

**ON THE EXPERIENCE OF ENCOUNTERING ART IN MUSEUM SPACES: AN INQUIRY
WITH GILLES DELEUZE'S CONCEPTS OF DESIRE AND ASSEMBLAGE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Framed by the theoretical concepts of assemblage and desire from philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and his collaborative writings with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1987), this study inquires into the qualities and productive potential of the art encounter in a gallery setting. The study brings together my practice in the field of art museum education, and my interest in the art encounter to inquire what the art encounter *does*. Thinking with Deleuzian concepts enacts a view of the art encounter as a milieu of experimentation where affects move a body to create assemblages, connections with things, human and non-human bodies, expressions, qualities, ideas, spaces. Assemblages allow desire (as a force) to circulate; desiring-assemblages move bodies to produce connections with other human or non-human entities, thoughts, they produce subjectivation as a mode of existence.

For Deleuze, one does not 'have' an experience of an artwork or exhibition detached against the background of life; experience is a milieu which contributes to actually making life. My study inquires how working within a philosophy conceived in terms of relationality, connections, flows and multiplicity (rather than fixed identities) enact a view of the art encounter as a milieu of immanent ethics. By immanent ethics, Deleuze means that encountering increases the potential for new connections, it can actualize the possibilities already in life. The experience of encountering art is inviting one into experiences of living.

This post-qualitative study followed a process of research as assemblage formed by: the research site at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and the dynamic constellation of interconnected objects, bodies, ideas such as my field notes, photographs, the writing of personal narratives of my encounterings in the gallery space, and scholarly texts. Throughout

the research process, two guiding questions remained present: 1) With the production of data in autobiographical fieldnotes, how does Deleuze's concepts of desire and assemblage help me inquire about my art encounters, and what insights can I bring forth on the art encounter? 2) In what ways does thinking with Deleuzian concepts enlarge received discourses in art education and museum education about the art encounter within the art museum?

LAY SUMMARY

This research is about the experience of encountering art in a gallery setting. It brings together my practice in the field of art museum education and my interest to understand what the art encounter *does*, alongside the concepts of desire and assemblage from philosopher Gilles Deleuze. To Deleuze, experience is a milieu providing various opportunities to be affected, and allows for encounters to happen. Thinking with the Deleuzian concepts of desire and assemblage was generative to consider the experience of encountering art as a complex milieu where affects produced in the encounter with art move a body to create assemblages allowing the flow of desire (as a force), the production of ideas, and subjectivation as a mode of existence. An implication arising from this study is that encountering art invites us into experiences of living because we never know how we will be affected, and what possibilities will be actualized.

PREFACE

This dissertation is original work by the author, Marie-France Berard. I conceptualized and crafted this research following the guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Dónal O'Donoghue and my committee members Dr. Rita Irwin and Dr. William Pinar, and building on the support of the Vancouver Art Gallery and many other peers and classmates recognized in the acknowledgements.

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GLOSSARY

Affect

The sensation of coming against a monumental sculptural installation, the unspeakable sudden loss of control when slipping on ice, a bodily reaction to a caress or sudden cut, affects are those indescribable moments before one reacts or responds. Affect is an experiential force, a transitory thought or that something which occurs before an idea or perception, before being conceptualized and put into language. Developed throughout his entire oeuvre, for Deleuze affect is not an emotion or a feeling, rather it is the result of the interaction of bodies and it can yield actions, changes. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994)

Assemblage

Developed by Deleuze and Guattari, most notably, in *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), the concept of assemblage refers to complex relations and connections of bodies, objects, modes of expressions coming together over different periods of time and space. For instance, the authors use the example of the feudal knight as one such machinic assemblage. More than the simply addition of a human body, a horse, weapons, a saddle and stirrups, the knight does not pre-exist the "intermingling of bodies" (p.89) and the complex interaction of all those elements together. There is no transcendent law, finality or meaning outside of any assemblage as a whole; the law of any assemblage results from its connections. (Colebrook, 2002b)

Becoming

Contrary to the predominant Western philosophical tradition since Plato, Deleuze is not interested in origins and in Being, but rather in difference and becoming. The common understanding of becoming is that of an organism, human or non-human body, moving between identitary positions; for instance, myself as an undergraduate student eventually becoming doctoral candidate. This is a view of becoming as a variation between two fixed states, but this is not how Deleuze and Guattari use the concept. In fact, as explained in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), for Deleuze and Guattari becoming doesn't have anything to do with origin and progressions towards a destination or an end point. Becoming is "always in the middle" and in-between (p.293). Becoming is the dynamism of change itself, but a change not related to the fixed concept of identity.

Desire/Desiring-assemblage

In *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) develop a view of desire unrelated to lack, or residing inside a subject who wants something she or he does not have. Desire is not related to intrinsic motivation—in psychological terminology, or acquisition. They have also tried to shift the concept of desire from the sole focus on sexuality. For them, desire is viewed as productive; desire produces reality and thus, it is a social force. Desire is a process, an affect, an event, it is not in a person or a thing. Desire is about connections and thus, one important aspect is that desire only exists within the creation of assemblages. A desiring-assemblage provides connections of forces, flows and it produces something: whether it is a new idea, an event of becoming (of any kind depending on the assemblage), or a revolution.

Deterritorialization

Deleuze and Guattari apply the concept of deterritorialization in different theoretical contexts such as music, literature, philosophy, politics, and the arts. Deterritorialization is a process, it "is the movement by which "one" leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 508). The concept of territory is complex because it is more than a fixed space with defined boundaries; a territory can be marked and created by the song calls of birds, modes of occupying the land by living organisms, a home, the signature of an artist on an artwork. A territory is an assemblage and thus malleable and always in a state of movement (Message, 2010). As an example, the tree could be seen as an assemblage and a territory. What happens to a fallen branch or leaf? The fallen leaf or branch have been deterritorialized, they keep some of their characteristics (such as their molecular composition) but they no longer function within the tree as assemblage. And yet, the fallen branch or leaf can now become reterritorialized in a bird's nest, if used as building material. In a different context, contemporary artists often explore a process of deterritorialization when they chose to remove objects, language, or practices from their everyday use or context. But when inserted in the space of the artwork, objects or practices then become reterritorialized because they enter the assemblage of the artwork, and other larger assemblages including the art museum, the artist's practice, the art market.

Difference

As elaborated in Deleuze's (1994) major work *Difference and Repetition* originally published in 1968, the concept of difference is used to challenge Western philosophy on two counts: the primacy accorded to Being and the representational image of thought. Difference is usually taken as a change between two states; by comparing two states, a difference or resemblance

from the same is noted or observed. But for Deleuze, this view implies that difference is subordinated to sameness and, thus to the concept of identity, to Being and to representation. Instead, for Deleuze (1994), difference should be conceived in terms of 'difference in itself' (p.28). Stagoll (2010b) explains that to Deleuze, there is no pre-existing unity and there is a "particularity or 'singularity' of each individual thing, moment , perception or conception" (p.75) and that this difference is internal to the thing or event, it is not subordinated to something outside of it, such as the notion of identity.

Immanence

Gilles Deleuze was a philosopher of immanence. This means that for him, everything is to be thought in terms of relations *in* something. Life is a plane of immanence, there is nothing outside of it. For Deleuze, western thought made the error of focussing on a philosophy of transcendence where any term, situation, problem is questioned or seen in relation *to* an outside, such as the concepts of God, subjectivity, being. Deleuze contends that relations of transcendence have implicit negative founding assumptions, for instance that the mind is separate from the body (Williams, 2010), and these in turn have become the ground for negative valuation—the transcendent realm being considered dominant.

Line of flight

Called "lignes de fuite" in French, the line of flight is in literal translation a line of escape or a "path of mutation" (Lorraine, 2010, p. 147) in a connection, assemblage or multiplicity. The Deleuzian term "lines of flight" is a way to tell how in an assemblage, sometimes a diversion, mutation, or new connection emerge. For example, it could be because encountering an artwork sparked a new idea, it could be a genetic mutation in an organism, or a few individuals breaking away from the habits of a political or social group and deciding to form a

new group out of the previous one. Lines of flight have the power to deterritorialize, meaning that something breaks away from an assemblage. And thus, for Deleuze lines of flight are a becoming event, they are the dynamics of change, and they are creative because they produce something new. But Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also warn that lines of flight can be "very dangerous for societies" (p.204), because no one can tell in advance what is going to be produced. According to Parr (2010c), this may be a reason why the arts are most often a primary target when political repression is applied.

Multiplicity

A concept at the basis of Deleuze's understanding of the rhizome and assemblage. Put simply, a multiplicity is a complex structure which is not dependent on size or numbers and it does not reference a prior whole or unity which has been fragmented. As he wrote in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), "everything is a multiplicity in so far as it incarnates an idea" (p.182). Ideas are multiplicities, an art gallery, a reading group, a house are multiplicities. In each case we can list their various components but it is impossible to determine what the essence of the house, for instance, is; it is a patchwork of connections in-between a structure, usages, things, habits (Roffe, 2010). Multiplicities are complex, often fluctuating, structures. We are ourselves multiplicities, always in flux, always already both part of and actors within the world as we interact with other multiplicities.

Rhizome/rhizomatic

Developed at length in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari derive the concept from the biological term of 'rhizome' used to describe a form of plant that can grow and extend itself with a horizontal root system that shoots off new plants from its nodes. In their work, the rhizome becomes a way to describe the connections in assemblages or

multiplicities, and importantly, a mode of thought. Instead of the metaphor of the dominant tree-like structure which "plots a point, fixes an order" (p.7), the rhizome has no center, no genealogy and it does away with hierarchies. The rhizome is about connections, it maps without tracing (tracing is about copying or tracing over the lines which are already there).

Singularity/Singularities

The concept of singularity is pivotal in the work of Gilles Deleuze but it finds various inflections throughout his writings. In this glossary, I will focus more specifically on a view of singularity pertaining to my use of the term for this study. As Bryant (2012) explains, singularities are immanent to things, meaning that they are intrinsically part of things, but they cannot be represented, they can only be actualized. Singularities manifest qualities and take shape when things come into contact or encounter other things in a constellation of forces, for instance the particular molecular composition of clay will make it solidify in contact with air. In the *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze (1990) asks what is an ideal event; an event, he writes, is a singularity, or more precisely an ensemble of singularities which are "turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion and condensation, and boiling; points of tear and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, sensitive points" (p.63). So, for example, the boiling point of water is the materiality of water encountering the singularities of various forces such as heat. Themselves informed by the work of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) develop a view of matter "as a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression" (p.409). And so, singularities are related to a process of individuation and of forming, but they cannot be identified before the encounter. For instance, a painter can know about the viscosity of a given oil paint, the texture of the chosen canvas, and the softness of the paintbrush, but it is the encounter or

assemblage of hand-brush-paint-canvas that will manifest all the singularities of the materiality; of the hand holding the brush, in turn responding to the thickness of the paint in contact with the texture of a canvas.

Virtual

In this study, the virtual is not related to simulated reality created by a computer software. Informed by the work of Henri Bergson, in Deleuze's ontology the virtual is real but it is not actualised. Deleuze does not oppose the virtual and the actual; while the actual is concrete, the virtual is not, but it is still real. The virtual is the mode of reality involved with potentiality; for instance, through experimentation, one can actualize what was, until then, virtual. Deleuze calls differentiation the process of actualizing the virtual (Parr, 2010b).

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DEDICATION

To my mother Rolande Bérard, for always being at the other end of the phone when I needed her, for her heartwarming and unflinching moral support. And in loving memory of my father, François Bérard who was so proud to see his daughter embark on her doctoral journey.

Merci pour tout.

PROLOGUE

To this day, I remember deserting Valentina's art gallery tour. In Moscow, Valentina was assigned as the official cultural guide to our group of travelers from Montreal. I still feel the weight of her gaze as she noticed me, deliberately making the wrong turn and silently abandoning the group and her gallery tour. I still sense her disappointment. Not through words but in my visible signs, she interpreted my gesture as a lack of interest; I made a dent in her joy. She felt pride in the beauty and the mystical presence of her beloved Russian icons. Highly knowledgeable too; for years she had studied the artists' techniques and the historical context. How could I turn my back on such a unique opportunity to learn and discover?

Our group had paused for a short visit of the State Tretyakov Gallery. I did not have enough time. Not enough minutes and hours to see everything. Valentina rushed the group through the gallery entrance, walked up the stairs and went straight into the historical galleries. Rublev's The Holy Trinity, Our Lady of Vladimir; precious century-old wooden icons surrounded me. Like a proud and loving sibling Valentina wanted to introduce every member of the family, carefully pointing out characteristics and sharing individual stories. Her tour was informative, yet after forty minutes I could still see the long row of icons we were yet to meet. They were beautiful and fascinating but I wouldn't have time to wander the rooms of the Tretyakov.

All the while, I could hear the enticing call of the art gallery waiting to be explored. Not enough time to experience the sheer physicality of the building. Not enough time to tell her about my intense longing to walk the spaces of the gallery; she took her role of the good guide seriously, she kept talking, answering. I deserted Valentina and the gallery tour. She noticed. To this day, I still feel the weight of her gaze.

No gallery floor-plan. I left the dark solemn rooms of the golden icons and wandered, jumped into the flow of corridors, rooms and stairways. Like veins and arteries, the various hallways propelled me to vital spaces in the Tretyakov. I recall the bright, rectangular marble floor rooms displaying the Malevich, Larionov and other modernists. Meandering through the works, I would slow down here and there caught by the sight of a familiar painting or captivated by the unknown. So little time left to get a sense of centuries of Russian and Soviet art. I plundered through, it was exhilarating.

Still wandering, I emerged in the original 19th Century architecture of the Tretyakov Gallery. The smell of old musty wood, the sight of low benches covered with deep burgundy velvet now tattered at the edges. There, time, space, history and my own fantasies of Russia intersected as I let my eyes caress the surfaces of paintings by Nesterov, Serov, Korin and Brodsky. Only twenty minutes left before returning to the bus and meeting point; a dreadful constraint but I got into trouble before for not abiding. I kept moving into the

flow of passages and ended up on the Tretyakov's top floor. I remember the thrill of entering the large expanse of the high wall gallery, with dim rays of pale yellow sunlight coming through the glass roof, gentle specks of dust dancing in the air. And emerging in the shadows, the sight of Chekhov and Tolstoy strolling casually while deep in discussion, absently gazing at the paintings. Around me Russian painters fascinated by Impressionism and the Symbolism yet creating their own new vocabulary to tell of the land, the Orthodox priests, the peasant revolts, the datchas and a young girl at the kitchen table. I read a few labels, the names have faded away but affects remain present.

I turned a corner...and there he was; Mikhail Vrubel's Seated Daemon. To this day, I remember standing there, frozen yet intensely alive. I recall being transfixed by the luscious colors, the vibrant paint handling. I still feel the unspeakable and sensuous presence of the male daemon with the intense gaze, yet peacefully resting until another desire for him to rise. Him, so beautiful, so oblivious of my own existence.

INTRODUCTION

Three background moments to the study

Purpose and focus of the study

My research topic is the experience of encountering art in a gallery setting while taking into consideration the artwork, the visitor or public but also the multiplicity of material forces (human, non-human, discursive, spatial) and the fluid connections weaved in-between. The study took shape in the entanglements of a multitude of events, ideas, doubts, experiences, questioning and desire to understand, not so much what the art encounter *is* or how it functions for the visitor, since these questions are already being explored in museum research but rather, I am interested to inquire what the art encounter produces. Such a question is relevant in today's scholarship because in terms of an event, encountering art circulates throughout my practice and my journey as art museum educator¹; in particular when I am involved in aesthetic education providing gallery tours, lectures, artist talks or developing interpretation strategies, or creating particular situations or invitations for encountering art. The study also aims to expand the terminology frequently used in museum

¹ Philosopher Maxine Greene (2001) establishes a distinction between "aesthetic education" and "art education". Aesthetic education is about facilitating an "appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts (p.6). The focus is on bringing individuals to notice and see the various characteristics in a particular work of art, and through experiencing the artworks, for the artworks to become meaningful in one's life because new connections are made, new ideas and ways of seeing emerge. Art education is mostly concerned with learning and exploring the various artistic techniques and media through direct experience. Greene encourages connections between the two disciplines since the physical exploration of an artistic medium opens one to ask aesthetic questions about artworks. Following Greene's distinction, my practice and role at the art gallery encompass both aesthetic and art education. In this dissertation, I will use the term 'art education' as an umbrella term which includes both the 'aesthetic' looking and perceiving and the hands-on exploration, since I understand them as closely interrelated.

education to describe the experience of encountering art. While the vocabulary provided by educational psychology to interpret and explain the cognitive, emotional, physical, social experience of the visitor remains significant and useful, for my theoretical framework I decided to work with the concepts of encounter, assemblage and desire from philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and in his collaborative writings with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari². Thinking with Deleuze implies a view of the subject as an assemblage of a multiplicity of elements, and always in a process of becoming due to encounters and experimentation. Since it was imperative for me to think with a Deleuzian framework, a number of methodological commitments followed. In particular, this is an empirical study of a different kind, one in line with post-qualitative research and the new empiricisms (St. Pierre, 2015) or new materialism (Coole & Frost, 2010); that is, research methodologies more attuned to the importance of matter and processes of materialization or how research enacts its object of study. In my

² For a comprehensive and polyvocal biography the collaboration between Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, consult, François Dosse (2011). *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*. Here are some notes on the collaboration between Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: In May 1968, the streets of Paris were the theatre for student manifestations and class struggles that will deeply shake the foundations of French society. During that time, philosopher Gilles Deleuze (b. 1925-d.1995) was at an important turn in his professional life. He had been working previously on the history of philosophy – Hume, Kant, Spinoza and Nietzsche - and was then finishing *Difference and Repetition* (1994/1968), a post-structural critique about the concept of identity, and *Logique du Sens* (1969) where he develops his view on the event and becoming. Félix Guattari (b. 1930-d. 1992) was a militant psychoanalyst, the director of the La Borde psychiatric clinic, and a social scientist. Deleuze and Guattari met in 1969; they were introduced by a mutual friend also working at La Borde and to whom Deleuze had expressed his interest on the topics of madness yet knew he missed disciplinary knowledge in psychoanalysis. Guattari had been up to that point a faithful disciple of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, but Lacan did not return the favor and distanced Guattari from his close circle of followers. During his first meeting with Deleuze, Guattari shared an outline of a paper entitled “Machines and Structures” which he planned to present at the Freudian School of Paris. Stimulated by some of Deleuze’s ideas elaborated in *Difference and Repetition* (1994/1968), the conversation encouraged Guattari to dare an official attack and criticism of Lacan’s focus on the Œdipal triangulation of mother/father/child, and his thesis resting on the importance of the signifier- the system of signs. As Foucault notes in his preface to *Anti-Œdipus*, this act of subversion against Lacan was shocking for the French intelligentsia. Indeed until 1965, every intellectual had to become familiar with Marx, remain faithful to Freud’s ideas and treat the system of signs with “the greatest respect” (p.xi). But Deleuze and Guattari went on to elaborate their critique of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, afterwards they embarked in a fruitful collaboration lasting until 1991 with the publication of *What is Philosophy?* (1994).

study, this implies that the research design does not follow the usual structure of, for instance, interview-transcription of data-coding-analysis. Instead, the research closely adheres to the theoretical framework and I have crafted the research as a Deleuzian assemblage, a dynamic constellation of interconnected objects, bodies, ideas such as: field notes, the writing in/of personal narratives of my encounters, photographs, the lived inquiry of embodied encounterings in the gallery space, and scholarly texts. Throughout the research process, two guiding questions remained present:

1) *With the production of data in autobiographical fieldnotes, how does Deleuze's concepts of encounter, desire and assemblage help me to think and inquire about my art encounters? What insights can I bring forth on the art encounter?*

2) *In what ways does thinking with Deleuzian concepts enlarge received discourses in art education and museum education about the art encounter within the art museum?*

The guiding questions for this study came together over time, like a constellation of tiny forces in the water and environment that build up and coalesce at some point to become forceful waves rising, turning, folding and unfurling into one another; the outside of waves rolling in, eventually becoming an inside. Both inner and outer surfaces connecting, and merging with it the potential to produce another wave. The folding of events and ideas as a wave is an idea which I borrow from Deleuze (2006) who in his book on Michel Foucault, proposes that to think is "to fold, to double the outside with a coextensive inside" (p.97). It would serve little purpose for me in trying to locate a beginning to this study but there are situations, moments, acting as a multitude of folds coming together and prompting me to inquire about the experience of encountering art in my ever fluid roles as an art historian and art museum educator. These various moments or background stories are very different, yet all are connected to encounters with art, impacting me or others and, they have built up to form

this powerful wave. A wave that gathered momentum, and as it rolled, all the various moments and situations started to connect. The outside of the wave now forming the inside and in my case producing questions and the desire to further inquire experience as a milieu which provides opportunities for encounters with art, and the production or the actualization of affects and ideas.

