, I
created the third-level Child Nodes. I continued to employ a method of emergent theme coding.
At first, I started to use detailed coding as I did in the first question "Learn." This worked for the
"Self" node, however, it was not working for the "Others" node. All of the students were talking
about various ways they could "help" others, but some were just simply saying "Watching this
video made me want to help others" and others were getting more specific, coming up with
specific ways they could help, such as “I could make changes like donating money and donating
clothes.” In order to address this, I made "Help" a third-level Child Node, and coded the
responses that only generally spoke of "helping others" at this node. Then I coded the rest of the
responses based on what I believed to be the main idea the student was trying to convey, creating
fourth-level nodes. I ended up with ten fourth level nodes under "Change" and 11 third-level
Using NVivo functions, I was able to see the numerical frequency of coding references (APPENDIX B). I was also able to visualize the data in different ways through charts (APPENDIX C). The most useful tool however was the coding matrix query, which allowed me to see more details about the individual students who answered the questions. I was curious about which students were the most highly coded and whether they had any patterns. I was also curious about the students who specifically stated that the video made them want to take their education more seriously. With my research questions in mind, I read the responses again and highlighted the ones that seemed to tell me something interesting about those questions. What follows takes that analysis combined with the coding patterns and puts the data in conversation with the theoretical framework of affect in order to interpret the results. I will start by detailing some quantitative statistics from the data, then discuss themes related to research question one, and follow with themes related to research question two. Please note that I have corrected the spelling of the responses, but have allowed the syntax to stand as expressed by the students.

Results

After watching the presentation and video, *Beyond the Block: Haiti*, most of what the students learned was information about others (111 code references=45%), followed by understanding self (64 code references=26%), critical thinking (49 code references=20%), and imagining a better world (21 code references=9%). Most of the things students wanted to change, however, had to do with themselves (81 code references=56%). The charts below (APPENDIX D) show the most referenced codes in each section. I deliberately left out "Imagining a Better World" from the Learn category, because it was clear that most students
were applying that response to their second answer rather than repeating it in both the first and second.

Based on the coding references, the most significant thing that students seem to have learned from watching the documentary is that not everyone has the same lifestyle as they do in the United States. Though these students live in one of the most low-income areas in Los Angeles, they had never seen the type of poverty that they saw in the video. Student OV517 states, "I learned a lot from this video like how poor their community is compared to ours. And people say that East LA is ghetto." For this student, the video caused a shift in perspective. Though he felt people judged his home as being "ghetto" or low-income, he saw that in fact there are communities outside of Los Angeles that struggle even more. Many students echoed this basic recognition of economic differences:

Student EA624: "I learned all countries are not rich."

Student KR653: "People in Haiti suffer more than we do, that's what I learned."

Student SS534: "I learned that there are a lot of people in this world without food or money like the people that live in Haiti."

But most of the students went deeper with their responses, reflecting on how this recognition of poverty made them feel. Student KA529 states: "I learned that there are many kids in need of help not just here but all over the world. We shouldn't be selfish, and try to help people like this around the world. The least you could do is read about these places and learn more about them."

This student is acknowledging that there are people who struggle in her neighborhood, but that there are others struggling throughout the world, too. The student articulated that not being aware of the people and struggles outside of your own immediate circle is "selfish" and that we need to make an effort to "learn more about them." Here we see that this student believes that
learning about others can be a reparative act that makes up for the privilege she experiences.

The majority of students felt compelled to be more appreciative of things they had in their lives, also associating specific emotions and reflections with their shift in perspective.

Student OZ530: "I have learned that there are many people all over the world that have hard lives. I now understand that I should not complain about what I don't have and be grateful of what I do have."

Student LG533: "I learned that there is plenty of people out there that have a lot of need. I don't even get to be compared to them. This video taught me that I have to appreciate what I have and not complain about it."

Student JR575: "I learned that we should really appreciate what we have because people [and] kids are suffering for what they don't have."

Student JR 576: "I am very grateful for what I have after I saw this video. It is very sad to see the fact that they are not able to go to school while we do so we should all feel grateful."

RA639: "From watching the video I learned that there are a lot of people in need. I complain a lot and today I learned that I don't have a right to complain because there are many people out there than suffer."

Encountering such a vivid portrayal of the material effects of poverty caused the students to want to be more grateful for what they do have instead of complaining about what they do not have. Upon coming to this realization, students reported feeling sad or conveyed guilt for previous behavior. Student DA611 states, "It makes me want to cry," and student JL547 "felt messed up," when they realized that there are people in the world who have less than them.
When I asked the students to write down what they *learned* from the video, the majority of their responses were fairly straightforward iterations of the economic differences they noticed between their lives in the US and the children's lives in Haiti. But when I asked students what *changes* they could make today in their lives to help create a better world for themselves and others, their responses became much more nuanced. This is evident in my need to add another level of nodes during the coding process. Their responses ranged from simple statements of wanting to help others, to critical reflections on their own lives.

DR623: "I can help people in need."

AG583: "I can try my best to actually do something to help them.

AR552: "I think we should just help each other. We have a lot of things that we don't need and they do."

NS523: "I think we should all learn to help others more often. We should think twice before we throw away our school food or throw away a new pair of shoes. We should reflect on our lives and realize that what we are doing is wrong. We should also keep track of our education to be able to help others."