In the next three sections, I will introduce the reader to the three background moments that are significant in this research as assemblage. The chapter comes to a close by describing the site of the study and I also provide some words on the structure of the dissertation.

First moment - My studies in art history and professional work as art museum educator

A first background moment resides in my training as an art historian and subsequent position at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal where I worked for fifteen years. I began as a gallery-interpreter³ providing tours to both children and adults, and a few years

³ In this study, I use the terms gallery-interpreter, museum educator, museum interpreter to describe my work inside the art gallery. In Canada, each museum institution has a different set of designation and division of roles that vary according to the history of the institution, and set of organizational practices. In most instances, the museum educator will be responsible for coordination, conceptualization and implementation of educational programs, as opposed to the gallery-interpreter or tour-guide who mostly facilitates gallery tours. A museum educator works specifically in the education department (this denomination can also vary, such as education services, museum learning, direction artistique et éducative) or in public programs. Drawing from Welsh (2013), the function of interpretation is broader, for it includes:

(...) all of the means and media – including effective application of emerging technologies – by which the museum conveys its messages, principally through exhibits and programming – and extends to exhibition design and docent training. Interpretation also involves assessments of the museum's effectiveness in delivering its messages. (p. 443)

Hence, I understand museum interpreters to encompass museum educators but I also conceive of curators, exhibition designers, even the marketing and communication department to be involved in

later I became *Responsable des visites*⁴. My responsibility was to develop the in-gallery educational programs; by being involved in the everyday work of coordinating and facilitating gallery tours, but also collaborating with artists and curators for public talks, and facilitating modes of engagement for the museum public. And for the past eight years, I now occupy a position of gallery-interpreter at the Vancouver Art Gallery where I was granted permission to do my field work in two exhibitions between the months of March to early September 2015.

As I made my entry into the educational realm of art museums in the early 1990s, a persistent sense of lack emerged for me, for I questioned if I was fully prepared in my pedagogical approaches with the art museum's visitors. I started to wonder what it even meant to experience art, and what was my role as a museum educator. At university, my learning was focused in art theory and the history of art, and thus mostly on the art object which I could analyze from every socio-political, cultural, historical and theoretical perspective. But I learned to trouble the simplistic and elitist view of my role as teaching the skills of the expert art historian. For one, many other art museum educators at the time turned to what has been called the 'new art history'⁵. Emerging and proliferating in the 1970s

interpretation for the public. It must also be noted that in larger institutions, professional roles are usually very distinct, but in smaller institutions the same person can occupy numerous roles, such as planning an exhibition, while at the same time devising a public program of activities to enrich and facilitate the visitors' experience.

⁴ More specifically, from 1995 to 2008, I was responsible for conceptualizing and implementing numerous interpretive strategies such as gallery tours, audioguides, specific extended labels and texts, small didactic exhibitions, lectures and artists' talks. In my early days, my work was informed by art historical discourse, theories of contemporary art and the new museology concerned with politics of display, discourse, power, interpretation (see Barker, 1999; Duncan, 1995; Greenberg, Ferguson, & Nairne, 1996; Karp & Lavine, 1991; Preziosi, 1998; Serota, 1997; Sherman & Rogoff, 1994; Vergo, 1989). My pedagogical interventions would also draw extensively from readings in teaching methods and communication skills, museum research and educational psychology on visitors' experience and learning styles (Dufresne-Tassé, Sauvé, Banna, Lepage, & Weltzl Fairchild, 2000; Falk & Dierking, 1992, 2000; Gardner, 1985; Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Lachapelle, 1991), on cognitive stages (Housen, 1992; Housen & Yenawine, 2001) and various texts on the museum as discourse and curricular space (Duncan, 1995; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Roberts, 1997; Vallance, 1995).

⁵ Writing on the intellectual history of art museum education, Melinda Mayer (2005, 2007) examined the emergence in the 1970s of new approaches to the study of art and art history, these practices were

and onwards, the feminist and post-colonial critiques⁶ concerning the complex racial, gendered, cultural power structures of art historical discourse and inside the art museum, shifted the way art museum educators (and curators) viewed and theorized the visitor's experience. In a nutshell, art museum educators became interested in the new art histories because the scholarship provided concepts and theoretical tools to: interrogate the complex racial, gendered, cultural, social power structures inside the gallery (Duncan, 1991; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992), challenge a monolithic and top-down transmission view of knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004), and complicate the nature of meaning and interpretation by accepting that meaning is not embedded in the object but rather, it is a process derived from the encounter by a perceiver within a cultural context. (Bal & Bryson, 1991; Muhlberger, 1985; Roberts, 1997).

Spending so much time in the gallery space with other visitors also made me realize that I had perhaps failed to, or not fully, considered the constellation of forces in the entangled and material experience of the viewer. Interestingly, David Ebitz (2007) found out, in his research on the theories used in/by art museum education, that professionals traditionally trained in art history or the visual arts turned to visitor-centered learning

no longer concerned solely with attribution, style, taste, and iconography. Loosely grouped under the term 'new art history', these new approaches were informed by feminist, cultural, post-colonial, critical and ecological theories. More specifically, for a historiography of the term 'new art history', see Harris (2001), Rees and Bordello (1986)

⁶ The literature in feminist theory and postcolonial critique of art history and by extension art museums is too numerous for me to do it justice here, but I will mention key texts significant for my own learning. In feminist theory and the challenge of the canon of Western art, figure the influential articles by Nochlin (1971) "Why have there been no great women artists?", Duncan's (1989) "The MOMA's hot mamas", and Tickner (1978) "The body politics: Female sexuality and women artists since 1970". Also important moments in the articulation of feminist theory are: Broude & Garrard (1982), *Feminism and Art History*; Lippard (1976), *From Center: Feminist Essays in Women's Art*; Parker & Pollock (2013 [1981]), *Old Mistresses*; and Pollock (1988), *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. As part of the fields of postcolonial and cultural studies are: Bhabha (1994), *The Location of Culture*; Hall (1980), "Cultural studies: Two paradigms"; Said's *Orientalism* (1979), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993); and finally Spivak (1987), *In Other Worlds*.

approaches in the 1980s and 1990s. More specifically, art museum educators started to adapt to the gallery context, learning theories drawn from psychology of the individual⁷. This was also my strategy, and I turned to educational literature, and studies specifically in art museum education, to learn about the viewer's emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes when experiencing art (see footnote four in this chapter for a list of titles).

Much of museum educational research is premised on what Falk and Dierking (2000) consider to be the key role of museums as "public institutions for personal learning" (p.xii). As Hooper-Greenhill (1991) points out, the public museums of the nineteenth century had education as their core function, the ideal museum was meant to be an "advanced school of self-instruction" (p.25). This aim was embedded in complex ideological representations of wealth, power, colonialism, knowledge, nonetheless via exhibition displays and especially education as teaching and learning, museums sought to participate in public instruction. Historians of museum and gallery education have examined the important shifts that occurred in the teaching/learning dynamics. As I made my way into the art museum, the image of the museum of the Enlightenment where the favorite model of teaching as the transmission of knowledge provided by the curator as expert, was definitely being challenged. Instead, I learned about constructivist conceptions of learning⁸ with a focus on museum

⁷ David Ebitz (2007, 2008) asked museum educators attending an annual convention of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) to list the theories which inform their practice. At the top of the list, most cited Howard Gardner's Theory of multiple intelligences, Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine's Visual thinking strategies, followed by John Dewey's (1997) *Experience and Education*, Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow or the psychology of optimal experience, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development and constructivism. Further down the list, a few art museum educators were drawing from Maxine Greene's (1995) *Releasing the Imagination*, Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, and Hans Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Postcolonial theory came last. I need to point out that Ebitz's surveys date from 2005 or so, and we do not know the provenance of the museum educators. Nonetheless, this list follows very closely my own reading list as I progressed in the field of Canadian art museum education. To my knowledge, a similar but more recent survey has not been done.

⁸ It is Georges E. Hein (1991, 1998) who, in the early 1990s, heralded and brought constructivist ideas into the field of museum education. With its core ideas already expressed in John Dewey,

visitors' meaning-making process; via exhibitions but also their culture, previous knowledge and experiences, and the conditions of their visit (Hein, 1998, 2006; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994).

With current economic pressures for public art museum to justify their role in the social fabric, learning is one of the keyword to promote the museum educational experience. I suggest that the naturalized description of the art museum as a space of *learning* needs to be complicated and de-centered in order to allow for a new vocabulary, thus adding to the vocabulary already in use from art history or educational psychology, that is generative to think about the art experience. To put it succinctly, I do not deny that through experience learning happens, or wish to critique learning *per se*. I came to question what are the limitations, what shadows are cast, if art museum educators think of the experience of encountering—not exclusively of course, but predominantly—with concepts from theories of learning, where experience is viewed in terms of the construction of meaning. To be clear, I am not implying that learning theories should be put aside, on the contrary. Simply, as a museum educator, I am curious to inquiry what view of the art encounter would be enacted, or how I could think, the experience in terms of inter-connections happening in the complex assemblage of viewer, artwork, context of display, museum spaces, ideas, discourse, other non-human materialities, and so on.

This questioning manifested itself as I entered the field of art museum education but it continued until the doctoral studies, and even now but today with the vocabulary of Gilles

constructivism is a theory of learning and knowledge in which learners individually and socio-culturally construct knowledge for themselves. According to Hein, constructivism was important for museum education because instead of seeing knowledge as 'out there' or residing in the object itself or the topic of a display, in constructivism the focus is on the museum visitor, prior knowledge and that learning is active, it happens through/in/with experiences. Hein's view of the constructivist museum (1998) are still important and influential in today's museum education, in science museums in particular, but also for art museum education (see De Backer et al., 2014).

Deleuze. Nonetheless, this first moment overlaps with another prompt framed by my decision to join a tour offered at the Université de Montréal and traveling along the Trans-Siberian Railways. Still charmed and haunted years after my reading of *Michel Strogoff* a novel published in 1896 by French author Jules Verne, I could not resist the call of this journey and the thoughts of encountering the city of Moscow.

Second moment - A visit at Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery

I described earlier in the prologue to this study what emerged for me as another prompt or moment; a narrative recounting my visit to Moscow's State Tretyakov Gallery. The text was produced for a doctoral seminar, one for which I decided to experiment with Laurel Richardson's practice of writing as a method of inquiry (2000). In choosing words and moments to relate and somehow re-present my visit in the art museum, I wondered if I would see, understand differently how I heard the call of the Tretyakov's spaces, how I withdrew from Valentina's excellent gallery tour of masters in icon painting in order to go and explore the dark galleries filled with paintings telling the history of old Russia. As Richardson (2000b) shared about her process of writing in research; "I write because I want to find out something. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it" (2000b, p.924). Fascinated by the generative act of writing, I decided to embark in writing as a mode of inquiry, to examine how, even when visitors are engaged in an educational program or a situation of mediation⁹, they can suddenly decide to leave an activity, slip through the cracks,

⁹ In a nutshell, the term mediation refers to the full range of strategies, tools and resources put in place by a museum to facilitate the relationship between the visitor and a work of art. This includes the exhibitions, catalogues and the work of curators, but also the guided tours, workshops and various public programs meant to inform and enhance the visitor's encounter with art. See, Desvallées & Mairesse (2010).

transform the educational offering or even refuse the invitation. I revisited this narrative during the writing of my comprehensive exams and, interestingly, the initial question that prompted me to write this piece shifted. By then informed by Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa Mazzei's (2012, 2013) method of thinking with theory, I became interested to unpack my account, without coding, but instead by putting it to work with theoretical concepts in order to see what knowledge could be produced for myself and other art museum educators and curators who will read this study. Following Jackson and Mazzei, this means that instead of looking at my narrative as data to be coded in order to find larger themes, using a concept such as affect or assemblage necessarily frames and make possible certain analytical questions. And thus, reading the narratives with philosopher Gilles Deleuze's concepts such as affect (a non-verbal experiential force or intensity and the result of the interaction of bodies), desire (an experimental and productive force), and assemblage (an assemblage establishes connections between complex physical, conceptual, material structures) produced something I had not noticed before. For instance, it prompted me to realize how the pale light seeping through the old gallery's glass rooftop, the faint smell of wood, the muted sounds in the gallery unspeakably affected my body. How I created my own desiring-assemblage¹⁰, my connections with the rich gallery space, walking without a purpose but discovering at every turn, like a *flâneur* strolling without any attempt to remember artist names or notice stylistic periods, simply strolling until happened the suspended moment of coming against the large, jewel toned painting of the *Demon Seated* by Mikhail Vrubel¹¹. Neither did I know about the artist or the painting, and I am not sure why this painting stopped me in my path.

¹⁰ For the reader, a glossary of terms for the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari can be consulted on page x.

¹¹ Here is a link to a visual of *Demon Seated* painted in 1890 by Mikhail Aleksandrovich Vrubel: <https://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/en/collection/show/image/id/252> Retrieved June 15, 2017.

Psychologists could certainly suggest interpretations to explain my behavior, but I am interested in what this encounter produced, how twenty years later I re-live the moment, do Internet research on Vrubel and revisit this little event in my dissertation. Perhaps, this is why I became intrigued when I read a short passage by historian Timothy Brook in which he describes his own experience of strolling in the gallery space and he came upon a painting he knew from reproductions, but turned out to be "a fundamental *encounter*" (Deleuze, 1994, p.139), one that produces and creates thinking.

Third moment - A reading, *View of Delft* by Timothy Brook

And so, my third background event was another chance encounter. It is a written passage by historian Timothy Brook (2008) in which he describes his experience with *View of Delft* by seventeenth century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer:

I encountered the painting for the first time on a visit to the Mauritshuis thirty-five years after I landed in Delft. I went there to see *Girl with a Pearl Earring* and I did. I knew that there were other Vermeers on display as well, though I did not know which ones until I turned into the corner room on the top floor and found myself facing his *View of Delft*. The painting was larger than I expected, busier and far more complex in its modulation of light and shade than reproductions revealed. As I was trying to decipher the buildings in the painting based on what I knew from seventeenth-century maps, it dawned on me that Delft was ten minutes away by train. Why not compare Vermeer's rendition with real life, especially if the seventeenth century were still as present as I suspected? I rushed downstairs to the gift shop, bought a postcard of the painting, and hurried to

the station. The train pulled out four minutes later, and in no time I was back in Delft.
(pp. 10-11)

I came upon this narrative of an experience with art completely by chance, while preparing to tour a new exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, one focused on precious objects and artworks belonging to the Imperial Museum in Beijing. Timothy Brook, a sinologist and Ming scholar, collaborated with the curatorial team both in terms of layout and interpretive material. Wanting to learn more about Chinese history, I bought a copy of *Vermeer's Hat. The Seventeenth Century and The Dawn of The Global World* and soon Brook's engaging prose grabbed my attention as a reader. In part, this passage caught my attention due to the author's choice of words and vivid descriptors to share his moment of recognition, and yet surprise, of seeing the painting *View of Delft*, a famous painting he obviously knew from photographic reproductions.

Perhaps due to my training as an art historian and art museum educator, I also noticed that in telling his meeting with the artwork, Brook chose to provide the reader with a summary description of the painting's formal properties¹² — such as the composition and the effects of light and shade (the painter's use of color and values), common to most description in the field of art history or art criticism. Interestingly though, he also finds it worthy to share an embodied aesthetic property such as the scale of the painting which surprised him and defied his expectation because the painting is larger than he had thought. Furthermore, drawing from previous knowledge and his memory of old maps, Brook attempts to read the

¹² In the disciplines of art history and art education, the formal description consists of identifying the visual elements (also called elements of design) seen in the artwork such as: the composition, colors, forms and shapes, textures, lines and the space. The formal description should then lead to an analysis which examines how the visual elements affect, contribute to the representation. See: Barnett (2014). *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* and Feldman (1968, 1985, 1994) on art criticism in the context of art education.

various painted motifs as signs in order to reconstruct seventeenth century Delft. I could continue to unpack Brook's description but suffice to say that this short passage points to his experience with some references to his bodily perception of an art object, and he described some formal qualities which he sees as attributes of the art object. He decided to keep under silence the gallery setting, ambient lighting, sounds, and other sensorial characteristics of the Maurithuis.

Why my interest in this passage? Admittedly, so far Brook's account remains close to a Kantian conception of the aesthetic experience as, "[...] the full exercise of all our sensory, cognitive and affective capacities in the appreciation of works of art" (Goldman, 2005, p. 259). But the passage reveals so much more. And by reveal, I do not imply any desire in the text to 'reflect' his experience, but I read it for what Brook chose to tell the reader. For as Michel Foucault (1991) reminds us, "[...] an experience is neither true nor false: it is always a fiction, something constructed, which exists only after it has been made, not before; it isn't something that is "true", but it has been a reality" (p.36). And thus, I particularly became captive of the text when Brook embarked on a line of thought, a wonderful line of flight made of connections and relations of 'and', 'and', 'and'. Brook was looking and engaging with Vermeer's painting, and then he realized that the actual city of Delft was nearby; that's the little line of flight, a little opening in his assemblage with the painting, and the larger assemblage of the Maurithuis. And this little line of flight produces an idea; he buys a postcard and leaves the gallery to jump on a train so he could re-visit Delft, and discover for himself Vermeer's point of view.

My doctoral study aims to inquire into the qualities and productive potential of the art encounter and I remember that reading Brook's brief description of an encounter triggered a

number of questions to the art experience as educational and one way to augment one's capacity to act in the world. I will share some of my first thoughts, and early questioning, as a way to show precisely that my theoretical and research interest is in shifting away from the viewer/artwork binary towards, as Foucault (1997) proposes, finding the means "for thinking about everything that is happening" (p.325). Hence, I remember playfully unpacking Brook's narrative prose by asking myself: how would one describe Brook's encounter with *View of Delft*? Should one write only about the moment when the historian finds himself in front of - or against, *contra*- to use the etymology of encounter- the painting? Or perhaps, the encounter began the moment Brook entered the Maurithuis, already open to an experience, attentive and intrinsically motivated¹³, since Brook already knew that the gallery displayed famous works by Vermeer. How can one inquire both about Brook's strolling around the gallery, his contingent meeting with *View of Delft*, and the knowledge gained from this encounter? Does the encounter and experience of the *View of Delft* end the moment he turns away and decide to hop on a train? Playing with these speculative ideas allowed me to start articulating my interest in the concept of encounter as developed by Deleuze.

Of course, Timothy Brook's prose describing his encounter is mediated by a choice of relevant artistic terminology, carefully selected words, literary effects to grab the reader's attention and move forward his narrative. Albeit I will not rehearse the argument here, philosopher Jacques Derrida (1997) has elaborated in his book *Of Grammatology* about language as being both necessary yet inadequate to convey the complexity and richness of what words attempt to refer to (Dimitridiadis & Kamberelis, 2006). Knowing this, I am most

¹³ While my work is not grounded in psychology of the Subject and constructivist theories, I certainly do not reject these theoretical lenses and, in the field of museum studies, I recommend the following seminal, and still influential, work grounded in cognitive psychology by: Hein (1998), Hooper-Greenhill (1991,1994), Falk and Dierking (1992, 2000, 2013).

intrigued by Brook's choice of words and what he shares with the reader as he recollects and perhaps, partially recreates a new encounter with *View of Delft*. I see something being produced in the encounter, for as soon as Brook establishes a connection, according to his narrative, between his visual observations and his knowledge that he might visit in person the city of Delft. Of course, the reader will never know what this encounter produced for Brook, besides his growing scholarly interest in trade routes, perhaps the historian does not know himself. Yet I am curious about the words Brook chose to share what followed the meeting with *View of Delft*. How he wanted to stand at the exact spot Vermeer stood when he drafted his study for the painting. Being in presence of the artwork and as connections between knowledge and ideas were made, a little space opened for something to leak, to unfold, it opened up a path, in Deleuze's terminology a 'line of flight' producing a new idea and the power to respond. These three background moments also opened a line of flight, which after many twists and turns, became the starting points for this study.

Opening a line of flight - The study

The three moments I have described folded onto each other, and by connecting served to produce new thoughts and questions about the messy, fluid, complex, multi-dimensional experience of encountering artworks in exhibitions spaces. Educated in art history, I have learned to frame and think the experience of art with aesthetic categories, feminist theory, cultural studies, and sociology of art. Having worked in art museum education for twenty years, I have come to know about the cognitive, emotional, perceptual and other psychological processes at play in the art experience. These knowings and practices have informed my practice as a museum educator, and in different ways continue to do so, but they

will not be explicitly framing my study. For as my professional background folded onto my encounters in the Tretyakov or Brook's encounter with *View of Delft*, these knowings somehow did not help me think about my body being affected by the pulsating historical and physical pull of an art gallery, about the material connections being made *in* the encounter, or about what the encounter produces.

This study aims to contribute to existing scholarship in the visual arts focused on the art experience and art museum education, and also the emerging scholarship interested to inquire art and art education alongside Deleuzian concepts¹⁴. Situated at the intersection of art museum education, the art experience, with the thinking and writing of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (and his work done in collaboration with French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari), this study will inquire with the concepts of encounter, desire, assemblage because Deleuzian philosophy is about connections, about experimentation; not so much about the 'what is' but rather about *how does it work* and *what does encountering art do?* In other words, I wish to open a line of flight by taking the concept of art experience I have come to know— through studies in aesthetics, critical pedagogy, educational psychology, hermeneutics, phenomenology- and both connect and enter it into a Deleuzian territory, this one informed by recent scholarship thinking art with Deleuzian concepts, see the scholars in footnote number fourteen, and the work of Simon O'Sullivan (2001, 2006, 2010) who is especially useful because of his interest in contemporary art. This, I contend, will enable new understandings about the experience of encountering art because many concepts are used differently. For instance, I have long been concerned to complicate and move away from the

¹⁴ In recent years, the number of titles with the keywords art and Deleuze has grown exponentially. Here I will briefly mention a list of scholars who are studying art education from, or an engagement with, a Deleuzian perspective: Beier (2013), Garoian (2013, 2014, 2017), Irwin (2013), Irwin and Springgay (2008), jagodzinski (2005, 2017), Lemaire (2015), Richardson (2013, 2017), Schulte (2015), Springgay (2011a, 2016), Sweeny (2013), Wallin(2010).

binary perceiver and the perceived. For, as Stagoll (2010c) explains, for Deleuze the dichotomy of perceiver and perceived is without ground because one never simply gaze upon an object because there's always numerous and a multiplicity of interactions (at macro or micro level, material or immaterial) being involved. And there's always a complex set of forces at play; from the imperceptible movements of the body responding to affects, the materiality of the artworks in my path, the noises in the gallery, if one is hungry or tired, people passing by, the sense of time, the moisture of coldness in the air, or the sense perception of the artworks qualities. Yet, it is important to add that to Deleuze, forces are not defined as pressure or something aggressive but as "any capacity to produce a change" (Stagoll, 2010, p.111). And thus, what would it mean to consider the art experience, not as a starting point on a path that leads, or should lead, to a learning *about* or an ideal of transformation, but rather as a complex assemblage which produces more connections, ideas, flows, and as a milieu for emerging subjectivities, affects and new thoughts?

And so, how do I inquire the messy, relational experience of encountering art? How to proceed in order to map out and inquire, without tracing and without trying to contain into one tidy narrative, these complex set of forces at play in an encounter? Deleuze (2001) suggested that "theory is an inquiry, which is to say, a practice [...]" (p.36), therefore thinking with Deleuze calls for my study to make certain empirical and methodological commitments; in particular regarding the question of subjectivity and the de-centering of the researcher, and the research process as assemblage. Although Deleuze's view of subjectivity shifts slightly between his early and later works it is never, Boundas (2010a) explains, defined as the image of the pre-existent, fixed and unified individual. Instead, a person or subject is "an assemblage of heterogeneous elements" (p.274) and is in a constant process of subjectivation, meaning that "subjectivity is not given; it is always under construction" (p.274). And thus, engaging

with Deleuze was an invitation to shape my research process as an assemblage, which is a co-functioning multiplicity "made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p.69).

As a research-assemblage, this study is made up of heterogeneous terms such as; my personal narratives based on my encounters with specific artworks, some photographs of the artworks simply taken with my cellular phone, my "writing as a method of inquiry" (Richardson, 2000, p.923), the writings of Gilles Deleuze, and the background moments which I have just shared and are always actual and co-functioning in this little machine which is the research. Although I am the hand taking the pictures and the narrative are written in the first person, the photographs are other terms in the assemblage, they are not to be seen as central nodes, they are not captioned nor numbered. The images are not to be seen as documenting the fixed, central position of the researcher, but rather act as lines connecting various experiences in the gallery space, theory, knowledge, past experiences and future projections. Dispersed throughout the study, the personal narratives and the photographs serve as encounters for the reader. Furthermore, informed by the methodology of a/r/tography; the juxtaposition of text and photographic renderings of the artworks, enact my own encounters and the emergence of my un-thought concerning the experience of encountering art.

Site of the study

The study was conducted at the Vancouver Art Gallery in Vancouver, Canada. Founded in 1931, the Vancouver Art Gallery is the largest public art museum in Western Canada, it houses a permanent collection of more than 11, 000 artworks with a focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia, as well as First Nations artists.

Located in downtown Vancouver in the renovated neo-classical building of what was originally the Provincial Courthouse, today the gallery includes four floors of exhibition spaces, and an extensive offer of public events and educational programs¹⁵.

Permission to do my fieldwork in two large exhibitions presented in Winter and Summer of 2015, was granted by the chief curator Daina Augaitis and the Vancouver Art Gallery director Kathleen Bartels¹⁶. During a period spanning over six months and most often after my workday as a museum educator touring school groups or adults, I would grab my oral consent scripts and walk, stroll, read, photograph, observe, engage in a conversation, take notes and linger in a section of the exhibition for an hour or so. There, I would write down observations and thoughts, as a way to generate data, embark already in the process of "writing as a *method of inquiry*" (Richardson, 2000, p. 923) and attempt an ever so fragmented yet enjoyable act of giving a written form to experiences of encountering the installations. As I mentioned, the artworks were displayed in two exhibitions of contemporary art on show while I was doing my fieldwork: four large installations were displayed in *Unscrolled. Reframing Tradition in Contemporary Chinese Art*¹⁷, these were, *Bang* by Ai Weiwei (2010-2014), *Background Story: Ten Thousand Li of Mountains and Rivers* by Xu Bing (2014), *Shan Shui – Cosmos* by Sun Xun (2014), and *Black Beauty: A Living Totem* by Jennifer Wen Ma (2014)¹⁸. And five artworks were part of *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth. An Exhibition by*

¹⁵ This information about the Vancouver Art Gallery was retrieved from the website of the institution at: <http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/about-us/about-us.html>. Retrieved June 15, 2017.

¹⁶ See appendix A for a copy of the approved Oral Consent Script I would hand-out every time I engaged in conversation with a visitor, and would use to contextualize my study.

¹⁷ The exhibition was organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery, co-curated by Diana Freundl, Assistant Curator, and Carol Liu, Beijing art critic. It was shown from November 15, 2014 to April 6, 2015. See: https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_unscrolled.html Retrieved June 15, 2017. See also the exhibition catalogue *Unscrolled. Reframing Tradition in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Freundl & Lu, 2015).

¹⁸ See the list of works on page ix for the full reference.

Geoffrey Farmer¹⁹, these were: *Four Frankensteins* (2015), *Storeroom Overture* (2015), *The Last Two Million Years* (2007), *The Surgeon and the Photographer* (2009 -), *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* (2015)²⁰.

The Vancouver Art Gallery was presenting other exhibitions at the time but these two exhibitions of contemporary art were so compelling that my fieldwork also emerged because of the presence of certain artworks within these exhibitions. I do not know exactly how I came to choose the works by Ai Weiwei, Jennifer Wen Ma, Xu Bing, Sun Xun, or the larger installations from Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer. Perhaps they chose me. Mostly, I still remember the intensity of affects when I encountered these artworks for the first time. In a Deleuzian framework, affects are not emotions as in the everyday sense of the word. Affect is an intensity, it's an "experiential force" (Colman, 2010, 12), it is the change or variation that occurs when bodies, things events come into contact. Affect is also pre-conceptual, so the naming of that change, however subtle or impactful, happens after. From the first moment I stepped into the exhibition, I remember the powerful visual impact of seeing Ai Weiwei's monumental assemblage of eight hundred and eighty-six stools inside the high wall gallery, and then the playful joy of strolling in and through the work, sensing the precarious balance of the assemblage resting on old wooden stools. Xu Bing's sculptural installation was sheer beauty at the sight of peaceful mountain landscape, but also a site of fascination when it turned out to be constructed out of mundane materials. And the work by Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer was also sheer intellectual and experiential delight, the artist having staged

¹⁹ The exhibition was organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director with Diana Freundl, Assistant Curator. It was shown May 30 to September 7, 2015. https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_farmer.html Retrieved June 15, 2017.

²⁰ See the list of works on page ix for the full reference.

for the visitor particular invitations to move and discover his past and current artistic practice.

For this study, my in-gallery research activities occurred sometimes on the weekend but, most often, after a busy day of tours and art workshops with students. I would spend an hour or two with an installation. Often at random, I would gravitate towards a piece such as *Shan Shui — Cosmos* by Sun Xun (2014), simply sitting in the middle of the room, admiring the colorful rendering of birds in flight moving across the projection of an old scroll landscape from the Song dynasty, or the hand drawn animation of sea monsters' ferocious fighting. Sense impressions, thoughts, observations of other visitors moving in the space were written down. I would take a few random pictures, what would be the use or purpose of these images, I was not yet certain. At times, another visitor would open a conversation; these moments were contingent but I consider them also constitutive of my experiences of encountering art. The reader will be introduced to E. in a later chapter, she was simply a visitor who noticed me diligently writing notes and she opened up the conversation. From then on, my notes were not about her experience but rather how our conversation expanded my web of connections with the artwork. The scratch notes, the photographs, or the comments and observations of other visitors are not to be seen as ways to excavate what an experience of encountering art is; they are not to be taken as ways to trace the unfolding of stages or psychological processes as one experiences an artwork. Rather, the narratives and photographs are both mappings and enactments of my experiences of encountering art.

Some preliminary words on the structure of the study

In-between and inter-connecting the various chapters where I examine the concepts of experience, encounter, assemblage, desire and, as closing thoughts, the concept of mediators, the reader is invited into encounters. It was my intention to open a narrative space inviting the reader into creating their own experience of encountering written text and photographs of an artwork. There is no particular or required reading sequence between each narrative section but I did follow a chronological order in terms of the exhibitions. At the Vancouver Art Gallery, first opened the exhibition *Unscrolled: Unframing Contemporary Chinese Art* and, after closing, a few weeks later was presented the solo exhibition *Geoffrey Farmer. How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?* I wrote the narratives in the sequence presented and my photographs weaved through or placed alongside, also follow the movements of my body. The point of view in the photograph is one captured by the camera, but it does not necessarily follow the path of my gaze at that specific instant. The materiality of the recording device also had a form of agency since it partially blocked my view every time I took a picture, and somehow, I adjusted or interacted myself in response. That moment made me I think about the pioneering work by Richard Lachapelle (1994) who for his doctoral dissertation made the methodologically innovative decision of providing in addition to the participants' interviews, video cameras to his participants so they could film the dynamic path of their gaze upon the artworks. More recently, some research teams (Troendle & Tschacher, 2012) provide museum visitors with specially designed monitoring gloves to measure the physiological impact of artworks, or with visual tracking glasses to support the study of cognitive processes (Heidenreich & Turano, 2011). Yet, since recording devices have ontological implications (see Law, 2004) because they enact realities about the object of study, for art museum researchers the question remains; the question of generating data and

whether a more technologically advanced recording device can provide better information or knowledge about the art encounter.

In this study, the reader is invited to connect with the research through the narratives and my photographs, neither one relying on nor serving as illustrations to the text. Both text and image work in dynamic juxtapositions; neither voice nor image existing as 'objective' data to faithfully reflect an experience but as many lines in the research as a Deleuzian assemblage, the assemblage being a constellation of various connections. As researcher I am always already enfolded, intertwined in this research-assemblage, nevertheless writing the narratives as various moments of a storyline became a privileged moment for me to linger with the textual and visual 'data' without asking them to 're-present' the art experience and yet, as a way to generate meaning about the event of encountering. In the understandings gained from this study, I realized how reading through my personal narrative of art experiences and thinking with Deleuzian concepts produces an art encounter as desiring-assemblage; that is, the encounter with art is about connections, hence the formation of an assemblage; one which may be temporary, but still an assemblage allowing desire, as movement and productive flow to circulate. I cannot tell in advance how the reader will encounter the narratives and the photographs or what productive flow of affects, ideas will circulate. But it is now time to step into the art gallery.

Already three o'clock in the afternoon, the end point of my working shift as a museum educator. Today, I have toured and facilitated art workshops for elementary school students visiting the exhibition *Unscrolled. Reframing Contemporary Chinese Art* presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Move along, it's now fieldwork time. Time to generate data for my research, a thinking and inquiry about the art encounter with Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) concepts of desire and assemblage.

But first, I need to replace two aching feet, pull out an inflamed muscle, oil a knee joint swelled up from walking all day, turn the switch from museum educator mode to the differently rigorous, objective art historian and doctoral candidate. Yet, no...I cannot disentangle myself for, attuned to Deleuzian philosophy, I think the subject in term of rhizome and multiplicity, I am part of the world's social and material agencies and I gently rub the inflamed muscle and cherish the myriad of daily experiences. Indeed, I am connections: this body of mine always already produces and is being produced by the assemblage with other affects, knowledge, events, bodies, spaces. I grab my notebook, my oral consent scripts for visitor interactions and head upstairs towards the installation piece *Bang* by the contemporary Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (2010-2014). No interview questionnaires, no audio recordings of visitor's comments such as with the recognized Talk Aloud

method (see Dufresne-Tassé & Lefebvre, 1994; Émond, 2008) or video solicitation (see Lachapelle, 1999) well studied and much in use research methods for the field of art museum education and museum studies.



For now, only the calm space of the gallery rotunda matters as it envelops me. I carry no desire for a museum as a quiet temple for contemplation; on the contrary, the vibrant murmur of conversations is part of the pulsating life in the gallery. But after a whirlwind day, I soak up the temporary silence, feel the cold reassuring presence of the iron railing and slowing make my way up

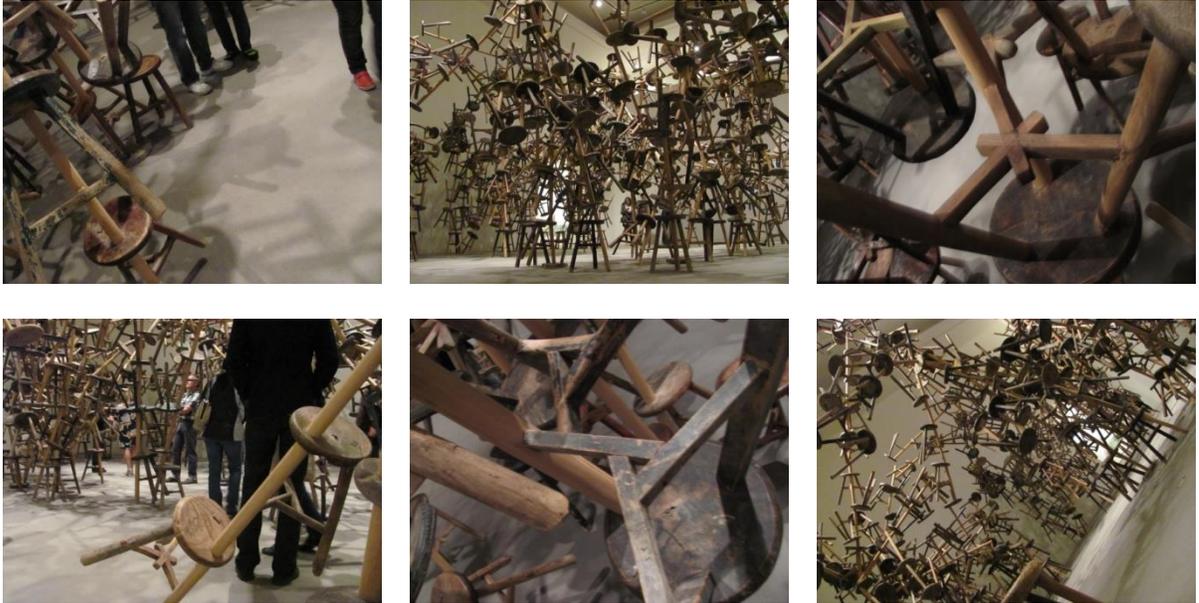
the marble staircase. The intricate landscape of Xu Bing's installation welcomes me but I decline the invitation, for now. My gaze floats and lingers gently on Qui Shihua's evanescent and barely readable paintings. And here I am. After a turn, I suddenly encounter a monumental web made of 886 three-legged wooden stools; worn out by years of domestic use, scratched and chipped at the edges, hand-crafted and sturdy, silently inviting me to step into the work. I immerse myself in Ai Wei Wei's (2010-2014) installation; without a predetermined path I stroll amongst a maze of stools expertly designed and assembled without the use of nails or screws. Around, over and beside me, swirls a giant organism or rhizome in frozen expansion yet seemingly desiring to burst open the high ceiling of the gallery. My body feels the warm presence of the tattered, worn-out wooden seats dating back from the Qing Dynasty to recent times, each passed down from one family to the next, one generation after another, each one expertly hand-crafted, each one beholding a myriad of secrets and stories to tell. Foreign yet visibly a trace of the making process, tall and sturdy wooden rods replace some of the legs in the tripod and act as a structuring frame. I hear the ventilation humming in the gallery, cool air brush my cheeks, listen to the mumble of voices, witness the children excited to twist their body under and through the maze, and visitors eagerly taking selfies.