UL527: "Think about others there in a new world that I don't know about. Think about what you have. How hard it is for them to get a life that I live. My life compared to theirs is perfect, the dream life. Have an open mind, take advantage of all this. I want to be someone. I want to be able to help them. This video helped me realize how the world is difficult."

Many students also reflected on how the economic differences between the US and Haiti can translate to a difference in individual attitudes.

BE524: "I've learned today, even though Haitians have a difficult life, they help each
other out. Not like Americans. Sometimes I have food that 'I don't like' and I don't eat it. I'm going to start being more grateful."

NA637: "The changes I would make is to be nicer to people because I don't know what they are going through."

SG525: "I can donate more clothes and money to charities knowing that there are many countries in poverty. It's a very difficult life they live through every single day and so just being grateful for everything, even my education. I should just be positive and feel good about my culture and who I am."

This question provoked students to make connections between how they experience the world and how the Haitians in the video experience the world. Whereas the first question provoked many students to respond that they should be more grateful and appreciative of the opportunities they have here in the US, the second question demanded that students reflect on what actions would demonstrate that feeling state. In that sense, the video provides students with a transformative opportunity. They are not simply learning about the education, geography, history, and culture of a handful of children living in Haiti. They are witnessing different ways of being in the world. The discourse of representation would lead us to believe that the children in Haiti are being gazed upon as exotic others, or a subjugated other. And certainly we can read some of these responses as evidence of that. But for the majority of the students, witnessing the lives of the children in Haiti allowed them to completely reconsider their subject position. As low-income students of color in the United States, they were able to connect to the children in Haiti through their own experience of subalternity.

The UMS students are fully aware of the racism and classism that exists in the United States. Whether it is the color of their skin, their citizenship status, or their feeling of not having
as much "stuff" or status as the kids across town in Beverly Hills, they are constantly reminded that they are the other in the United States. They see the children in Haiti representing their own culture with pride, and they in turn want to "Be a proud person" (BO590). They see the children in Haiti taking their education seriously, and they in turn want to "work get good grades for I could go to high school and then I go to college be a president and make lives better." (KC557). They see the children in Haiti expressing a desire to help those who are suffering in their own community, and they in turn want to "Try to help in my community." (LR559).

The video confronts the students' lack of knowledge about the country of Haiti and the existence of poverty in the world outside of the United States, motivating them to want to learn more about such issues:

CG551: "I can't make any changes in Haiti, but I could think about how they live and the decisions I make."
FR645: "Learn about their country."
GL633: "Learn more about problems in the world."
AA582: "What changes that I can make in my life that will help to create a better world for myself and others is keep learning about the country."

Many students took this a step further and reflected on the educational inequalities between Haiti and the US. This motivated them to become more committed to their own education:

MH522: "I would keep going to school finish my education because not every person has an education."
JM518: "I will try to accomplish my goal and go to college."
YJ581: "I could do better in my education and start appreciating everything I have and take advantage of everything we have."
AP532: "A change that we can do here is take advantage of the free education we have here."

XX654: "I can start trying in school and make a better life for everyone."

By asking the students to think about what they can change in themselves to honor the students' stories in Haiti, they could not get away with only feeling sympathy for the children in the video. In becoming aware of the personal lives depicted through the video as well as the conditions in which people in Port-au-Prince live, the students became implicated in the struggles of these children and were confronted with a question asking them what they, personally, were going to do about it. Some of them interpreted that as what they can give to Haiti:

RA549: "I would like to go visit Haiti and help out their country by paying people to build them homes, better streets, schools, etc."

DG646: "I would like to be a rich person that can get everything just like rich people to kids who need it."

LL632: "Give them support and money for school supplies and food."

JD622: "What I would do is get money so I could give it to the schools so they could get better things. Get old clothes people don't wear and give it to the people that has nothing."

JL547: "I would build schools and give everybody money and food and a home for they can be safe."

But the majority of students interpreted that as being a challenge to better themselves and committed themselves to changing after seeing the video:

LG594: "I can be kind to others."

MZ545: "Well change your emotions into action. You could be holding it in or turning it
into something else."

AV542: "What I could do is to be more thankful for what I have. Also I should help others more than myself and help people that are in need."

RF628: "To be kind to people."

NC935: "Help others and be a better person myself."

PA638: "I would like to start studying more and try harder."

AC647: "I would help others to be a better person than I am now."

BM625: "The kind of changes I will make today is be kind to all and be thankful for what I have."

Some students were moved to confront their own struggles by encountering the struggles of the Haitians in the video.

JC610: "To stop hanging around with bad people. I would want to stop getting in trouble on the streets with other people."

DA611: "Try to do better in school and care more about school because other kids dream of going to school and I get to go for free. And thank god that I am alive and be better to my parents."

BA603: "Don't be lazy and to appreciate what I have in my life."

Other students were able to clarify their dreams and goals after hearing the children in the video describe theirs:

IA607: "To become president of the US and help them."

DN531: "I want to study to become a doctor or Marine biologist. Maybe I'll find some major breakthrough. I have high hopes for that."

VB641: "I would stop the violence now because it's now going hogwire."
YL567: "Start to reach my goals before it's too late."