Tucked in a corner of Ai Weiwei's installation piece, I comfortably sit underneath this construction of wooden stools, a precarious entanglement surprisingly still and in equilibrium. The writing creates a particular space/place for me to map out with words, sketches, photographs the (im)possible to represent; the grain of the dry wood, the scratches and markings occurred over decades, the beauty and ingenuity of the craftsmanship, the intricate play of shadows on the walls and the carpet of the gallery. I have relinquished the vain desire to write in details the structure of my seeing, as if it assured the telling of my experience. Rather I prefer to let the writing guide my thoughts, like a stream of consciousness as my body relates to the installation. Ah, the temptation of touching... albeit I am self-regulated by years of museum work and the kind but assertive gaze of the security guard stops my gesture.

It is almost closing time. For over the past hour, I am verbs such as walking through, being affected, sitting under, reminiscing and lingering into the Ai Weiwei installation. Can one still be 'encountering' after recurring visits and, like today, being enveloped for more than an hour in/with the artwork? Some would deny this. And yet. If to encounter is to 'come against', even after an

hour my body still discovers new ways and sensations of being met by or coming against the antique wooden objects. My body must spontaneously respond and negotiate ways of moving around a stool's leg so I avoid hitting it with my shoulder, thus pushing and challenging the balance of the whole structure towering over me. I know the rules of the art gallery, but I enjoy the thought of my hand caressing the splintered and cracked wood, a finger rubbing against some characters engraved with a sharp knife by a bored child, a rebellious soul, a yearning lover.



I feel observed by the quiet presence of mundane three-legged chairs expertly build of interlocked pieces with such simple but elegant and beautiful craftsmanship. It is moving to think that most were silent witness of the joy and sorrows of domestic life during the end of the Qing dynasty and into President Mao's Cultural Revolution.

Today, I noticed for the first time, hand painted in black ink, a few Chinese characters underneath a seat, I do not know what they mean but am touched by the power of linguistic marks to transcend space and time. Either a private message, a poetic line or perhaps is it the signature of the maker. I begin to see how each stool, albeit generic in size and model, is slightly different from the other, due to small variations in the interlocking system, the curve of a seat or the texture and color of the wood.

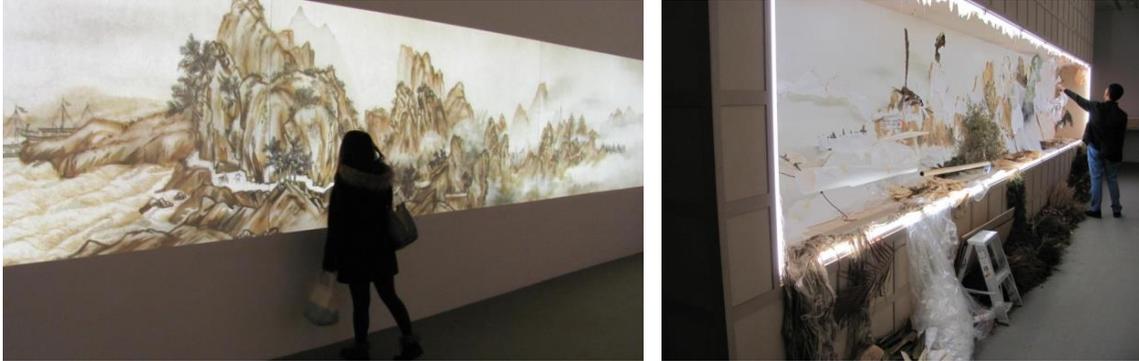
The stools are calling for my body to sit down and rest. I wish that a simple touch could unlock cinematic images and sounds of their past lives. Ai Weiwei decided to create the installation so that some stools stood with three legs solidly placed on the floor, and while they are still part of the supporting structure, the empty seat invites us to make good use of the everyday object. Over there, a man spontaneously answered this call and sat down comfortably on one of the empty stool. A woman companion quickly said to him: "I think you are not allowed to sit there!" She glanced at me with a concerned look. He got up slowly and looked around: "That's great!" he said, still smiling, his head turning left and right, his body playfully moving about, following the lines of the installation. A child creates a game and imaginatively organizes and names the various spaces created by the various clusters of stools the rhizomatic structure. She enjoys walking through, crawling underneath, bending down, moving her arms as if she was feeling

the space. She explains to her adult companion: "This is the hallway, this is the living-room, this..." The woman actively tries to follow and she gently bumps her head -or is it her shoulder- on a group of stools hanging over her head; part of the installation shifts gently revealing the fragile and precariousness of the assemblage.



I feel rather cozy and paradoxically safe under this towering swirl of interlocked objects. With the act of simply removing a few rods, and the entire structure would collapse and begin to fall apart. Fifteen minutes before closure, it's time to leave. Two adult visitors are standing close by and observe quietly as I scribble away, I raise my head, they turn towards me, smiling as they enthusiastically open up conversation about the piece. As I inform them about my research and hand out the oral consent form they exclaim: "But we are preventing you from working and writing your observations". Oh, absolutely not, on the contrary... We share thoughts about the work and I still learn to see anew; one is a photographer, he elaborates on the exquisite play and intricate abstract forms drawn by the shadows on the walls and floor. Jumping from one comment to another, I inquire about their perception of

the Xu Bing (2014) installation piece *Background Story: Ten Thousand Li of Mountains and Rivers*.



"What do you mean?" they reply. The gallery is about to close and much of the exhibition *Unscrolled*, further remains for them to see. And yet they are now piqued by curiosity. Eagerly, they answer my invitation to walk back and experience differently. "But it's not written anywhere that you must look at the back!". As I leave them, I keep the memory of their smiles, the sounds of exclamations as their bodies engage in exploring the entire installation; that is by looking at every side of the wood frame, by moving back and forth the piece, by stepping closer or further away to notice a detail, and make visual or mental connections, and perhaps reflect on Xu Bing's artistic process.

CHAPTER 1

On the experience of encountering art:

An inquiry with Gilles Deleuze's concepts of encounter, assemblage, desire

This chapter conveys in more detail the purpose of theoretically grounding this study in Deleuzian ideas, I introduce my coming to work with the concepts of encounter, assemblage and desire. The last section of the chapter serves to outline how this study evolved into a methodology of research as assemblage informed by a/r/tographic insights.

Why Gilles Deleuze?

One might ask, why Gilles Deleuze? Gilles Deleuze was a name I knew from citations and many reference lists, yet I am at a loss to explain why I took so little interest in his work during my bachelor degree in art history. He remained but a vague acquaintance during my graduate studies at the master's level and the first years upon starting my career as art museum educator. Nonetheless, while working at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, I vividly remember sitting in the gallery's dark projection room on the ground floor, fascinated yet puzzled and positively baffled by the video program showing Deleuze's eight hours video-interview recorded with Claire Parnet (2011) in 1988-1989. I had by then read a few texts by the philosopher but without grasping them, simply put, I didn't know what 'to do' with his complex philosophical ideas. Interestingly though, today strong affects remain; in the video-interview, here was a scholar so vivid in his thinking, yet I remember distinctly hearing and being affected by the sounds of his frail body struggling for air with every breath. It was a first encounter and I was pushed to thought. I was fascinated, I felt provoked in a generative

way, entering a space of ideas unrecognizable to me at the time, but I wasn't sure what to make of these. Not back then anyway. Ten years later, there I am sitting at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in a research seminar with professor Rita Irwin; we were reading "A/r/tography as practice based research" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) and discussing a/r/tography; a mode of inquiry in the world through an entangled process of art production, writing/teaching, it is "a research methodology that entangles and performs what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) refer to as a rhizome" (p.xx).

A botanical term, the rhizome refers to plants with roots extending outward, growing horizontally in underground systems. There is no central plant out of which all others originate, no hierarchy, the root system expands in all directions to produce new plants. In class, I recognized the term rhizome, a recognition that was not stifling in a representational way such that I am satisfied to pin it down to the known. On the contrary, a connection was made. New lines of thought started to open up, and that moment became an event, and further readings started to produce something. In the opening chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the botanical rhizome becomes for Deleuze and Guattari (1987) a fascinating metaphor of heterogeneity, connectivity, multiplicity and asignifying structure in opposition to the tree model of thinking, the tree becoming an image of binary logic since it is vertical, centralized, unified and fixed²¹. Well, I had entered the rhizome of Deleuzian ideas, jumped in, right in the middle and got caught in the flow. As they mention, the rhizome is about outgrowth, the and...and...and:

²¹ As pointed out by Stivale (2003), the apparent irony of working with the binary structure of rhizome versus tree metaphor was not lost on Deleuze. In *Dialogues*, Deleuze and Parnet (Deleuze & Parnet, 1996) comment that we are inexorably locked into the structure of language and its dualisms. However replies Deleuze, dualism is not defined by the number of terms in a proposition, neither do you get out of dualisms by adding other terms. Deleuze is interested in looking at the multiplicity of terms in-between the binary, hence looking for assemblages of enunciations.

Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces. Whenever desire climbs a tree, internal repercussions trip it up and it falls to its death; the rhizome, on the other hand acts on desire by external, productive outgrowth. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 14)

Learning about the Deleuzian concept rhizome prompted and nudged me to further reflect on my random affective, conceptual, sensitive connections with artworks when they grabbed my attention, mapping the space of the gallery as I created my own narrative. I returned to Deleuze's writings but I was not at a beginning and neither did I have a fixed end point of arrival, I did not know where I was going with this encounter, nonetheless I had jumped in the middle of a process. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) , "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo" (p.25). From one reading to another, one conversation leading to more questions, my own theoretical rhizome started to expand.

It required a few years of careful reading, before I began to entertain some confidence in my understanding of Deleuzian concepts. And yet, despite the fact that I was often perplexed, trying to make sense of what I was reading, I was immediately drawn into Deleuze and Guattari's use of language, intrigued to see how they employ a well-known word such as 'desire', usually taken to mean a desire for something that I do not have, and they shift its common meaning to connote other ideas, such as being about the production of connections and flows. Or, when they take a vernacular term such as assemblage or 'agencement' in French, in order to develop a complex set of philosophical and political ideas. As Alecia

Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2012) observe, Deleuze (and Guattari) "stretch language and its possibilities as a way to interrupt and rupture our ways of thinking" (p.85).

So why Gilles Deleuze? Because of Deleuze's (1994)—and in his collaborative work with Félix Guattari— interest in the concept of encounter, which is a key concept found throughout his work. In his view, encounters "are what forces us to think" (p.139), and for these encounters to happen is through experimentation and experience (as a verb and process). What's more, in his interviews and writings Deleuze (Boutang, 2012; Deleuze, 1994;) affirmed the arts as a "bloc of sensations" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 164), and thus they consider the arts a fertile milieu of experimentation and thus potential encounters.

Why Deleuze? Also because Deleuze troubles and rejects the notion of fixed and stable structures, such as the Subject or Being²², in favor of a subject as an assemblage , a

²² Of course, it is important to mention that during his time Deleuze was not the only thinker to reject the structuralist views that language and life could be scientifically examined according to its structures, or the humanist views of the Subject. This was shared also by other philosophers loosely gathered under the label of poststructuralism. Put succinctly, poststructuralism is an umbrella term coined to regroup a number of European scholars of the May 1968 generation who came from different disciplines and did not form a homogeneous group. The scholars often regrouped under the label of 'poststructuralism' such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze have fiercely critiqued Western Humanism's values and principles which ascribe a fixed, universal essence to being human, and affirm the centeredness and superiority of human life over other forms of existence. In her book *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti (2013) explains how, based in classical Antiquity and the Renaissance, one major strand of Humanism will become a doctrine with a belief in rational progress and "in the unique, self-regulating and intrinsically moral powers of human reason" (p.13). Braidotti further details how Humanism will turn into a "civilizational ideal" (p.15) feeding Eurocentric discourse and imperialism rooted in a binary logic of difference. Within this logic, the concept of subjectivity will be considered the superior pole, and be associated with consciousness and universal rationality, thus implicating that "Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart" (p.15). In summary, Sedgwick (2008) points out that, whilst the genealogy of Humanism is ambiguous and complex, in the twentieth-century, the term comes to define a view of the human subject as centered, autonomous of full individual agency, and adhering to the view that;

[...] human subjectivity is the source of meaning in language use. A humanist, on this view, is someone who presupposes that there are essential properties (e.g. autonomy, freedom, intentionality, the ability to use language for the purpose of producing meaningful propositions, rationality) which define what it is to be human. (p.165)

bringing together of heterogeneous elements and the "outcome of a process of subjectivation" (Boundas, 2010a, p. 274). To write about subjectivity, Deleuze choose the figure of folds and folding²³, so that instead of the image of the unified Subject, subjectivation is being this constant foldings (as noun) and enfolding (as verb) of outside (experimentations, thoughts) becoming an inside. As Conley(2011) explains, "subjectivity becomes an ongoing negotiation of things perceived, both consciously and unconsciously, within and outside the body" (p.193). Thinking with Deleuze is an invitation to see life as a creative milieu of "proliferating connections" (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 5). By this he means, that life is not about structures and the logic that regiments it, albeit they exist of course in the war-machine, the State. At the core of Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) political analysis in *Anti-Œdipus*, is a critique of structures created by psychoanalytic discourses. And thus, to counter these constraining structures, the authors elaborate on the desiring-assemblage as a flow, a force always creating and generating more connection. And thus, more capacities to act in the world.

Often described as the philosopher of immanence, with Deleuze this means that if transcendence is a relation 'to' something (hence external), then immanence is a relation 'in' something; immanence values connections and embodiment (Williams, 2010). Thus, for instance, with Deleuze, I do not 'have' an experience of an artwork or exhibition detached against the background of life; experience is a milieu which contributes to actually making

Philosophers adhering to a non-Humanist stance will object to the ideological, political abuses of power perpetrated under the banner of humanist ideals. Gilles Deleuze moved away, and firmly opposed, humanist views based on dichotomies—such as mind/body, Self/Other —, the centering of the individual which reinforces hierarchies, the unified notion of subjectivity, and the predominance of meaning and representation for they implying an 'outside' or world of transcendent ideas.

²³ Deleuze's own development of his ideas on the fold and subjectivation is to be found in the last chapter of his book *Foucault* (2006) entitled "Foldings, or the inside of thought (subjectivation)". The text is a complex and difficult to grapple in terms of my comprehension, I turned to Tom Conley (2011) for my own understanding.

life. My study is thus inquiring how working within a philosophy conceived in terms of relationality, connections, assemblages, non-representation (there is no original), flows and multiplicity (rather than fixed identities) enact a view of the art encounter as a milieu of immanent ethics. By immanent ethics, Deleuze means that encountering increases the potential for new connections, and thus the experience of encountering (artworks, music, dance, literature, and...and...and...) is inviting one into experiences of living. Tamsin Lorraine (2011) explains that Deleuze and Guattari's view of immanent ethics requires us to attend to the complex, textured and embodied situations in our lives and to be open to find responses that go beyond familiar automatic responses in order to "access creative solutions to what are always unique problems" (p.1).

A key aspect for me, is that throughout his work Deleuze asks the question, as Todd May (2005) puts it; "How might one live?" (p.1). As well as being a philosopher of immanence, Deleuze is a philosopher of experience, connection and of the encounter. Furthermore, he challenges representation and the hegemony of Signifier/Signified—or the 'what does it mean?'— in favor of 'what does it do?' or "how does it function" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.4). It is my understanding, that Deleuze does not seek to instrumentalize experience and turn it into a linear Fordist model of production. When I encounter art, rather than trying to seek the meaning and fix the artwork in a representation, it is an invitation for me to ask and explore how the work functions, what sort of connections and flows are activated in the encounter, and what affects, sensations and concepts emerge. Moreover, and this happens at the same time, these affective flows (with their affective qualities of curiosity, disgust, enjoyment, etc.) also activate the way I create sense of the artwork. Thinking about how the work functions can potentially produce learning and different knowledge but it is

something that happens in the experimentation as interaction, rather than being an objective or a goal to the experimentation.

I am reminded of Kaustuv Roy (2003) who so aptly wrote; “The use of Deleuzian concepts is to help pry open reified boundaries that exists not just in thought, but as affective investments that secure those territorialities” (p.13). Over my twenty years of practice as an art historian and art museum educator, I have certainly reified some boundaries and, although it is troubling to admit it, Roy is correct in saying that one (can) build a sense of professional identity and comfort in that knowing. I certainly had...for a time until I encountered Deleuze's work. In the next section, I proceed to introduce, the concepts of encounter, assemblage and desire separately but this is not meant to be a form of scaffolding in my use of the concepts; with Deleuze, the concepts are always already interrelated and entangled.

On Gilles Deleuze's concepts of encounter, desire and assemblage

If the concepts of encounter, desire and assemblage are interrelated, this entanglement is, I contend, especially relevant when it comes to experiences of encountering whatever forms the art museum as a little machine with myriads flows and connections: the gallery spaces, the artworks, the curatorial choices, the lighting and benches, the museum lobby and staircases, the textual interpretation, the sounds and smells, the temperature, and the visiting public.

“But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into in order to work, must be plugged into in order to work.” said Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.4). The terminology and figure of the machine was put forward in

Deleuze and Guattari's first collaborative book *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* published in 1972. In that book, the authors advance ideas that critique, interrogate, learn from, yet move away from the influence of Freudian psychiatry and Marxist materialism predominant in the French intellectual landscape of the time (Foucault, 1983). The terminology of the machine and machinic (the term, and nuance, is important because it is very different from the closed system of the mechanism) will be helpful to Deleuze and Guattari to write, among others topics, about politics, life and the unconscious. For instance, life for them is about the flowing production of more connections, and they reject the Freudian view of the unconscious as a theatre, preferring instead, to think of the unconscious as a "factory" (p.113). The machine does not have a center, it is more like a "hub of connections and productions" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p.88). Deleuze and Guattari will eventually cease to use the terminology of the machine and the machinic during the writing of their second book *A Thousand Plateaus* published in 1980; their favored terminology will become that of *assemblage*²⁴, a term also referring to a constellation of connections.

And so, in Deleuze and Guattari's view (1987) a book is a little machine, a complex assemblage formed by the various flows and connections of a writer, the world of the writer, how the book is made, the reader, and what reading the book produces for the reader. And I appreciated the above quote because I see this dissertation research also as an assemblage; one formed by the active flows circulating in-between the constellations of my readings, museum practices, thoughts, uncertainties, questionings, experimentations, etc. In order to think with theory, the other literary machine I selected was found in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and the concepts of encounter, assemblage and desire. Cultural theorist Mieke Bal

²⁴ In the secondary literature, were particularly helpful for me to understand the concept of the machine, desiring-machine and the machinic were the works of Claire Colebrook (2002a) and Todd May (2005).

(Bal, 2002) explains the "conceptualizing force" (p.33) of the concept as a, "capacity to distinguish and thereby to make understandable in its specificity; hence to 'theorize' the object, which would thus further knowledge, insight, and understanding" (p. 33). Hence it is not so much about the word in itself; concepts are not fixed and univocal, they generate more ideas than what their common usage may presume. Therefore, drawing from Bal (2002), what interests me is not to establish the genealogy of a concept, but rather to "gain insights into what it can do" (p.11). I do not suggest, neither does Bal I would think, that the concepts have a fixed essence making them operate in stable ways no matter the context; of course, inquiring the 'what it can do' requires attending to the conditions of a given place, time, set of connections involved. This is a commitment not to solve, but to add on to current scholarship, to open up other avenues of research. It is a commitment to provoke, inform, complicate, and contribute to knowledge for the work and curricular thinking of art museum educators and curatorial professionals, on inviting others in how to live in the company of art.

In the coming pages, I will briefly introduce three key Deleuzian concepts in this study; encounter, assemblage and desire. I have already provided a glossary in the opening pages of this dissertation but I do not think this doubles-up, or at least, I find it important to bring them here also in the body of the text and in the flow of reading.

What about the encounter?

Since I am interested in the experience of encountering art, looking at the concept of encounter in Deleuze was an obvious choice. Yet, I was surprised to read that he defines encounter beyond the simple act of 'coming against'. Indeed, for Deleuze (1994) an encounter happens when one meets something, someone, an idea, a concept, anything that is not an object of recognition, and this "something in the world forces us to think" (p.139). An object of

encounter can be met with a range of "affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering" (p.139). It is important to mention that, in Deleuze, when he mentions that something forces us to think, by no mean does 'force' imply something controlling or aggressive. For instance, a force can be as subtle and gentle as an unconscious nudge to stay a moment longer in front of an artwork, or suddenly to turn left or move closer because a patch of bright red caught my sight. A force is anything that can move one toward producing a change whether it is physical, social, conceptual, artistic, not in order to find, to interpret, to discover a meaning, just to think and see what other ideas or manifests that which until then had remained virtual. The virtual, in Deleuze's philosophy, does not mean the simulated, artificial world of the computer image, but rather to his interest in the idea of the virtual found in the work of French philosopher Henry Bergson. For Deleuze, the virtual is something real and, through experimentation and encounter, one can "bring about actualisation" of something which until then was virtual (Boundas, 2010b, p. 300).

What about assemblage?

In my study I turn to the concept of assemblage as developed by Deleuze in his collaborative writing with Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). The concept of assemblage refers to complex relations and connections of bodies, objects, modes of expressions coming together over different periods of time and space. It is important to note that an assemblage is not simply a sum of parts, the adding up of separate elements. As Livesey (2010) explains, and assemblage "emerges from the arranging of heterogeneous elements into a productive (or machinic) entity that can be diagrammed" (p.18). Assemblages can be microscopic like cells, human and non-human scale if we think of the notion of artwork, a home or a habitat, but it can also be extremely large and complex such as a school, the art world, the State apparatus.

The assemblage is not simply the adding up of elements, but the relations and various forces connecting them, and what it produces. In chapter 4, I will examine the various characteristics of an assemblage, these are: what is part of the assemblage and their expression (the potential for movements), and the territory marked by whatever is part of the assemblage, and thus the "cutting edges" (p.505) that open up potential of change.

And what about desire?

The concept of desire was another obvious choice for me. I can still re-live that intense longing to stroll in the State Tretyakov Gallery and explore to get a physical sense of Russian painting through time. My own desire to connect to the artworks; because I could feel that Ai Weiwei's installation was also looking at me, that the artwork knew that my body was there present. I am not so sure if artworks desire to be interpreted (Pollock, 2011), but artworks do look back at us, and that's part of the play of desire.

Appearing throughout Deleuze's philosophical work, the concept was particularly explored in *Anti-Œdipus* written in collaboration with Guattari. In the Deleuzian sense, desire is a force not related to motivation, or intentionality, neither is it about wanting, hoping, wishing, desiring for something one does not have, something 'out there'. As mentioned previously, Deleuze is a philosopher of immanence, there is no transcendent reality. Desire exists and circulates in assemblages, which is why they often use the term desiring-machine or desiring-assemblage. Desire is not a thing and it cannot be located as pre-existing in a subject, it becomes possible in relationality, desire is all about connectivity and the and...and...and. As Goodchild (1996) reminds us; "Desire becomes a drive to live a life of relations, creation and intensity" (p.6). Deleuze does use the term 'drive' in relations to affect and the unconscious; what desire does or produces are more connections.

So why Deleuze?

Why Deleuze? To answer this question, I return once again to the background moments I shared in the opening chapter of this study. Regarding my experiences of encountering art in Moscow's State Tretyakov gallery, my interest is not in seeking to investigate my emotional responses, cognitive processes when looking at Vrubel's painting or even to examine how or why an art museum educator could lack so much intrinsic motivation as to leave in the middle of a highly interesting gallery tour. The significant body of qualitative research in art museum education using empirical data, and mostly rooted in interpretivism²⁵, is too numerous to share here, yet I do recognize the significant contributions made regarding the art experience from the point of view of the visitor. To provide a brief overview of the range of research topics regarding the experience of the visitor with art, I will mention a few notable studies which examine, for instance: the cognitive processes and the aesthetic development (Dufresne-Tassé, O'Neill, Sauv , & Marin-Robitaille, 2014; Housen, 2007), the art experience and self-consciousness (Wetzl Fairchild & Gumpert, 2006), the emotional response to the art experience ( mond, 2010;  mond, Eick de Lima, & Marin, 2015), the implications of the viewing duration on the art experience (Lachapelle, Douesnard, & Keenlyside, 2009), the impact of knowledge and the non-expert art viewing experience (Lachapelle, 2007), and also measuring the physiological impact of aesthetic perception (Tschacher *et al.*, 2012).

²⁵ According to Schwandt (2003), interpretivism is an epistemological stance that focus on the process by which meanings and understandings are created, negotiated, articulated and manifested. Inquirers want to understand the world of lived experience from the perspective of the participants who undergo the experience. In interpretive traditions, the researcher does value the subjective human experience, but the interpretation makes claim to objective science.

Even though I have greatly benefitted from these studies, my interest and research project lie elsewhere. What understanding of the art encounter is enacted when I use the Deleuzian terminology of affect, desire and assemblage to inquire my experience of wandering the beautiful galleries of the Tretyakov? Returning to the background moments of this study, what art experience emerges if one were to use the Deleuzian concepts of encounter and assemblage to think Brook's encounter with *View of Delft*? To Deleuze, experience is a milieu favorable to making new connections and assemblages and produce thought. Brook's encounter with *View of Delft* triggered an affect and produced a new idea, as a line of escape from his usual way of thinking. The encounter produced a curiosity to visit Delft in order to see for himself where Vermeer once stood when planning his composition for the painting. Of course, this is but one of the lines of flight triggered by the encounter.

I am drawn to Deleuze because the concepts of encounter, desire and assemblage are integral to his philosophical project of increasing one's capacity to act in the world. Granted that a capacity to act is also political, and it can't be said in advance what will emerge, according to one's own assemblages and one's social assemblages. Desiring-assemblage are powerful, they can become detrimental and potentially lead to negative, foul consequences. There are no promises of salvation or transcendental goals of transformation in Deleuze, for he is a philosopher of immanence, there is only one plane of existence; life itself. So, then the wider contribution of my study is to examine the experience of encountering art as a milieu to potentially make connections, and perhaps actualize what until then, was virtual. This is a claim to think the art encounter as important in and for itself, but also as educational in the larger sense of increasing one's capacity to act in the world.

The research as assemblage

Before elaborating on the methodological perspective for my doctoral research, it is important to mention that, on the topic of the art experience or art museum experience, there is to date an increasing body of studies also referring to, exploring in various ways, or drawing from Deleuzian ideas such as the mode of relationality and connections of the rhizome, the importance of materiality and the other-than-human in living-knowing-researching, but also affects, as the sensations preceding verbalization, some of which I will consider in the following paragraph. While the list of works is growing exponentially and, due to limitation of space, I will focus on readings that became particularly stimulating encounters with some Deleuzian approaches or use of concepts.

Key texts I often return to, have been *Art encounters* by Simon O'Sullivan (2006) and his article "From aesthetics to the abstract machine: Deleuze, Guattari and contemporary art practice" (2010) where he makes the case for a return to an aesthetics of affects in relation to the reception of contemporary art. Elizabeth Grosz (2008) examines the material and conceptual structures of art with various concepts from Deleuze and Guattari. Perhaps not surprisingly, affects²⁶ are at the core of many research projects focused on the arts: Janice Baker (2008, 2010) suggests the idea of the Deleuzian museum operating affectively not only as a text needing to be read but as an assemblage of non-linear time; Diane Mulcahy (2012, 2016) investigates the potentialities of affective learning at the museum; Stephanie Springgay (Springgay, 2008, 2011b, 2016) wants to reclaim the affective, the body and movement to emphasize the importance of sensation in knowledge production; Emma Waterton and Jason

²⁶ For supplementary readings on affect theory, mostly framed by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, please see, for example the edited book by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, *The affect theory reader* (2010).

Dittmer (2014) propose an interesting view of the war museum as assemblage and the role of affect in the museum. Closely related to art education and the art museum, I discovered the work of Charles Garoian (2001, 2013) who, among others, uses the concept of the rhizome to inquire an embodied pedagogy and performativity in the museum. Jessie Beier (2013) argues in favor of thinking the art encounter in terms of what it does, rather than working along the objective of visual literacy. An finally there is the recent doctoral dissertation of Marie-Hélène Lemaire (2015) who turned to Deleuze, among other theorists, to inquire the gallery tour and animation as a space formed by lines of flight and as a thinking in movement. To this literature at the intersection of art and art museum education, my study is most aligned with the work of O'Sullivan and Garoian who are also, albeit in different ways, articulating the art encounter in terms of affect and/or productive assemblage. I also aim to contribute towards the affective, embodied, relational experience of encountering art as a productive assemblage but from my (non-essentialized, not fixed) position of art museum educator.

Hearing the call of post-qualitative research that rejects the scientific belief in the possibility of representation and seeks to displace the researcher away from a central, objective and controlling position in order to flatten the hierarchies. Another important concern in post-qualitative research is to recognize the importance and our constant intra-action with matter, hence the need in research to better attend to materiality and the relationships between human/non-human (Barad, 2007; Lather, 2013; MacLure, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011, 2013), I was looking for a method not to excavate the *what is?* but rather explore “how to document becoming” (Richardson, 2004, p. 71). Becoming in this Deleuzian sense refers to the non-linear process of change itself, as mentioned in the glossary, becoming is not directed towards an arrival or end point. I realized very soon in the research process that, to work with Deleuzian theory would be a commitment made for research methodologies

seeking to limit “the will to power inscribed in sense-making efforts that aspire to totalizing explanatory frameworks” (Lather, 2007, p.5). In other words, thinking with Deleuze means that I am not in the central position of the observer-researcher aiming for control over a unified explanation of what the art encounter *is*. Inquiring with Deleuzian concepts means that I want to attend to the messy, the movement, the fluid boundaries, the flow of connections, the human/non-human materialities. Then if research is not about a secure knowing, what then? As Coleman and Ringrose (2013) point out, methodologies are “descriptive and generative” but they are also “performative” (p.6), embarking in the research as an evolving process, rather than following a set of procedures, enacts an ontological view of the world. So how to proceed? According to sociologist John Law, one of the important aspects of the new methodologies—also called post-qualitative by scholar Elizabeth St.Pierre (2011), in terms of the research process is to trouble my desire for secure knowledge of how the research will develop, to trouble my desire to know in advance how I will proceed. Law writes,

[...] we will need to unmake many of our methodological habits, including: the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; [...] But, first of all we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security. (Law, 2004, p. 9)

Post-qualitative inquiry is not about developing a new and improved methodological model. It is in my view, more akin to an ethos, a way of thinking and one's approach to research. And thus, I have chosen the metaphor of the Deleuzian assemblage as the

methodology for this study for I am interested to do research which is not so much a *knowing about* as a knowing that emerges when "relating to" (Coleman and Ringrose, 2013, p.6) the world. It is important again to remark that assemblages are "complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18). This study and dissertation on the experience of encountering art is such a constellation, not a passive putting together of parts, rather a constant coming together of experimentations and thinking, Employing Deleuzian concepts enable me to take this approach; my study as a research-assemblage aims to inquire the knowing that emerges in the relating, to study the knowing that is produced in the lines moving and shifting in-between my notes, my personal narrative of encountering artworks, the museum spaces, conversations with other visitors, my researcher's thinking through the writing, the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze, and to some extent, other scholars such as Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Greene who were already part of my art-museum-educator-assemblage.

During the process of coming up, of realizing and articulating the close interrelation of theory/methodology for this dissertation study, I was informed by the work of Susan Nordstrom (2015) on data assemblage and, more specifically, the arts-based research methodology named a/r/tography (Irwin, 2013; 2008). I will succinctly introduce them both.

Even though Nordstrom's (2015) topic of study is family history genealogists and not the arts, it is very interesting to read how she worked with, and came to think her study was a folding of assembled data such as objects-interviews, media but also "dream and response data, weather data, spectral data, books written by participants, books recommended by [...] participants [...]". Rejecting the fixed idea of data as evidence, the author engaged with data

as, not simply an accumulation of blocks of concrete information, but as "as motley crew that infinitely folds, differentiates, emerges, moves, and morphs in a weblike fashion" (p.170). And this forever interacting constellation of lines, including the researcher, is the productive study as data assemblage. Nordstrom's thinking about data assemblage was generative for my own articulation and use of narratives, photographs, conversations in the gallery, the thinking with Deleuzian concepts and scholarship, and the constant shifts in the entire assemblage that keep happening because of one new idea, one new question or observation.

Furthermore, I gathered insights from a/r/tography, a practice-based research methodology. According to Irwin (2013), "a/r/tography is a research methodology, a creative practice, and a performative pedagogy that lives in the rhizomatic practices of the in-between" (p.198). I was informed by a/r/tography because of the methodology's weaving together, and the ever moving and inter-relating practices of artistry, researching and teaching. My study is not a/r/tographic *per se* since I do not consider my personal narratives or the photographs as part of an artistic practice, nonetheless reading and learning about a/r/tography became a prompt for me to re-consider the theoretical impact that the physical, embodied movement, such as my walking in/through the various installations, have on the inquiry as process²⁷. In my view, one of the insightful ways that a/r/tography theorizes movement and living inquiry is by drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome. In a similar way to the expanding lateral root system of the strawberry plant, the rhizome "is an assemblage that moves and flows in dynamic momentum" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. x). This perhaps, better explains the reference to the rhizome in Irwin's quote mentioned in the opening of this paragraph; the rhizome, like the assemblage, is not about

²⁷ For more readings focused on walking and embodiment in arts-based living inquiry, see also (Irwin, 2006; Irwin & O'Donoghue, 2012; Springgay, 2011a, 2016).

the nodes that constitute it, it depends on the lines *in-between* the various elements. A *knowing about* will focus on the nodes, but a *knowing in relation to*, is concerned about the in-between, the movement, the connections.

Informed by a/r/tographic insights, for the study I chose to engage with the narrative writing and the photographs as ways to, ever so imperfectly, share an experience of encountering artworks but also, the act of writing became part of my art experiences, and another way of creating otherwise my art experiences. Informed by Richardson (2000), I wanted to consider, "How we are expected to write affects what we can write about" (p.7). By this I mean that if I craft and write my study as an assemblage, this will affect how I can think the research. For instance, rather than occupying the center as in the binary subject/object of conventional humanist qualitative research (St. Pierre, 2011), I see that I already am but one node in a constantly interacting and changing rhizomatic network. And so, the art encounter is a process which I can map and make intelligible, but without tracing and imposing a deterministic meaning upon it. Nevertheless, I keep writing about de-centering myself as a researcher but I still say 'I'. Is there a contradiction, since I still appear as occupying an outsider perspective? Indeed, the 'I' made of multiplicities that I am, is writing and, even St.Pierre (2011) admits that "it is indeed difficult to escape the 'I'" (p.619), but while I may seem to retain an distant perspective, my text aims to move away from the "mastery and victory narratives"(Lather, 2007, p. 11)

On another note, I consider the words and my writing as already interacting with the materiality of the desiring-assemblage composed of the narratives, the re-creation of the experience through memory, looking at the low-resolution and sometimes blurry photographs taken on my cellular phone, I thoroughly enjoyed scribbling scratch notes and

random observations while sitting underneath Ai Weiwei' (2010-2014) canopy of wooden stools or surrounded with Geoffrey Farmer's (2009-) crowd of puppet figurines. In this study, the words scribbled during the fieldwork and in my narratives are my allies and, as I choose and select them in my personal narratives of past or recent art encounters, already co-productive of my thinking and analyses.

The personal narratives of art encounters as writings drawn from observational fieldnotes and journal entries does not claim to reflect or "capture the real out there" (Britzman, 2000, p. 28). As a side note I would like to clarify that, although I work with personal narratives, my study is not an auto-ethnography, which as both process and product, is an approach to writing and research aiming to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) as a way to know and understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, ¶1). Indeed, my aim is not to explain the use or function of the art experience in a larger social or cultural context. But neither is my methodology autobiographical in the sense defined by the method of *carrere* devised by William Pinar (2012), a strategy seeking "to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interests of self-understanding and social reconstruction" (p.44). Informed by psychoanalysis, the method of *carrere* entails a view of the self that is very different from the Deleuzian subject as assemblage, just to name one distinction between them. And yet, I assume it will become clear for the reader that the entire research process leading to the study you are now reading has become for me a project in line with Pinar's view on "subjective reconstruction" (p.45), if in a rhizomatic way. In the study as process, I do wish to better understand my role of educator in the public sphere.