The students in Los Angeles could not ignore the suffering they witnessed in the video because it had now been brought to their conscious awareness. They could not distance themselves from their suffering because they are intimately connected to it through their own experience of subalternity in the United States. Most of their comments go beyond simply "sending money" to Haiti perhaps because they are very aware that they do not have a large amount of money to give. But by comparing their own experience of poverty to that of those living in Haiti, they are able to recognize the relative privilege they have simply by virtue of geography. Recognizing this privilege quickly imbues the students with a sense of responsibility to the other (as opposed to being responsible for the other in a neocolonial way). The students expressed this by repeatedly acknowledging the importance not just of changing Haiti, but of positively changing their own lives and the lives of people around them.

LS558: "I think some change we can do to create a better place in the world is to try to help others when they're in need, to appreciate what we have as so many other people don't. Also to make a better world to not only be helpful but to also be happy with my life and to try to make other people happy by helping them."

SA556: "Like try and help others, not only your family but everyone else. Be a good person with everyone."

DH554: "The changes I could do is inspire people to go to school, be a great person and someone in life. Also that we should appreciate what we have because one day it could go away."

LR559: "Try to help in my community."

OZ530: "Everyone on their own can make so many changes, but you have to start with
yourself. I feel that if more people watch this video, they would realize that there are many people all around the world that suffer everyday, that have to struggle to live everyday."

JD528: "Getting an education will help yourself and others because it has an affect worldwide, not only with the people around you."

These responses demonstrate how after experiencing a perspective-shift by encountering the Haitian children in the video, these students are generalizing the lessons they learned to their own lives, recognizing the inherent and varied connections between self and other that are all around them.

Conclusions and Implications

These results indicate that students are mainly learning about others through watching Beyond the Block: Haiti, particularly about the difference in economic conditions between Haiti and the United States. The students are also learning about themselves, recognizing their own economic privilege relative to Haiti. As a result of these two things, they are imagining ways they can improve conditions for others and also articulating how they can improve the way they live their own lives. Many of the students came to these realizations as a result of watching Beyond the Block: Haiti, which indicates that the vast majority of students knew nothing about Haiti or certain conditions of poverty before watching this video. This raises a concern: where are the Haitian film subjects in all of this? Are they simply being used to help Americans realize how privileged they are? What good does it do them to have students from East LA recognize their privilege?
These are difficult questions that must be asked, but their answer I believe lies in the perspective one takes in analyzing these student responses. If we are approaching our analysis from the discourse of representation, we might conclude that telling a partial story about Haiti to a group of students who have no baseline knowledge of the country is dangerous, as it reduces Haiti down to only a few representations of poverty and struggle. But if we approach our analysis from an affective perspective, we begin with the assumption that all stories are already partial. We acknowledge that an audience made up of students of color who have experienced urban poverty within the context of the United States is going to relate to the film differently than an audience of white and/or middle class adults. We reflect on the ideologies and feelings that inform how we want to see Haiti represented and how those inform our judgment of what is happening during the film viewing process. These are the things I have attempted to elucidate throughout the course of this dissertation so that we can arrive at a place together where we can make room for a conversation about ethnographic documentary film that is not based in the discourse of representation, but rather is based on the quality of the encounter with the other.

If we imagine Beyond the Block: Haiti as a visualization technology, what does it allow us to see? The students are seeing Haiti. They are seeing poverty. They are seeing struggle. They are seeing resilience. They are seeing children who have dreams and goals despite challenging circumstances. The students’ responses do not indicate that the children in the video are seen as foreign exotic Others. The responses indicate that in encountering the other, students came to learn more about someone else’s life and then attempted to respond to that encounter the best they could. They are recognizing difference while accepting “accountability and responsibility for translations and solidarities” (Haraway, 1988, p. 684). They are seeing parts of themselves “without claiming to be another” (p. 681).
The encounter that the documentary facilitates is able to open up a space for the student viewers to position themselves in the world. For Haraway, positioning is “the key practice grounding knowledge organized around the imagery of vision” (p. 681). The act of positioning “implies responsibility for our enabling practices” (p. 681). In positioning themselves, the students assert their own ways of knowing and being in the world by making decisions about how they want to interact with it. Some students made simple resolutions like student DC519: "Don't throw away the food when some people don't have nothing to eat." Others set more encompassing goals like student AA582: "What I learned from watching this video is that I am grateful for what I have and that I should take advantage that I do have an education, food, shelter. Also that I am going to dream big.” Many students compared their own experience of being in the world to that of the children in the video, with student AP532 noting: "From watching this video I learned that there are kids out there who have less than kids here yet they value life, education, and health more than we do."

In an interesting way, having low-income students of color recognize their Western privilege is subversive to the dominant white male Western narrative. It restores in them a healthy sense of power, because they recognize the opportunities they have at their disposal while also maintaining a personal connection to the subalternity created by the material consequences of racism, classism, poverty, and for many of these students, citizenship status. Their experience of the other is not so foreign to them that they easily objectify it. They are the other coming into contact with an other they find familiar in some ways and out of that identification a kinship forms. For instance, student VM548 reflects on her desire to help others in need, but also notes that she needs to improve her own “place” as well: "I could help others who are in need. I would help my world be a better place. I would help out other places such as
Haiti. I would make my place and other places better for everyone. And I have faith in Haiti."
Perhaps it is the faith she has in her own ability to affect change in her "world" that allows her to
believe in Haiti's ability to overcome its difficulties as well.