Therefore, neither auto-ethnographic nor strictly autobiographic, the personal narratives embrace writing as a generative and analytic practice with the effect that it can destabilize me and allow me to think differently the art experience. For, as Laurel Richardson (2000) asserts, "I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it" (p.924). The writing is always already enfolded in the materiality of my body hearing the mumble of voices around me, sensing the moisture in the air, moving closer, or bending and being careful not to touch the art. The writing was also enfolded in the materiality of the writing itself, of the resistance of my pencil scratching the surface of my notebook; unable as I was to follow the rhythm of my thoughts. Somehow this materiality already allowed the writing as thinking, I am not certain why; perhaps because the material agency of paper-pencil-hand assemblage pencil became some kind of an encountering moment. Somehow, I dropped an habitual way of writing for the sake of writing down information and ideas formed and were articulated differently during this short writing-encounter. This kind of writing did not happen every time I was in the galleries, but overall the complex assemblage of hand writing-sounds of the pencil on the paper-looking-artwork-body-notebook-gallery spaces_enacted²⁸ my encounters with the art installations. Each narrative writing in conversation with the photographs, becomes an opportunity to revisit my scratch notes, to revisit the experience from memory and also to re-create the event of the installations in language.

I did not code or look for patterns in the narratives, and thus, the narratives have excesses that are not fully fixed, interpreted, or contained when I read them in relation to a

²⁸ This may beg the question; is there agency in Deleuze? Although the question is much debated in the space of secondary literature, my position is that there is indeed agency in Deleuze. Yet, contrary to the humanist understanding of a Subject acting upon the world, Deleuzian agency is distributed since we are assemblages. See also Bowden (2015), Braidotti (2012).

Deleuzian concept. But neither is the text supporting the photographs placed in juxtaposition, and inserted either in the body of the text or to the side, but without descriptions and explanatory captions. Here text and image have equal status in that neither one explains or illustrates the other. I have used the word 'juxtapose', which implies the idea of bringing close together for contrasting effects, but drawing from a/r/tography this coming together, or doubling, of the visual and the text is called: contiguity (see Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005). In a/r/tography, contiguity is a methodological concept that serves to destabilize, trouble, and complicate the conventional hierarchies of the text as provider of knowledge regarding the visual. In contiguity, the meaning making process resides precisely in the relation, the line, in-between the visual and textual. Hence, a contiguity is not simply a static positioning of two comparable realities but in a different medium. As a methodological strategy the contiguity of textual and visual, explains Springgay et al. (2005), performs because of the "contiguous interaction and the movement *between* art and graphy" and thus the reading/research "becomes a lived endeavor" (p.900).

I began taking photographs with my cellular phone while scribbling away in the first artwork of my 'fieldwork'; that is, the monumental sculptural installation *Bang* by the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. There is no specific theoretical or methodological reason why this piece became the first one in the narrative thread of this study; although it was an installation about which the students and adult visitors expressed vocally their enthusiasm, excitement in feeling the tension between the delicate balance of the wood construction, and the monumentality surrounding them. Even though many of the photographs appear quite blurry, they create another line in the mapping of my encounters, and add another fold in the enactment of the artwork. Juxtaposed and in constant conversation and inter-relation with

the narratives, the visuals operate as rich but partial fragments missing in sounds, embodied presence and other physical sensations, and yet, they ontologically produce my art encounter.

I have realized two aspects of my working with them. First, instead of considering my researcher-singularity looking out *at* the artwork, in the mode of a binary viewer/object, I have become interested to notice in the photograph the agency of both my body and that of the thingness of the sculptural installation; more specifically that my viewing-body emerged in my interaction with the materiality of the artwork. To articulate my thinking, I was informed by the work of political theorist and philosopher Jane Bennett who writes about the “vitality of matter” (2010, p. 5), and who states that even non-human entities or things “perform actions, produce effects and alter situations” (2004, p. 355). And secondly, the photographs become one node as part of the research as desiring-assemblage, by this I mean the network of connections in-between researcher-text-artwork-images-gallery space through which my questions, desire to generate new insights on the art encounter flow and circulate. My narratives were written a few months after my embodied engagement in/with the artworks at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the narratives further enact another way of experiencing the installations after they were dismantled. Placed in juxtaposition to the narratives but without strictly corresponding or being an illustration to the text, the photographs also bring a material impact on how I remember, re-live my art encounters. In light of Deleuzian philosophy, this re-living is not about summoning old perceptions as a repetition of the same. As Stagoll (2010d) suggests, Deleuze was absolutely not interested in that model of memory because it denied life all creative principles. For Deleuze, instead for re-tracing the past, memory should be seen as constituting “the past as a new present relative to present interests and circumstances” (p.164). Indeed, as I was writing the narratives, I

would 'project' myself back with the installations but the images and affects were also renewed in relation to my dissertation topic

And finally, to close this section I need to explain that, while this dissertation is framed by Deleuzian theory, other scholars have also been significant and have informed my intellectual and professional rhizome as an art historian and art museum educator. John Dewey, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans Georg Gadamer and Maxine Greene hail from different intellectual traditions and connections to art and aesthetic experience; yet all have written expansively of the arts. Why bring them in conversation? It is well known that Deleuze and my selected group of scholars have opposing philosophical positions; for instance, Deleuze has a view of the subject as always already the "provisional outcome of a process of subjectivation" (Boundas, 2010, p.274) which is opposite to the Humanist image of the subject with a core substance and foundation which is a position endorsed by the selected scholars. But this apparent incommensurability will not prevent me from bringing Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Greene in momentary conversations with Deleuze. My aim is not to iron out their philosophical differences, but since Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Greene are part of my intellectual-academic-art museum educator-assemblage, I want to revisit the concepts of experience, the tutelage of perception, play, and imagination through my understanding of Deleuze.

My selection of one scholar and a concept at the core of their work emerged rhizomatically. Philosopher John Dewey was key for his influential writing on the concept of experience and of art *as* experience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty has long been a philosopher I appreciate for his critique, in *Phénoménologie de la Perception* published in 1945, of Cartesian dualism in favor of an embodied mind. Deleuze critiqued phenomenology because it assumed

the existence of a subject conscious *of* something outside of itself, and yet he was interested in phenomenology because it provides the grounds to define important concepts in his work, such as immanence. I discovered Hans Georg Gadamer's concept of play as part of the dialogical process of interpretation early on in my career as an art museum educator and I aimed to trouble perhaps my own set ways of thinking differently about the concept. Bringing philosopher Maxine Greene into the conversation was an obvious choice for her take on Dewey's ideas, but also for my desire to engage with her work and the concept of imagination. Imagination is a term which I find too often co-opted by neoliberalism and marketing, for instance as the disguised pressure to produce new product for the consumers. But Greene's work gave it a more generative connotation for me. Indeed, Greene's understanding of imagination prompted me to see the art encounter as a space of the possible, an idea also expressed in Deleuze, but differently, as I will examine in another chapter.

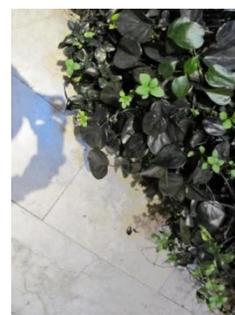
ENCOUNTER - *Ripped newspaper, dry yellow corn shavings and mist*

Earthiness. Moisture. A pleasant mineral, earthy scent of wet soil invades my senses as I walk into the rotunda. Petrichor; a recently created noun derived from the Greek and a combination of the word 'petra' for stone and the special fluid that flows in the veins of the Gods. Petrichor, what a beautiful word to describe the particular scent of dry soil in interaction with the rain. In the center of the rotunda, rising vertically as high as the second floor, the exuberant, luscious landscape by Jennifer Wen Ma is the source of the delicate, soothing smell. The plants have just been watered. Dipped or painted in the deepest, blackest traditional Chinese ink a few weeks before, the potted plants show foliage the color of night but some are struggling, they appear wrinkled and dried up. Yet, how wonderful... here and there I am excited to see the bright green of delicate new leaves emerging in this dark forest.



I recall the day the education team had the opportunity to meet with Wen Ma during the installation of the piece; she shared her interest for *Black Beauty: A Living Totem* (2014) to be an invitation to reflect on life and death; on social constraints. For her, the work further enacts a conversation with centuries of traditional Chinese landscape painting. And yet for me, the work has an ineffable presence that cannot be

exhausted in relation to the various references and signifiers. In my gallery tours, although it is engaging to talk about this work, for words come easily to describe the materials and process, or share some of Wen Ma' ideas, the difficulty is to talk *with* the work. Beyond the formal or material descriptions and pointing out specific natural or artistic processes, I would enjoy remaining speechless. At the risk of pinning down *Black Beauty: A Living Totem* in a fixed representation, how can words speak the excess of the constant transformation, be attentive to the slow metamorphosis, share the pulsating life force which now gently impacts on the art gallery, a historical building and formerly a courthouse.



As Peter de Bolla (2001) suggests in *Art Matters*, being or becoming speechless, such as in a state of muteness because one cannot verbalize, is the sign of an affective response and something he also calls being in a state of wonderment. De Bolla thinks of the aesthetic experience as an affective response to the specificity of the art object through our encounter with it—he looks at experience not as something that we 'have' but as something "lived through" (p.15). For Gilles Deleuze, affective response is not reduced to the realm of feelings or the inarticulate emotional response—although emotions felt within me are present in the affective response—but these emerge in my encounter with particular features of the artwork. I lean more towards Deleuze (1994) who considered how some encounters force us



to thought; these encounters may be grasped in a range of affective tones but the characteristic is that it can only be sensed.

Mulling over these thoughts, I walk towards the second floor for the *Unscrolled. Reframing Tradition in Contemporary Chinese Art* exhibition. At the top of the stairs, someone reads the didactic panel and explains to a companion how the Wen Ma sculpture is comprised of live potted plants, most native from British Columbia. I do not know what this information and encountering the sculpture will produce for them, tomorrow, next week or, next year. Nevertheless, I am reminded of O'Donoghue's (2011) suggestion that contemporary art has the potential to create both learning and being opportunities that "amplify the practice of paying attention; that engage in effortful observation; that embrace uncertainty and court ambiguity; that are open to chance encounters" (p.167) and perhaps were these two visitors living and being in the encounter.

Then I turn and gaze upon the mesmerizing landscape *Background Story: Ten thousand Li of Mountains and Rivers*²⁹ by artist Xu Bing (2014); I have seen it countless times but forever and always, it leaves me speechless for its sheer beauty and mysterious presence. At twenty feet wide, it resembles a large scale ink scroll painting showing and



²⁹ Xu Bing took as its subject a detail from the influential scroll *Ten Thousand Li of Mountains and Rivers* by the painter Zhao Fu (active 1131-1162) from the Southern Song Dynasty. In the Vancouver Art Gallery, Xu placed a reproduction of the original scroll in a nearby vitrine.

revealing jagged edged mountains, a twisted path unfolding alongside steep slopes and a thick line of trees, fog covered valleys with a few barren hilltops emerging timidly in the distance, crouched figures walking towards the coast where boats are ready to sail. From afar, the work looks like a traditional Chinese landscape painted with ink on rice paper, then placed against clear glass so it could be lit up from the back. The subtle washes and fluid brush strokes invite my gaze to float deep into the mountains and the grey clouds heavy with rain. Words come easily to describe the subject matter but there is an excess in the work's happening which is beyond words; for when I bring my body close to the glass pane, what a moment ago was a tree or a rocky mountain side, now is revealed to be dry twigs, straw and pine needles.



Repeating a gesture done so often, my gaze and body follow a line made of straw or hems or i-do-not-know-what-material and I end up by the side of the large casing or wooden frame enclosing the piece. Discretely placed but visible against the frame, just a few inches from the floor, Xu has installed a frail tree branch peeking beyond the frame as if to say "come this way".



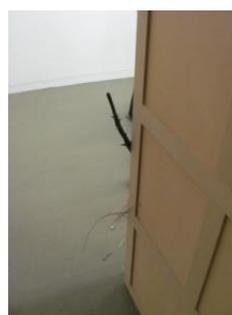
Interestingly, some people walking pass me do not seem to notice this small yet intriguing detail, nor are they curious to follow the intense source of light coming from the back of the picture. But many people are curious. And like me they walk around the sculptural installation,



as I have done countless times before. I have no idea if this placement is intentional on the part of the artist or accidental, for art historian De Bolla (2001), the aesthetic experience matters, the 'art' in the artwork matters since, "the artwork itself teaches us how to approach it: the image, to some extent, teaches us how to look (...)" (p.26).



I wonder why this little branch sticks out of the frame, it could very well have been removed, cut or trimmed, thus it is clearly an artistic decision, a frail detail part of the art-ness of the work. The materiality of this branch—not simply the material, the what-it-is-made of-, calls for me to look and see closer. Noticing the branch, I feel invited to leave the usual semi-static position of a spectator looking at a painting, in order to move and walk around to look behind the image. I follow the invitation and I am stunned once more. The scene leaves me speechless. Xu Bing and his assistants have literally made a three-dimensional drawing with repurposed, recycled, found materials gathered around Vancouver. I see what at first appears to be a confusing jumble of ripped pieces of the *Vancouver Sun*, ripped plastic bags, dry leaves, woody twigs, short branches from a pine tree, dull yellow corn shavings, soft hemp fibers, large or small fragments of heavy white paper, also in suspension float a plastic bottle and a cardboard tubing. At the base of the frame, it seems as if the artist is away on a coffee break, just about to resume work; he left a small ladder ready for use, bundles of dry leaves placed against the frame



seem awaiting to be transformed into 'art', a large sheet of plastic appears forgotten there, not knowing its purpose. And all around the frame are mundane, snow white neon tubes to light up the entire scene. I hear the elevator doors open and two visitors stumble onto the apparent chaos of everyday materials, "What is this?", they laugh, barely slow down or glance at the work and they leave. I so wish to interrupt their path, be a trigger for another kind of experience but no, they do not acknowledge my gaze as an invitation to converse. They walk pass me. There is no opening and I choose to respect this. I name, describe their apparent mockery, or lack of interest to engage with the work, as a refusal and yet something happened. Both individuals did notice and had to physically negotiate around Xu Bing's installation. There was a physical encounter with the piece but a response to affects caused by an artwork cannot be planned, programmed, triggered, instrumentalized, or measured. I will never know what will be generated or remain from this experience an hour from now, in two days or two years.

Behind me, other voices can be heard, my body senses movement occurring nearby; a child and adult keep looking and moving back and forth, from the front and the back of the installation. The child, perhaps six or seven years of age bursts with a "This is SO cool!", and when in front of the landscape he asks, "But how was it painted?" Let's try again. Smiling, the adult shows him patiently by playing a game. As



they walk back and forth around the wooden frame of the installation, they try to discover how the yellow corn shavings, the soft hemp fibers, the small twigs of broken branches and the short pine tree needles seem to transform into a mountain, there a gentle sea waves or here, some rugged trees, when seen through the rice paper and the frosted sheet of plexiglass.



What am I witnessing? Do I observe a willingness to be curious, a human interaction, the behavioral signs of living out wonderment, a play with the work, the unfolding of an encounter? As I was watching the adult and the curious child, and today as write this narrative, I still tend to project myself in that beautiful moment, and I shall call it a state of wonderment. Indeed, what I have learned about *Background Story* is inextricably entangled with my experience of/through the looking, thinking, comparing, moving back and forth, observing other visitors, reading the text panel, etc.



It is time to leave but I know I will be back tomorrow and still be in a state of wonderment each time I pass by; knowing that what appears like an exquisite, evocative large scale traditional Chinese painting with brush and ink, is actually an assemblage of contemporary urban materials transformed by the artistic process. Whether I think about the slippage of meaning, the play of signs or contemporary practices in



dialogue with the past, wonderment becomes a rich in-between of ideas and perceptions, a place to play.



CHAPTER 2

Art experience

This chapter opens with an overview concerning the notion of art experience in the literature, then follows some comments on the concepts of experience and experimentation as written in the work of Gilles Deleuze. I further revisit John Dewey's (1934) commitment to thinking art as experience, and in the last section I see what knowledge is produced on the art encounter following a Deleuze-Dewey encounter around the concept of experience.

Overview concerning the notion of art experience

In this study, I use the term 'art experience' as an umbrella term to talk about one's experience when involved with the creating, making, conceptual or material configuring, or the performance of art, but also the aesthetic experience of being in the company of art. While the terms have different meanings, I noticed that in the art museum parlance, but also in various professional writings in art education, both terms are found to be interchangeable.

Writing about art experience or art as experience (Dewey, 1934) still begs the question; "What is experience?". Different meanings of experience abound, so much so that German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (2004) considered the term "one of the most obscure that we have" (p.341). But covering the terms 'art' as related to experience still begs the question of defining 'experience'. As Martin Jay (2005) points out, turning to etymology is not necessarily a desire to "recapture a true point of linguistic origin" (p.10), especially since Greek and Latin were themselves preceded by earlier languages. Nonetheless etymology does shed some light on the sedimentation of senses the words have acquired.

Jay (2005) explains that the English term 'experience' derives from the Latin *experientia* that stands for trial, proof or experiment; in French for instance, *mener une expérience* clearly suggests a controlled scientific experimentation. The Greek antecedent is *empeiria* and later will become the word 'empirical'. In Ancient Greece, there were three schools -and competing factions- of medicine: the *Dogmatiki*, the *Methodiki* and the *Empiriki*.; the *Empiriki* drew on observation and were skeptical of dogmatic authority and theoretical explanations. Over time, sense experience became associated with the un-reflected observation of the *Empiriki*, as opposed to the theoretical approach and rationality of the *Dogmatiki*. Because it became associated with the body and the sense, experience thus gained a strong derogatory meaning which extended also to include concepts such as ignorance and imposture (see also Williams, 1983). For Dewey, this denigration of experience which emerged in Greek classical thought until the end of the seventeenth-century is connected to an imposed hierarchy concerning the superiority of ideas, mind and intellect over the messiness of everyday life³⁰, for as he claimed: "Opposition of mind and body, soul and matter, spirit and flesh all have their origins, fundamentally, in fear of what life may bring forth" (Dewey, 1934, p.22).

³⁰ As detailed in *Songs of Experience*, according to Jay (2005) it is the seventeenth-century British empiricist philosophers who will first attempt a critique of the rationalists philosophical positions represented by Plato and René Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas, or the belief that ideas and cognitive capacities are inborn and already present in the mind. In his *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* of 1690, John Locke advances the argument that the mind was a tabula rasa on which all the materials for reason and knowledge, hence ideas, are imprinted from sensory experience. Contrary to rationalists doctrines, ideas do not pre-exist in the mind, we are not born with ideas writes Locke (1999), the mind needs access to the things themselves via experience: "How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store (...) When has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience" (p.87). Although Locke's empiricism maintains a view of the mind as a passive receptacle of impressions, it marked a significant philosophical turn because it sought to re-inscribe experience as the source of justifiable beliefs and human knowledge.

But what has been said about experience in relation to art and the aesthetic?