The students’ own positioning in the world contextualizes their privilege so that they find
themselves implicated in the suffering of the other they are encountering through *Beyond the
Block: Haiti*. This implication in the suffering of the other is demonstrated through the
commitments to personal change and action they voice through their responses. The students do
not see the documentary as “pictures of the world” that are “allegories of infinite mobility and
interchangeability,” (Haraway, 1988, p. 679). They know that they are different from the
children they are seeing in the video. But they are treating this difference not with distance, but
with “loving care,” (p. 679). They are attempting “to learn how to see faithfully from another’s
point of view, even when the other is our own machine” (p. 679). As we have seen in Arizona,
helping students of color understand their own identity in the context of the United States is not
always a welcome activity. Therefore, anything that not only encourages students to position
themselves within the “machine” of the US but also to change that machine through harnessing
its power in a non-dominating way is indeed subversive to Western modernity.

In future documentaries and programming Beyond the Block develops, it will be essential
to create learning opportunities that encourage the student to position himself or herself in
relation to the world. It is clear from looking at the student survey responses that the most
thoughtful comments came when students were able to reconsider their own lives as a result of
encountering the lives of those featured in the film. Simply disseminating knowledge can result
in objectification. Calling upon the students to consider how the choices they make and the
actions they take in their own lives affect the lives of a previously unknown other can alter a
student’s worldview and affect how they recognize and understand their own privilege. Such transformative education would work better if the students had more of a grasp on their own cultural identity, struggles, and dreams and goals. In areas like Tucson, Arizona however, this type of education could be deemed illegal. And in school districts in general, especially ones that are low-performing, there is a resistance to dedicating school time to subjects that are not related to standards-based education. As it stands, facilitating an encounter that encourages students to understand others does present a positive in-road to helping them understand themselves. It is not a perfect method and it can be improved, but it is certainly better than nothing. And in today's system of education, for my students, more than nothing is a measure of success that I am comfortable with.

Continuing the Cycle of Affect

The process of affective transmission does not end with having students fill out a worksheet. Nor does it end with conducting an analysis or evaluation of their responses or the “effectiveness” of Beyond the Block. This brief study elucidates the different ways in which affect is transmitted and transmuted through the film viewing process. But as the producer of that documentary, I am also affected by the students’ responses. The viewing of Beyond the Block: Haiti by the students at UMS resulted in more than this dissertation chapter—it resulted in this entire dissertation. In reflecting on the students’ responses, I realized that it was not just the words and images from the video that were affectively transmitted, but it was my own hopes and dreams for my students and, at one point or another in my life, myself. The reader of this project may even be able to locate sentiments similar to students’ responses at various locations throughout this dissertation.
So where do we draw the line between what I imbue into the documentary and what the children I interviewed imbued into the documentary? Can we draw a direct line of correlation between these videos and whether or not my students finish high school? Is there a line between determining whether this video had an ultimately positive effect or ultimately negative effect, or any effect at all? My belief, and perhaps my ultimate argument, is that affectively speaking there are no lines. That question, that desire to pinpoint a cause, is yet another manifestation of the depths at which the Western conception of the self-contained subject affects the direction of our inquiry and appraisal of effectiveness. That is not to say such studies are not useful when applied in certain contexts. But it is to say that such studies are not always necessary in every context, nor do they always effectively assess what is actually going on.

My hopes and dreams for my own students have been indelibly shaped by my interactions with the children I met in Haiti, and all of the people and children I met through my travels before that. These hopes and dreams have also been indelibly shaped by each and every client I have ever had as a therapist and school counselor. Through the experiences of traveling and counseling I have had the privilege of forming intimate relationships and close bonds with a large number of people that I would otherwise have never met. Every encounter I have ever had with another has helped me to grow in my understanding of myself and my understanding of others. Beyond the Block developed out of the potentia of all of those encounters. I often feel shy about “claiming” Beyond the Block as my own, because I feel so strongly that it is a vessel where I have been able to gather all of the amazing lessons and insights that others have taught me over the years. Those lessons and insights have become my own hopes and dreams for myself and others, and I have transmuted those hopes and dreams into things like “mission statements” and “learning outcomes,” creating an entire organization out of what has stuck with
me throughout all of my encounters. Every presentation I make in front of students is yet another encounter. Reading their words after the presentation is yet another encounter. I, in turn, bring what the students say back to the organization. As I grow and change because of these encounter, so the organization continues to grow and change.

The entirety of this dissertation, and particularly this chapter then, is meant to explicate the multiple levels and axes at which our encounters between self and other create the contexts of various systems and functions. The extent to which we recognize these encounters, the way in which we understand them, and how we assign meaning to them all contribute to the creation of these contexts. I have detailed how my own counseling education, my experience counseling students in a large school district, and my understanding of the problem of school dropout all contributed to the creation of Beyond the Block. The creation of Beyond the Block in turn created the context within which my filmmaking took place. Through filmmaking, I formed relationships and participated in encounters that resulted in my own growth and change. The video I made in turn inspired growth and change in many of those who viewed it. The students’ expressions of growth and change further informed my own understanding of the filmmaking process and Beyond the Block’s objectives. They also inspired me to reflect more deeply on my own life throughout this dissertation that has in turn resulted in an incredible amount of personal and professional growth for me, which will affect all future encounters I have through my filmmaking and through Beyond the Block. And so the cycle of affect continues into the next filmmaking experience, the next presentation, the next travel date, the next student I counsel.

Beyond the Block is just like any other nonprofit in that we need funding, so of course if we have the opportunity to do a more traditional assessment of the effectiveness of the program I will take advantage of it in order to keep the organization viable. But I hope through this study I
have demonstrated that the ethics of our practice can sometimes become lost in the quest for results. And without ethics, no matter how “effective” your program is on paper, you may be doing more harm than good.
CONCLUSION

“Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.”

– Adrienne Rich, *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision*, 1972

This case study created a conjuncture that positioned the production of the ethnographic documentary film *Beyond the Block: Haiti* within the context of K-12 urban education, the nonprofit sector, and documentary media studies. I connected significant moments that made up the conjuncture of documentary film production and put them in conversation with my own subjectivity, using critically reflexive narrative to deeply attend to the affective exchanges that constitute the filmmaking process. By examining student survey responses, I was able to gain an evaluative understanding of how *Beyond the Block: Haiti* functioned as an affective learning tool. What I have discovered through this study is that ethnographic documentary film presents filmmakers with an incredible opportunity to facilitate positive growth through their affective encounters with those who they are filming. Further, it presents filmmakers with the opportunity to act as a conduit, encouraging film subjects and viewers to encounter each other through the technology of video. Without a strong sense of ethics, however, the filmmaking process can become a space of exploitative landmines, terrain that even the most well-intentioned filmmaker may find difficult to understand and navigate.

Through this dissertation, I have come to see ethnographic documentary filmmaking as a process of becoming, that is “a process of expression, composition, selection, and incorporation of forces aimed at the positive transformation of the subject . . . Becoming has to do with emptying out the self, opening it out to possible encounters with the ‘outside’” (Braidotti, 2006,
Interpreted this way, not only is there a place for ethnographic documentary films in today’s cultural landscape, but in today’s highly individualistic society, there is an overwhelming need for them. Before I founded Beyond the Block, my students’ parents told me that their children needed some kind of diversity education. Now, my students’ teachers and school-based administrators regularly tell me how the students need the education Beyond the Block provides. I believe the responses from the students analyzed in Chapter Six demonstrate how ethnographic documentary film can be used as a tool for positive growth.

Though I do not agree with Jay Ruby that ethnographic documentary filmmaking should be rooted in Anthropology, I do believe that every ethnographic documentary filmmaker is also an educator. Everyone who makes an ethnographic documentary film is on some level teaching their viewers about people and should be ethically accountable for facilitating those encounters. We need to think deeply about what can happen when we intervene in someone's life as well as what can happen when they then necessarily intervene in ours. The onus of ethical negotiation is always on the filmmakers because they are the ones initiating and facilitating the affective encounter through their filmmaking. In that sense, they are always already responsible for the other. Considering issues of representation only addresses the encounter after it has occurred. The filmmaker must undertake the preparation before they initiate the encounter.

The goal of this dissertation has not been to prove that I am ethical, or to posit that Beyond the Block: Haiti is an example of an ethical film. The goal has been to construct a framework that can attempt to answer the questions, “Am I being ethical in this situation? If not, how can I be more ethical?” Throughout this dissertation, I have mined my own experiences so that I can arrive at ethical reflections that I can use in the future when making an ethnographic documentary. This ethical framework is one that I have come up with through deeply reflecting
on the various contexts of my positionality and the encounters I experienced within that positionality, therefore it should not be taken as a “how to” guide on making an ethical ethnographic documentary. Further, my amateur entry point into filmmaking and my specific intent to use these documentaries as pointed pedagogical tools also influences this framework. This is not a generalizeable model then, but rather an example that might provoke reflection and consideration from others, such as those who are untrained in documentary filmmaking, yet are considering picking up a camera and filming another for the purposes of creating a documentary intended for any level of distribution.

The following is a summary of the synthesizing themes from every chapter, which form a framework through which we can try to create more ethical ethnographic documentary films in the future:

• Believing that another’s subjective reality is just as real as your own does not exempt you from affecting their reality.

How we understand the lives and experiences of our film subjects has the ability to affect how they understand their own lives and experiences. We must be mindful of the hidden ideologies, histories, and personal prejudices that are informing how we experience and influence interactions with our film subjects. Take inventory of these things before you begin production, as it will influence your interview questions, your narrative, your edit, and most importantly, the way in which you interact with those you are filming.

• A new definition of empathy can help us connect to others in a more equal way.

Attempting to relate to those you are filming through personal experience during an encounter can result in an empathic failure, especially if that person is different from you in class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, or other categorization. Instead, focus on trying to
understand how and why others feel the way that they do (Tuch, 1997). You can do this by centering the experiences of those you are filming. What stories do they want to tell? What is important to them? Using a method of open-ended, non-leading, subject-focused interviewing can help you get to the why and how of feeling.

- Style matters.

Even if there are funding guidelines, or in my case state standards, that you have to address in your film, remember that any unique variation you create—even if it’s within a regulatory system—will open up another field of potential possibility for your viewers and for the filmmakers who come after you. The hope of being able to change oppressive systems comes from small sidesteps and stylish movements that compose new areas of “play.” By accepting that detachment from those who you film is impossible, you can initiate and interrogate the act of being in relation with the other.

- Ethical measures of success should be guided by the extent to which they disrupt categories that perpetuate the abandonment of the least likely to succeed.