According to philosopher Jean-Marie Schaeffer (2015), if the terms 'aesthetic' and 'artistic' are often used as synonyms, nonetheless they refer to two different activities. The term 'artistic' refers to an act of making and the result of that making, such as an artwork. On the other hand, the term 'aesthetic' refers to both, in its etymology and by Eighteenth century German philosophers Alexander G. Baumgarten who has introduced the term in philosophical thinking, to a modality of sensual perception and a particular attention and judgment into the act of looking and perceiving. Later on, German philosopher Immanuel Kant will take up the term and discuss aesthetic experience and judgment in relation to questions of beauty and he sense of the sublime. First used by Baumgarten (1961 [1750]) in his treatise *Aesthetica*, philosopher Alan Goldman (2005) explains that the term 'aesthetic' opened up new discursive explorations; it referred to cognition achieved by means of knowledge derived by the senses. Baumgarten brought aesthetic to refer to the subjective and sensuous perception, especially in the arts; the arts were a source of sensuous knowledge but this did not translate to an interest in the artistic object *per se*. In his *Critique of Judgment* Kant (1987 [1790]) will later apply the term 'aesthetics' to making contemplative, disinterested and reflective judgments of beauty regarding arts and nature.

In the twentieth century, the influential aesthetician and analytic philosopher Monroe Beardsley (1991) will introduce a broader view of the aesthetic in experience, which for him is a "species of hedonic quality" (p.74. He provided a set of five criteria. In summary, for Beardsley (1991, p.75) the aesthetic character of experience can be determined by; 1) the "object directness", or the undivided attention and the willingness to surrender to the artwork, 2) a sense of felt freedom, a sense of release from everyday concerns (although Beardsley admits this can be unrealistic with difficult or puzzling artworks), 3) a certain

detachment of affect, 4) the cognitive discovery, experiencing artworks is a state "amounting to exhilaration in seeing connections between percepts and between meanings" (p.75), and 5) the sense of wholeness, contentment that it provides, even if the artwork provokes difficult emotions. Admittedly Gilles Deleuze's philosophy differs from Beardsley's; for instance, Deleuze is not involved in the evaluative or interpretive aspect of experience, nonetheless, I do find Beardsley's criteria interesting in that they round up ideas from Kant-experience as being disinterested, they also relate to cognition, phenomenology and Dewey's (1934) notion that there is sense of unity in the aesthetic experience.

An important read when I entered the field of art museum education was the seminal book *The Art of Seeing. An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter*, a study conducted for the Getty Education Institute for the Arts by psychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson (1990). In order to gain information on the processes, the reception and understanding of art by experts, Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson generated data by interviewing art museum professionals, thus participants with highly developed literacy skills in viewing art. As a result of the study, a key finding was that the meaningful aesthetic experience consists in an "intense involvement of attention in response to a visual stimulus, for no other reason than to sustain the interaction" (p.188) which is similar to a state of flow³¹ a concept developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1975). The main purpose of their study was to "construct a model of the ideal experience based on the highest form in which it can be expressed" (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. xv), hence the decision to work with

³¹ A concept developed by M. Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), flow is an autotelic experience- a self-contained activity without needing a goal because it is satisfying in itself. Flow is considered an optimal experience, it is a heightened state of consciousness; concentration is intense, self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time is distorted. Flow is an activity that produces joy and a gratification that does not need rewards.

museum knowledge holders in both historical and contemporary art. The research further defines the art experience as something occurring when;

[the] information coming from the artwork interacts with the information already stored in the viewer's mind. The result of this conjunction might be a sudden expansion, recombination or ordering of previously accumulated information, which in turn produces a variety of emotions such as delight, joy, or awe. The information in the work of art fuses with information in the viewer's memory and followed by the expansion of the viewer's consciousness, and the attendant emotional consequences. This process of fusion we will refer to as the structure of the aesthetic experience.

(p.18)

Thus, according to the authors, a successful art encounter depends on the interrelation, what they call a 'fusion', between the information gained by the person's observational skills, such as noting the artwork's specificities, and the production of a variety of subjective emotions (behavioral consequences) such as a sense of clarity, wholeness of the experience, felt freedom, and one's own cognitive functioning. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, art experiences all have a similar structure with four dimensions: emotional, communicational, intellectual and perceptual, but what is most important in their view of a successful art experience is achieving this fusion between the four dimensions. This fusion or being " [...] the merging of action and awareness" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 38) is the sense of flow. In terms of research, *The Art of Seeing* was generative for scholars and art museum educators looking to develop models fostering rich art experiences, or to understand the implication of cognition and a flow state of consciousness in the art experience (see Kirchberg & Troendle, 2012; Lachapelle, 1991, 1994; Latham, 2007). Admittedly, I have summarized the

complexity of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's findings yet, writing this section of my dissertation allowed me to revisit the above quote and I was struck by the word 'fusion' as a merging of whatever one is doing/thinking/feeling/perceiving in the art experience, and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage. Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the assemblage "groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations" (p.254). But I am not the first to entertain the thought of similarities, and differences, between the concept of fusion as flow and the concept of assemblage; indeed these have been pointed out by Zink (2015). Albeit Zink's research interest is not related to the arts, the author remarked how some assemblages are similar to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow because of the idea of the "heightened awareness that merge with action and a loss of ego, as these are also about relating to the world" (p.77). Nonetheless, in my view one of the crucial difference between the concepts of flow and the Deleuzian assemblage is that, in Csikszentmihalyi's model, there is a self-contained view of a subject which precedes the experience, while the subject in a Deleuzian assemblage comes into being *in* the relationship. Echoing Zink (2015), this is also one of the reasons why I find the Deleuzian concept of assemblage so generative, because it allows me to think and imagine the art gallery/body/artworks/art discourse/spaces/movements with "more flexible boundaries" (p.77).

In recent years, after his study of Beardsley and other writers in aesthetics, philosopher Richard Shusterman (1997) noted that, while the concept of aesthetic experience remains elusive, it is mostly written alongside four dimensions: evaluative (the sense of pleasure or not, qualities of the experience), phenomenological (the embodied nature of art experience, sense perceptions), semantic (meaning and interpretation), and demarcational-definitional (definitions of art). Albeit these categories are extremely broad, the exercise

proves interesting and useful to keep in mind as a conceptual frame. Here are the four dimensions used to define the art experience according to Shusterman's review of the literature:

First, aesthetic experience is essentially valuable and enjoyable; call this its evaluative dimension. Second, it is something vividly felt and subjectively savored, affectively absorbing us and focusing our attention on its immediate presence and thus standing out from the ordinary flow of routine experience; call this its phenomenological dimension. Third, it is meaningful experience, not mere sensation; call this its semantic dimension. [...] Fourth, it is a distinctive experience closely identified with the distinction of fine art and representing art's essential aim; call this is demarcational-definitional . (p.17)

I think that Shusterman has left out as a dimension, which is in my view, the productive potential of every art encounter³². Nonetheless, his summary invites one to consider how, while difficult to describe, explain or even speak of, the art experience is mostly understood as related to pre-conceptual affects, to subjective emotional or cognitive processes, to an embodied response to the physicality and materiality of an object defined as art, or, following Dewey (1934), defined as art through one's aesthetic experience of an object. Of course, in most authors, definitions of the aesthetic experience touch on more than one dimension.

Yet, there are other ways to look at aesthetic experience. For instance, there is this rather, perhaps unconventional but in my view insightful, definition by philosopher David Fenner (2003) reminding that aesthetic experiences are first of all experiences and these are;

³² In this instance by the term encounter I mean the experience of coming upon and being in the bodily presence of artworks.

(...) complex things, having to do with things as tidy as the formal qualities of the object under consideration and with things as messy as whether one had enough sleep the night before, whether one just had a fight with his roommate, whether one is carrying psychological baggage that is brought to consciousness by this particular aesthetic object. (p.41)

Complex, messy, embodied, relational, affective; these are some of the characteristics that can be said about the event of encountering art. as Martin Jay (2005) reminds us, "no consensus has been reached about what an aesthetic experience is or should be" (p.168), or what the art experience *produces*. The range of viewpoints vary considerably, and some even appear to be contradictory.

Here lies in my opinion, the beauty and fascinating character of being with art. There were according to Jay (2005), considerable fluctuations regarding the use, signification or importance of art experience. Many of the shifts took place between a focus on the experience as objective, related to cognitive faculties or, possible only through and in the embodied subjective experience. By implication, the art or aesthetic experience could be valuable if seen as an "object of discursive exploration" (p.131), if one could obtain knowledge through the senses yet, on the other hand, it could be perceived as unreliable since embodied and difficult to communicate. The art experience has been, and often still is, circumscribed and spoken of in binary terms such as viewer/artwork, mind/body, learning/feeling. Scholars still argue whether the experience of art is autonomous, and thus should be thought and treated differently, or if it overlaps with the regular concept of experience. Furthermore, contemporary artists are constantly troubling this possibility of ontological boundaries of art by the development, exploration and creation of new types of art implicating film, video,

sound, the viewer's own body, space, social practices and situations, educational strategies and more.

Drawing from these considerations, one might question if the concept of art experience is still relevant or perhaps is it more relevant than ever, especially with regards to contemporary art practices and propositions, many of these now renouncing even the notion of object since they exist only as interactions between people. The American philosopher and influential art critic Arthur Danto (2004) indirectly asked this same question after his encounter with Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* when first shown in 1964³³. The boxes were hand printed but they imitated (almost) perfectly the banal cleaning product one could buy at the supermarket. Danto was troubled and he started to reflect on the contemporary relevance of aesthetic experience as a particular category of experience. How can these Brillo looking boxes be considered art, and indirectly: did aesthetic experience still exist? He doubted it. According to his views, aesthetic experience had lost its definitional function ever since artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, had started to exhibit *ready-mades*, or industrially fabricated everyday objects selected by the artist and displayed in a gallery³⁴. How can one have an art experience or call it an art experience, Danto inquired, if the object appears to be simply an ordinary object, and therefore non-art? His question was provocative. It is interesting to note how his encounter with Warhol's *Brillo boxes* brought Danto to articulate his views concerning the importance of art theories and art institutions as definitional devices when

³³ Looking at Dewey, Beardsley, Goodman, and Danto, the philosopher Richard Shusterman (1997, 2000) wrote an interesting case about what he perceives to be the increasing demise, by philosophers, of the concept of aesthetic experience.

³⁴ I am not implying that an aesthetic experience is solely in the perception of material and formal qualities in the object. I think art/aesthetic experience in terms of relationality and other dimensions such as: the size or context of a gallery space, notions of proximity, sounds, smells, bodily sensations, how one body is affected by, responds or can circulate around/in the work constitutes the art experience.

traditional criteria of art appear absent, or too far removed from the known. But artistic theories and institutions, such as the art museum or gallery, function as more than definitional devices; in various ways they also support and frame one's experience by: putting in place possibilities for new encounters, providing information that can foster thinking and meaning making.

To Dónal O'Donoghue (2015), the concept of art experience is more relevant than ever considering the experiential impulse of many contemporary projects and the different ways many artists invite viewers to collaborate or participate in some manner for the artwork to exist as art. More specifically, O'Donoghue suggests that beyond the claim for participation, many recent works of relational aesthetics³⁵, are concerned, he writes, "with the promise and potentiality of experience; that is with what experience *does* and how it is and can be agentic in itself" (p.104). This brings forward the importance and continued relevance of thinking about the concept of art experience, especially if it means thinking about what experience produces, to what it does.

Arthur Danto passed away in 2013, the year Chinese artist Ai Weiwei presented the monumental installation *Bang* for the first time in the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The reader of this dissertation has already encountered the piece in my narrative titled "Eight hundred and eighty-six wooden stools", the words and photographs enacting for the reader a new instantiation of the artwork displayed at the Vancouver Art Gallery. I am simply curious and I wonder, but I can only speculate on Danto's possible choice of words to write about *Bang*, a precarious and swirly assemblage of second-hand, tattered, modest, and common three-legged stools. Danto's assumption seemed to be that the experience is derived

³⁵ The term relational art or relational aesthetics was coined by French curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) in the 1990s.

solely from the object but I think this is problematic because he overlooked the inter-connections.

Artworks are multiplicities and inter-connections. For instance, when Ai Weiwei developed *Bang* for the Biennale of 2013, the Chinese government was still preventing Ai from travelling outside of the country since his 2011 arrest. Hence, due to social-media and newspapers, the socio-cultural and political aspects of the installation were part of the public's experience. I did not attend the Venice Biennale but I had read about it and, in Vancouver, through the gallery text panel and the media frenzy surrounding the artist, visitors were likely to learn of Ai's tense political situation. I knew the stools had been collected by the artist and hence were discarded, ripped from their histories. Perhaps, it is this singular context and the space created by the artist that made me notice the simple wooden furniture in a different way; I feel the presence of the old tattered three-legged stools so expertly crafted by hand; some covered in paint appear quite recent but most carry deep gouges, half erased characters, deep marks and the texture of dry, tattered wood.

As I revisit the narrative telling but also a re-enactment in my "experience of encountering" (O'Donoghue, 2008, p.3) with Ai Weiwei's installation, I wish to inquire the messy spaces of being with art not by analyzing recurring themes in a block of narrative data or looking for psychological processes, but rather seeing what knowledge is produced on the art encounter when thinking with the theory of Deleuze and in his co-authored work with Guattari.

The concept of experience in the writings of Gilles Deleuze

The concepts of experience (as a noun and a verb) and experimentation are very important for Deleuze. More precisely, I should have written that both concepts are weaved throughout his philosophical work. For this reason, if this section appears quite succinct, it is because since the concept overlaps with encounter and assemblage—and desire, becoming, lines of flight, difference, and more— to avoid the risk of repetition, I isolate the concepts here as a way to introduce some key ideas. But again, since for Deleuze, life is creation, everything has to do with experimentation.

It is important to mention that his interest in experience differs from the psychological view of a unified subject experiencing the world out there, this preserving a dualistic separation between the inside and outside. As Inna Semetsky (2010) explains, Deleuze considered experience as a "milieu which provides the capacity to affect and be affected" (p. 91). Since experience is not grounded or perceived internally by the 'ego', this milieu is a non-topographic environment that makes possible affects, the transitory thoughts or sensations prior to conceptualization. Experience is also a-subjective since it is not 'had' by an individual; instead one is constituted through and within the process of experimentation. I look again at my photographs of *Bang* and I remember, or more precisely, I create a new experience through the image and feel surrounded by the assembled stools, the warmth of the old wood, the scratches made by the years of domestic use; it is an interesting conceptual shift to think that 'I' did not have an experience for me to describe and write down. Instead, 'I' as a viewer, was constituted by my interaction/experimentation with the artwork. An interaction residing in my body moving around and under the wood canopy, looking, thinking about the artist gathering his material, imagining the former people who lived with the small furniture.

The experimentation is embodied and lived, yet also quite subtle, I did not get to touch the wood, escalate the structure or test the solidity of the assemblage. On this, Semetsky (2010) points out something very interesting and I think important in the context of experiencing artworks: experience is "not limited to what is immediately perceived" (p.93). To Deleuze, a movement of change (becoming), something new happening as a result of experimentation can be real even if it is not manifest, even if it has been imperceptible.

And so, what is then 'experimentation'? "Never interpret; experience, experiment" wrote Deleuze (1995, p. 87). Experience as a noun and as a verb, or a process; between the two, Deleuze and Guattari seemed most interested by the verb and the generative process. Experimentation is something they explore in *Anti-Œdipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*; it implies to try something new, different methods or approaches without knowing what the result will be. But what does one experiment with? Bruce Baugh (2010) further explains that we experiment with "desires, forces, powers and their combinations, not only to 'see what happens', but to determine what different entities (bodies, languages, social groupings, environments and so on) are capable of" (p.93). There was no possibility for me to know in advance how my body would move or what it would do as I walked through the constellation of stools. There has to be the meeting of bodies (human and non-human), this interaction and experimentation of the installation, for me to see what my body would do. And through experimentation, discovering what the different entities do or produce in their arrangements will lead to knowledge. Certainly, my repeated visits with Xu Bing's (2014) installation *Background Story* enabled me to make connections between the discarded or ripped piece of newspaper on one side and the different sign it became when seen through the plexiglass and rice paper. I knew how my body would move, I created my path. And yet, every time, I would

always notice something new, and my body would shift and react to it differently. I saw that I could move and interact with the work in unexpected ways.

Furthermore, the concept of experience is crucially important to Deleuze because "the object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 4)³⁶. As mentioned previously, Deleuze is a philosopher of immanence and therefore insists that concepts are "not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. [...] They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature" (p.5). This serves to show the importance of experimentation for Deleuze. Since concepts are not given, one has to be pushed to thought. Yet how can this happen? Deleuze (1994) explored this question in his major work *Difference and Repetition* first published in 1968; thoughts are formed in the context of experiences and encounters. As Semetsky (2010) points out, contrary to analytical philosophy, experience is not about what is immediately perceived. Being pushed to thought does not have to be forceful, violent, controlling since affects can be imperceptible and can operate without us being aware.

Eight hundred and eighty-six three legged wooden stools. Rice paper, plexiglass, dried corn shaving, newspaper, plastic bags and pine needles. These may or may not carry much impact when looked as signs; I see mundane objects and detritus of everyday life, and yet when the things are brought into the assemblage of an artwork such as *Bang* by Ai Weiwei or Xu Bing's *Background Story*, something else happens. I deliberately kept the term 'something' vague; something happens. What happened the moment I turned a corner and saw the monumental structure of stools? Or when I actually started to walk in/through the installation. Deleuze is not interested in the what *is*, and I can see why the question of Being

³⁶ For a comprehensive study on the concept of experience in the work of Gilles Deleuze, see the philosophical dissertation by Charles Bolduc (2013).

can stultify, the 'what does it do' is much more generative. Deleuze repeated this idea in many books: "Experiment, don't signify and interpret!" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.139).

"To think is to experiment, but experimentation is always that which is in the process of coming about (...)" wrote Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 111), hence we make sense of experience not by connecting sense perceptions to universal categories but by experimentation itself. This idea of the coming about has further implications; Deleuze is not interested in the question of what is possible in relation to what is real. The important question for Deleuze is the relation between the actual and the virtual³⁷; if the virtual is real yet not actualized, how does one make it actual? Through experimentation. For Deleuze it is only experimentation which can reveal or actualize something which, until one experiences, had remained a potential, or in Deleuzian terms, virtual.

While he did not address the question of the virtual, the next section will turn to revisit pragmatist philosopher and progressive educational theorist John Dewey's understanding of experience—and art experience, for Dewey continually emphasized experience in his conception of progressive education.

Revisiting John Dewey's concept of art experience

Although developed almost sixty years earlier than Deleuze, also present in the work of Dewey, is this idea of experience as both responding and undergoing. Indeed, Dewey (1934) carefully examines in *Art as Experience*, the notion of experience as the very process of

³⁷ As mentioned in the glossary, for Deleuze, the virtual is real but it is not actualized. The concept of the virtual has nothing to do with the simulated reality of video games, for instance.

living and he defines it as; "the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication" (p. 22). Throughout the book, Dewey (1934) further explores and defines experience as,

[...] a matter of the interaction of organism with its environment, an environment that is human as well as physical, that includes the materials of tradition and institutions as well as local surroundings. The organism brings with it through its own structure, native and acquired, forces that play a part in the interaction. The self acts as well as undergoes, and its undergoings are not impression stamped upon an inert wax but depend upon the way the organism reacts and responds. (p.246)

In this quote, the major characteristics of experience are; 1) the inter-relation between the "living organism" (p. 246) or the self (as an assemblage with "its own structure, native and acquired" (Dewey, 1934, p.246) and the environment, 2) the change that occurs in the living organism due to this interaction. Contrary to Locke's empiricist model, Dewey rejects the view of a mind passively receiving the sense impressions, since experience is a constant interaction and a transformation of that interaction since for each being/organism experience is an active internal (mental) and external process.