Resist sacrificing opportunities for becoming at the altar of conformity. Funding guidelines and foundational rules must be followed, but trust that there are infinite ways of being and doing things that are always there for us to discover. Sometimes all it takes is one person to force the system to adapt and reconfigure. It is up to us to push back against systems that perpetuate the abandonment of the least likely to succeed. If any funding agency is participating in this abandonment, attention should be called to the injustice and they should be made to justify their methods rather than us justifying ours. It is here that collective action with other filmmakers/educators can help.
• Hold yourself accountable.

When in relation with your film subjects, take note of any time you feel a desire to act or to help. Be aware of those behaviors that perpetuate the separation of self from other. Reflect on where your focus is. Are you attempting to connect by being a conduit between your audience and the film subjects, or are you separating yourself and your audience even further by enacting a repressive ideology through your actions? Reflect on the historicity of your film subjects as well as your own. How might this historicity be playing out through trauma, attitude, or physical dis-ease? The onus is on you as a filmmaker to be accountable for the harm and benefit that your actions could bring. This is the responsibility you are accepting when you initiate and facilitate an affective encounter with the other.

• Feel your way through emotionally charged moments.

During difficult moments, do not put up barriers. Stay open to and present with the difficulty, as it may be a moment in which one of the above recommendations could be enacted. Do not be afraid to love, but make sure that your love is located within the context of the situation—that it is based in historicity and that it holds you accountable for the current and former pains you represent as a positioned person. Do not be closed to the idea of communicating without language. Come to your senses and make proper interruptions to aggressive systems of oppression.

• The theorization of ethnographic documentary film needs fewer borders.

Ethnographic documentary film is at once interdisciplinary and non-disciplinary and has multiple entry points. Be open to losing our objectivity by abandoning the object. Make the decision to live and produce from a world in which there is no subject/object dichotomy, but rather an infinite amount of human and non-human interactions that continuously create subjects
and construct subjectivities. Be open to re-examining key debates in documentary by applying alternate modernities in order to continue pushing the field forward. At the very least, be aware of the ontology or world view that you think is “right” and think deeply about how that could affect interactions with those you are filming and how you construct the narrative of your film.

- Through conscious awareness, ethnographic documentary filmmakers can work towards the ethical transcendence of borders.

Put work into developing your consciousness in order to promote positive interactions with other people. Examine yourself and your filmmaking from an affective perspective. Engage in discernment by examining your feelings, talking about those feelings, and processing those feelings. Writing journal entries, having retrospective discussions, and initiating debriefing conversations with friends or crewmembers can all help to establish a reflexive filmmaking process—one that does not have to occur in front of the camera. Understand that the borders that exist in our modern world are not just literal borders, but identity borders ascribed by society such as race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. An ethical transcendence of borders must include reflection on the grave material consequences modernist borders can have on your film subjects. But it must also acknowledge the material consequences of the affective encounter. By acknowledging your own position as a permeable, affective subject as well as that of your film subjects, you can work together to transcend borders through the shared intensity of the affective encounter.

I do not want to give the impression that the main thing one can do in order to become ethical is to think deeply. Certainly, critical reflection is essential to anyone who wants to take up documentary filmmaking, however, confining one’s reflection only to oneself will ultimately only serve to reinforce the idea of the self-contained Western subject. The practice of
documentary does not need to, and probably should not, adhere to any strict models, but aspiring
filmmakers should be able to put their work in conversation with some type of ethical guidelines
that acknowledge the benefit, harm, and potential that arises from mediated interactions with
others. As someone who entered documentary filmmaking not from the film school route, but
rather from an education/counseling academic perspective, I have discovered through practice
that many qualitative research methods speak to aspects of documentary filmmaking. At varying
points I have experienced documentary filmmaking as part ethnography, part case study, part
autoethnography, part narrative, and part phenomenology, all of which can be mixed and
matched within one film to varying degrees. These methods force us to ask questions that are
crucial to the documentary filmmaking process: What is your relationship with your subjects? Is
their participation in this project mutually beneficial? Do you have their informed consent?
Who is in charge of the direction of this project, the researcher or the subjects? How do you
member check? Do you stay involved with your clients after the work has been published? How
so? What happens if you make a large amount of money off of the project? What is your
ongoing responsibility to your subjects, if any? How do you negotiate the editing process?
What is your decision-making process for what material gets included in the project and what
gets cut out of it? How do you triangulate your data? What are your biases as a researcher?
How do you ensure that those don't affect the quality of your work? As an aspiring filmmaker,
these questions might seem overwhelming. But when you examine these questions from a
qualitative research framework, these challenges simply become expected negotiations of your
role as a filmmaker/researcher.

In terms of ethics, what I have found in my own practice is that it can help to identify
some previously established, and possibly unrecognized, framework within which to situate your
work. One does not need to adopt counseling ethics in order to stay mindful of ethical encounters with the other, though certainly they assisted me. Qualitative methodologies focused on transforming reality “with” rather than ‘for’” people, such as feminist participatory research, can help to guide aspiring documentary filmmakers in their planning, practice, and evaluation (Maguire, 1987/2008, p. 417). Most importantly, such models can help us frame and interpret the relationships we will make in an ethical way. Consistent with the ethics of feminist participatory research, I believe the “core issue” in determining the parameters of a relationship is power (p. 418). Feminist participatory research echoes Haraway's understanding that partial connection can result in objectivity, as Maguire states: “participatory research offers a partnership: We both know some things; neither of us knows everything. Working together we will both know more, and we will both learn more about how to know” (p. 421). Within feminist participatory research power is something to be recognized and relinquished on the part of the researcher so that it can be shared with the subjects who, in the dominant modern social context that we currently function within, are inherently less powerful in the researcher-subject relationship. Authors such as Macguire have put forth phases and guidelines for conducting such research and also candidly acknowledge the difficulties and limitations of it. This is where one’s own experience can be put in dialogue with such frameworks, helping to expand and deepen our understanding of the possibilities and limits of our current research models.

I was only able to arrive at these ethical reflections because I relocated my understanding of ethnographic filmmaking into an affective perspective. Throughout the course of this study, I have attempted to apply theory that is highly academic and often dense to the practical activity of service provision and documentary filmmaking. Through this application, I hope I have demonstrated how damaging it can be to believe that we are self-contained individuals. To
accept that we are permeable beings who are always in relation with each other and our surroundings is somewhat overwhelming. I could imagine that some might feel a loss of control, knowing that they are not sealed beings, but rather open vessels that affect others and can be affected by others both consciously and unconsciously. This affective perspective though, that we cannot escape our connectedness to both humans and nonhumans, offers us hope in the darkest of times because it allows for infinite possibilities and potentials to emerge. Things can always be different. And though we are always already connected to the other, theorists like Teresa Brennan help us to understand how we can use processes such as discernment to protect ourselves from negative affects, choosing to reject them or transpose them into positive ones. Ultimately, becoming aware, as Braidotti says, of our own power to affect and be affected is what helps us lead more powerful, joyous lives.

All of this talk of affect, becoming, ethics, and even documentary film would be meaningless for me, however, if I could not imagine a very specific way in which its application could affect real change in the world. At the heart of this dissertation lies my love for the clients I have counseled as a therapist and school counselor. At the end of every day, I would remind myself to “keep healthy boundaries” like they taught us to in school. Every time my students deeply affected me to the point of tears or depression, I considered it a professional failure. I was supposed to be stronger; I was supposed to know how to handle my emotions. I now understand what was happening as an affective transmission of the personal pain and social injustices that my students dealt with every day at home and at school. As I explored in Chapter One, these affective exchanges are evidence of the cultural affects that can be transmitted through the therapeutic process. The social injustices perpetuated by the educational system
particularly upset me, because I saw it as such a flagrantly missed opportunity to help improve the life of a child.

I truly believe that we could have another era that shapes education as much as modernity and specifically the Progressive Era have. Our public education system could lead the way in creating a better future for all people around the globe if it acknowledged that it is a broken institution based on outdated systems of an era that has long since passed. For this reason, I think we need to do whatever we can to preserve free public education in the United States. That being said, I think it is an injustice to wait for those at the top to figure out how to run a competent national education system while across the country an estimated 7,000 students dropout out of school every day—that is one student every 26 seconds (Swanson, 2006).

Although systemic change is needed, and should be fought for concurrently, we do not have to wait for institutional or policy changes in order to change the system. Our students are the system and it is only the archaic hierarchical power structure that convinces us that they are not. They are the majority in the educational system. There are more students than all the teachers, administrators, and district staff members put together. I think the future of education lies in empowering students to fight for the education that they deserve. A movement such as this could build off of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, demanding culturally relevant curriculum in every classroom. Grassroots and student-led organizations have recently been able to accomplish this in Los Angeles Unified School District, where the Board of Education passed a resolution in December of 2014 that made ethnic studies a requirement for high school graduation. The petition submitted to the Board stated:

Only 691 out of a total of 152,507 high school students in LAUSD are taking Ethnic Studies courses, despite the fact that over 90% of LAUSD is comprised of students of
color whose shared experiences are marginalized and forgotten in the mainstream curriculum.

It is time that all LAUSD students have access to Ethnic Studies courses—courses that speak to students who have felt invisible and marginalized, to inspire and motivate them in their education, so that they learn their own history, engage actively in their own learning, and connect in meaningful ways to the larger community.

Though the plans for the implementation of Ethnic Studies in LAUSD remain uncertain, this remains a huge feat. Students and community members were able to put the Board of Education in a very difficult position where they would risk political suicide in a city like Los Angeles by denying this resolution. As a result, the importance of diversity education has been thrust back into the forefront of educational policy. Though diversity education is more than just Ethnic Studies classes, such classes set students on the path of understanding themselves and others.

Teacher preparation programs and teachers themselves are also crucial allies in the fight to make urban K-12 education more equitable for students of color. Training teachers in anti-racist, feminist pedagogy could change the face of education from inside of the classroom while still managing to address the required standards and benchmarks. Training teachers in the border pedagogy that Giroux describes could be hugely beneficial to helping establish a place for students of color within the system of education that has marginalized them. Such changes represent the “slow work” of change that requires critical awareness, a new understanding of power, and a commitment to social justice. I have observed numerous teachers and counselors who resist oppressive forms of education every day by constructing counter-stories within and outside the classroom, by valuing and putting effort into qualitative modes of education like relationships and student voice, by attempting to diversify a culturally irrelevant curriculum, and
by accepting personal responsibility for their students. They do not do this because they have to:
in fact, the dominant discourse does not reward them for these efforts (unless they result in
higher test scores). They do it because they know that although they may not always have
control over what they teach, they have control over how they teach and how they relate to their
students. How they relate to their students is their ethical obligation to the other.

Future Studies

Affect has the potential for application in numerous different settings, but I think I have
only scratched the surface of its applicability to ethnographic documentary production. As I
mentioned in Chapter Six, audience reception studies of documentary films are few and far
between. Studies that assessed the usefulness of ethnographic documentary film to specific
populations in specific settings could be very helpful not only to filmmakers, but also to those
like myself who are service providers. There are many contexts in which improving or
expanding opportunities for positive relationality between self and other could be helpful, such
as with those who are incarcerated or those who are on probation. For instance, perpetrators of
domestic violence typically must complete a certain number of court-ordered group therapy
sessions. Incorporating ethnographic documentary film into their sessions could encourage
group members to feel and process the ideas of empathy and understanding.

I also think it is time that someone does an ethnography on ethnographic filmmakers.
Here, I have used myself as a source. I would be very interested in a study where the researcher
shadowed a number of filmmakers and interviewed them about the process of filmmaking, from
pre-production through to reception. Most interesting would be if this was a diverse group of
filmmakers, both academic and non-academic, making a variety of different types of
ethnographic films—some with big budgets, some with small budgets, some making them on their own community, some making them about a community previously unknown to them, etc. Would there be any similarities between the experiences? What ethical issues would arise and how would the ethnographic filmmakers deal with them? It would also be an opportunity for the researcher to put his or her own ethics and beliefs into conversation with the filmmaker’s.

Towards a Positive Future

Many well-meaning people want me to “expand” Beyond the Block. Their idea is that I should give anyone who is traveling or anyone who lives in a foreign place a camera and have them film a documentary so that Beyond the Block will have more videos to present at schools. The entirety of this dissertation exemplifies why such expansion would not be appropriate for Beyond the Block. That is not to say others cannot do the work I am doing. It is only to say that, when you are working in fields based in relationality, expansion for the sake of economic growth or business reach is likely to produce ethical problems. Jay Ruby echoes this sentiment, asking:

How does one translate experience into images? . . . When you are dealing with people whose sense of space, place, body movement, and event are different from your own, how do you know what you are looking at and when to turn the camera on or off? It is only possible to explore these questions in the field when the ethnographer is freed from the economic restraints of professional filmmaking and the need to produce a marketable product. (1998, para. 9)

Though I am committed to making a marketable product so that it can reach my students, I agree with Ruby in that when our main motivation is to produce revenue from an ethnographic
documentary, the ethical considerations inherent in filmmaking become even more complex and serious, mainly because they become obscured by the drive to get the story. Ruby imagines the new ethnographic documentary field to be one in which anthropologists make low-budget films “for a tiny audience of specialists” (para. 12). Such films would give filmmakers the time and space to immerse themselves in their method, be critically reflexive about their work, and explore form. Ruby admits that “One cannot make a living from the kind of films I envision” (para. 12) and further states that “No distribution company currently in existence would probably be able to accommodate this form of dissemination. Some sort of alternative distribution would have to be instituted” (para. 13).

I find myself doing exactly what Ruby proposes, but in a very different way than he imagines. My videos are made for a tiny, specialized audience, but they are not members of the academy, they are students of color in the urban public school system who are at risk of school drop out. They are incredibly low-budget, made with non-professional grade equipment and all edited on iMovie—an editing program that is included free with Apple computers that takes very little time to master. Any filmmaker would grimace at hearing that, as would PBS, and I am very aware of and comfortable with the fact that they are not worthy for broadcast on anything but a school auditorium projector. Since 2007, I have made a total of $12,565 in salary—not exactly a living wage. But where I proudly depart from Ruby’s assessment is that Beyond the Block exists as a perfect alternative distribution company. Being the director of a nonprofit I founded is not easy; however, it provides me with far more freedom than trying to make films while working in the academy. I typically had a full-time job in addition to Beyond the Block, so I only paid myself when I went down to part-time and was actively doing presentations for Beyond the Block. I saved the rest of the money that we received from grants and donations. As
I prepare to leave graduate school, I can now embark on a full-time position with Beyond the Block thanks to those savings, which will give me the time I need to replenish the funds through applying for grants and soliciting donations. It has been over seven years since I incorporated Beyond the Block, but I believe we are just coming into our potential.

When I entered graduate school, my end goal was to keep doing what I was doing with Beyond the Block, but learn how to do it better. In one way or another, I have been working on this dissertation throughout the course of my doctoral program. To bring everything that I have learned together into one project that inspired me to go to an even deeper level of inquiry and exploration has been an opportunity that has allowed me to accomplish my graduate school goal. I have no doubt that the next video I make will be better because of the work that I have been allowed to do in this dissertation. “Better” in this case does not mean that the videos will make it to PBS or Sundance. It means that when I am filming, I will have a deeper awareness of my own positionality. It means I will have a deeper respect for those I am filming. It means that I will be more willing to reflect upon my own emotionality before, during, and after filming in order to stay more focused on my subjects and my audience. It means that I will have an even stronger commitment to subversively hacking into the public education system through my videos and curriculum so that my students can receive the diversity education they deserve. It is my hope, of course, that one day there will be no need for such subversiveness and that students of color at risk of school dropout will be given regular opportunities to broaden their understanding of who and what they can be in this world.
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UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools (2007). Dropout Prevention. Los Angeles, CA.


## APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

Nodes compared by number of coding references