Also important for Dewey, experience has a unity, a sense of wholeness and "self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience" (p.35). These qualifiers or categories are used after the moment, when we reflect or talk about the experience of attending *this* concert, or visiting *that* exhibition. Furthermore, Dewey (1934) explains how in experience there is no division such as a mind closed onto itself and looking out at what is being experienced; experience signals an "active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events (p.19). According to him, it is

Western rational philosophy which has created false dichotomies since, he explains, the opposition of mind and body, soul and matter, find their origin in the "fear of what life may bring forth" (p.22). Here is a profound resonance in Dewey's words for art museum educators; when I started to read his work, I for one have become more attentive to my vocabulary and in thinking more about the constant interaction between the museum public and artworks.

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that for Dewey, not all experiences are valuable for this depends on the *quality* of the experience. As developed in *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1997) believes it is not the absence of experiences which is the problem in educational situations, but rather when experiences are, "wrong and defective from the standpoint of connection with further experience" (p.27), some experiences can also be mis-educative when they have the effect of preventing the emergence of further experiences. Thus, an experience has quality when it has an aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness (I call this the affective aspect of experience), and it has an influence upon later experiences (experience produces an effect of continuity). While in this study, the concept of art experience will not be examined along a sliding and evaluative scale in terms of *quality*, I think Dewey provides art museums with a relevant question: how to foster and choose the types of experiences, he writes, "that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p.28). Yet, at the same time, I am reticent if this implies a desire, due to institutional pressures and neoliberal requirements for validity, to instrumentalize and design models of "best practices".

Although experience happens continuously in our daily lives, all do not constitute *an* experience according to Dewey; some are random activities which we forget and exhaust themselves during the day, without leaving traces or carrying over ideas, knowledge, memories, emotions which are brought forward in/to other experiences. Unity and a sense of completeness are important characteristics to the Deweyian experience. First of all, an

experience can be named or, in a way, circumscribed in time and space, for "it has a unity that gives it its name, *that* meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship" writes Dewey (1934, p.37). But it is not enough for an experience to be circumscribed in time and space; it must provide a sense of achievement or completeness,

[...] we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives a solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or talking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is *an* experience. (Dewey, 1934, p. 35)

With all due respect to Dewey's definition of experience, it is regarding the characteristics of unity and fulfillment that I will state my concerns. As Noël Carroll (2001) teased, Dewey can be a "slippery writer" (p.50) hence, I may be over-interpreting or misreading his saying. I will close this section with thoughts on unity and fulfillment in experience.

By introducing the notions of unity and fulfillment, Dewey wants to establish some distinctions between various actions, activities, everyday experiences. I understand and see the qualitative difference between an automatic gesture such as running up the main staircase of the gallery, absently walking past *Bang* because I am late to a meeting, and a rich -my expression- art experience such as the sense of suspended time I felt while sitting underneath

the delicate assemblage of wooden stools, almost hearing the silent voices of generations who used these objects as everyday furniture, or the magical moment of watching a child playfully creating a new setting and story inside the installation space. While I would prefer another word than 'unity' to describe *an* experience, simply because unity implies a notion of boundary and does not adequately speak how experiences overlap, and build over time a complex web of images, memories, affects, ideas and interactions with other visitors, or new impressions about the physicality of the piece. Nonetheless, I also understand that for Dewey the word 'unity' is certainly not implying the end of experience, rather it marks, I would say, a moment of transition since as Dewey (1934) acknowledges, intellectual meanings or emotions can be "carried over from past experiences" (p.118).

In the following section, informed by a/r/tography, I want to see what emerges when bringing ideas from Deleuze and Dewey in contiguity. What can happen in the in-between, in the relation between the two?

Thoughts on art experience following a Deleuze-Dewey encounter:

I certainly am not the first one to see rich parallels between Deleuze and Dewey; for instance Inna Semetsky (2003; 2006) looking at education, and John J. Stuhr (2015) concerned with pragmatism, have more or less brought them together since experience and experimentation are central concepts for both Deleuze and Dewey. Deleuze wrote extensively on the arts albeit he did not, to my knowledge, offer an extended reflection on the art museum although we know he frequently visited art galleries. Nevertheless, I contend that a Deleuze-Dewey encounter is a rich opportunity to think the aesthetic experience in the museum in relation to Dewey's critique that the museum compartmentalizes art and life, that

both authors critique the stifling effects that recognition has upon experience and thus, of the importance of being worthy of the encounter.

A friend and close advisor to Albert Barnes who established an art education department at the Barnes Foundation in 1924, Dewey (1900) charted, in his series of lectures *The School and Society*, the model of his ideal school in which prominently figured a museum space at the intersection of areas for art, music and scientific laboratories. Nonetheless, while he championed a special role for the museum, he disapproved of any discourse or institutional structure separating or compartmentalizing art and life. The museum experience was valuable but it was not, as Hein (2004) mentions, a complete life-experience for it had to connect to and extend everyday experience. Dewey also offered a severe warning to art museum education because, according to him, a guided tour in a gallery cannot be a genuine aesthetic experience since "attention is called here and there to some high point" (p.54) and this is not to perceive. For to perceive, "a beholder must *create* his own experience" (p.54) otherwise, continues Dewey, expressions of admiration or emotional excitations are no more than a "mixture of scraps of learning with conformity" (p.54). The comment is scathing, Dewey did not mince his words. I understand that for Dewey, distraction and dispersion of one's interaction with the world did not lead to a fulfilling experience. Hence, a key question for Dewey is to find ways of living aesthetic experiences as a continuation of a normal processes of living; it is an intensification of significance in common experience, and one which should not be set apart from "any other mode of experience" (p.11).

Dewey became influential in art museum education for his position regarding experience as the basis for meaning making and his celebration of the art experience as an "intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience" (p.46).

More so, there has to be a continuous interaction—as engaged perception—between the fullness of a person and the art object. This is an interesting reminder: a perceiver who is to idle will not see, hear or fully create her/his/their aesthetic experience since perceiving is not about resting in the already known, it requires an active going toward in order to allow further experiences. Dewey explains that;

[...] receptivity is not passivity. It, too, is a process consisting of a series of responsive acts that accumulate toward objective fulfillment. Otherwise, there is not perception but recognition. The difference between the two is immense. Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized. [...] In recognition we fall back, as upon a stereotype, upon some previously formed scheme. [...] The esthetic or undergoing phase of experience is receptive. It involves surrender. [...] Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. To steep ourselves in a subject-matter we have first to plunge into it. (pp. 52-53)

This rich and complex quote seems to announce some ideas present in Deleuze's (1994) for whom recognition kills any possibility for a real encounter since recognition is about representation, reproduction, resemblance. When engaging with artworks, Dewey explicitly warns against staying in too easy state of recognition, of fixating on the known thus preventing further discoveries offered by/in the artwork.

Mine is not an attempt to contradict or tame Dewey's comments concerning the museum, indeed by their definition museums do de-contextualize historical art, although many contemporary art practices conceptualize and create artworks specifically to be

displayed in a museum or gallery. For instance, this is certainly the case for the installations *Bang* by Ai Weiwei, or *Background Story* by Xu Bing which refers to an important scroll painting kept in the collections of the Palace Museum in Beijing. If I think with Deleuze, since life is a plane of immanence, there is no outside, to relation to something, such as a museum experience in relation to a *real* one. In terms of an experience of encountering art, I would claim that the museum experience *is* a complete life-experience. What is important is to enter into an assemblage and attend to *that* particular object. The other point, this is one that Deleuze and Dewey have in common, is their critique of recognition.

I recall being amused and pleasantly comforted when I first stepped into Ai Weiwei's (2010-2014) monumental installation and recognized the presence of the humble wooden stool as building material. Recognition is only the beginning in the act of perception says Dewey, but the most important follows in the active movement of back-and-forth (my terms) between the perceiver and the art object. Certainly, recognizing the hand-made wooden stools is significant but a quality experience requires me to perceive also the choices made by the artist, the "how it is said" (p.106). "The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others" wrote Dewey (1934, p.106); it is in aesthetic experience that the materiality of what we perceive becomes art. In a similar way, for Deleuze, experience becomes meaningful in and because of the process of experimentation.

ENCOUNTER - *Stepping into Shan Shui*

My pencil moved swiftly on the page, words flowed, words not to describe or fix the tracing of my gaze but rather as a form of playful conversation with Xu Bing's (2014) exquisite *Background Story. Ten thousand Li of Mountains and Rivers*. Can one extend or stretch the pleasure of the encounter over time, over repeated viewings? For me, each new word scribbled on the page, or sometimes a photographic detail allows the encountering to continue nowhere and everywhere. A continuation without destination, a conversation which cannot be exhausted.

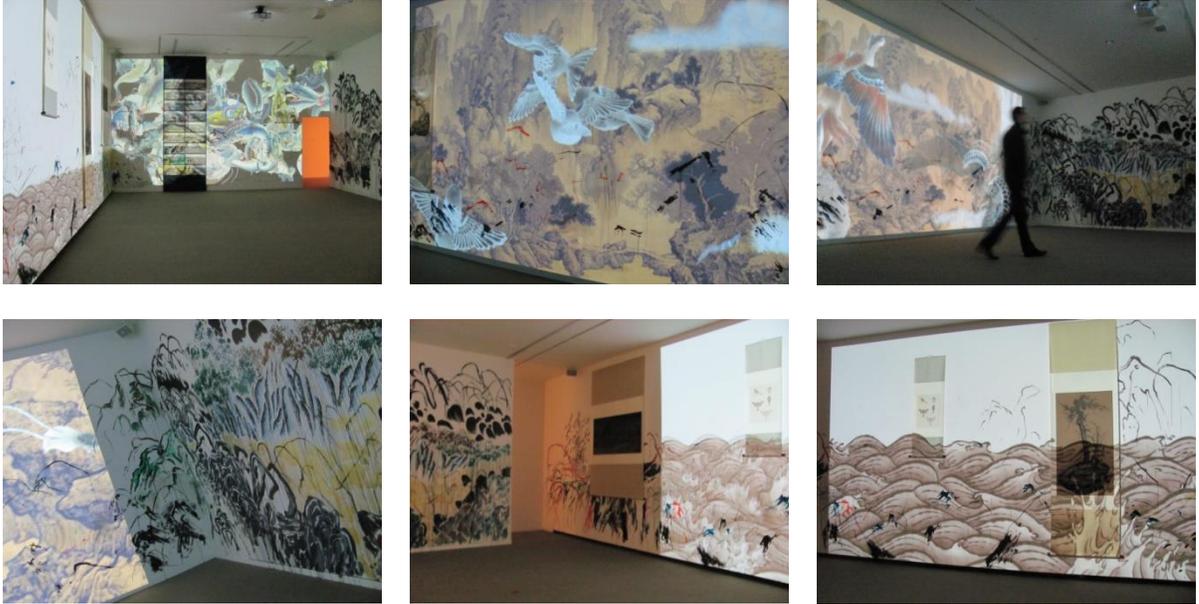
But something else grabs my attention; I hear a friendly voice talking to me. I lift my nose from my notebook. She stands beside me, and with a nod, asks about my focused writing; a term paper? She has noticed the presence of quite a few students equipped with notepad or sketchbook. Yes, this is field work for my dissertation. I explain briefly my topic and hand out an oral consent form. She was happy to chat. "On the art encounter? How interesting". She loves encountering artworks but she feels that sometimes things happen after, that ideas linger and then come back much later. "I like to come and visit on my own" she adds, "it's easier that way to interact with other visitors. And I love to share my enthusiasm. My name is E.". She attended the opening of *Unscrolled. Reframing Tradition in Contemporary Chinese Art* and visited the exhibition, but she desired to see it again. "Especially for Sun Xun's film

and painting installation. I just love it!" So do I. Superlatives words of appreciation and some "did you notice" form the basis of our dialogue for a moment. And the birds..."What do think of those beautiful animated birds in flight?" They are exquisitely drawn but did you notice the background, I add. "What do you mean?" she replies and makes a move towards Sun Xun's (2014) gallery space. I follow her and we step into the installation *Shan Shui - Cosmos*.



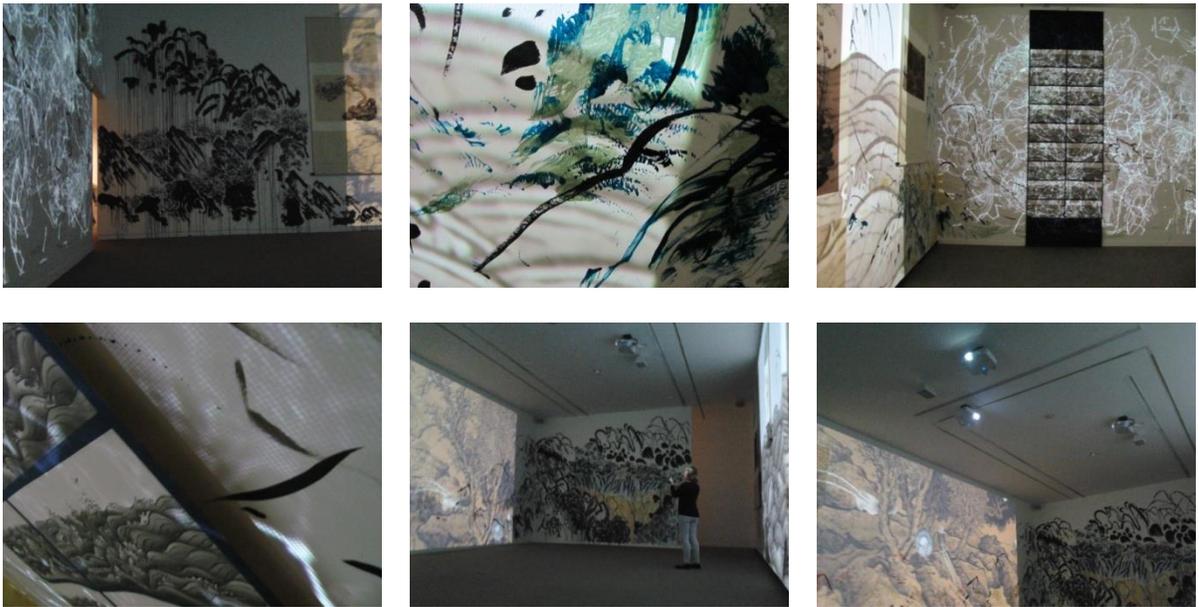
Inside, the white cube of the gallery is transformed, we step into another world. A world of deep muffled sounds—perhaps water curling at the bottom of a waterfall or the roaring of a powerful river, and on every wall large fluid brushstrokes of black, green and some red evoke the topography of Southern China with curvy mountains and steep valleys. But when I step closer to the wall paintings, they seem so abstract, more like graffiti marks because of the paint freely dripping, the brushstroke fluid and energetic. The gallery space is transformed, it is now a magical world of the moving image with three different projections; some of a fighting sea serpent, abstract dots evolving

into constellations and fantastic creatures, exotic colorful birds flying into a traditional black ink landscape painting.



Sun Xun plays with superposition, overlap, the contamination of signs and artistic tradition by his juxtaposition of traditional calligraphic techniques with digital animation. His large scale animated films are projected directly onto the painted landscape plus a third layer of hanging reproductions of landscape or paintings of exquisite birds, dating back from the Song Dynasty, or his own ink drawings of a monstrous water serpent (or perhaps a sea dragon) fighting what seems like a giant turtle. My senses are overwhelmed; there's the impossibility of grasping the entirety of an ever changing visual spectacle, the presence of the deep roaring sounds of rumbling waves, the background noise coming from the museum ventilation system and, perhaps in my imagination, even the moisture in the air.

Spontaneously, E. and I engage and start playing with the work; she points out and makes me notice the quality and the manifest skill of his brushstrokes. "I love this section of the mural painting...", she said. From afar, the paint work evokes a vague mountainous landscape but from close-up, the signs are purely abstract, fluid, gestural strokes but E. recognizes the quality and acknowledges Sun Xun's training and skills in traditional Chinese calligraphy.



We exchange some more about Sun Xun's grand-father who experienced sustained hardships during the Cultural Revolution and Sun's layered conversations with China's political and artistic history. I thought I knew the installation quite well due to repeated visits because of my gallery tours but E. makes me notice unseen details, visual textures and new connections such

as; at some point, the traditional ink landscape in the animation with majestic birds in flight perfectly joins with the painted mural in the gallery space thus creating the illusion of a transformation, a passage in-between two realities. History and present flow, connect and dialogue in and through the work of art. How did I miss that?

"But what did you mean, when you asked if I had noticed about the background?" says E. We had been playing with the work, noticing how the copies of old scroll paintings suspended in the installation were similar and perhaps the historical source for the motifs of the colorful birds flying in the digital animation. Sun Xun plunges the viewer into the maelstrom of his mind, the apparent confusion, juxtaposition, layering of images and references is a wonderful metaphor of an artistic process. "Notice the small garden scene and the waterfall behind the birds...now look around the space...", I said. Still she did not understand. I pointed to the reproduction of a landscape from the period of the Song dynasty that was suspended on the opposite wall and partially into the light projected by the film animation showing the fighting water serpent. She moves closer and gasps, "Yes, I have seen this but I did not make the connection!" There in full view, yet easy to overlook, is the view Sun Xun reproduced for the background of his birds in flight. E. is fascinated, partly because she had seen the reproduction during an earlier visit yet without actually noticing the relationship. But also, she and I realized how the artist sets up an invitation; hearing the call of the work,

our experiencing and engaging in a playful conversation with the piece made us enter into some of the ways the work thinks and makes manifest.

CHAPTER 3

Encounter

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, encounter as a verb means to meet a person or thing or come across especially unexpectedly, to meet as an adversary or to go counter to and oppose. As a noun, it refers to the meeting with a person or thing by chance or a confrontation, the encounter can also define a style of address, an exposure to something such as an information or idea that suddenly presents itself. Contrary to the concept of experience which is in use since Greek (as *empeiria*) and Roman times (as *experiri*), the word 'encounter' both as verb and noun does not exhibit a similarly prestigious philosophical pedigree. Put simply the word encounter, deriving from the late Latin *incontrare*, *in-* and *contra* or against, is a common Romanic word found in texts only since c.1300

In terms of vernacular language, the word encounter is commonly synonymous of 'a meeting with' and is often found interchangeable with the word experience, however for Gilles Deleuze, while they are closely interconnected, there are distinctions between experience and the contingent character of encounters. This chapter will examine the concept of encounter in the Deleuze's writings. Following this, I turn to Merleau-Ponty and his statement about the tutelage of perception. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss what knowledge can be produced on the notion of art experience following an improbable meeting between Deleuze, who distanced himself from phenomenology, and Merleau-Ponty.

The concept of encounter in the writings of Gilles Deleuze

For Deleuze (1994), ideas do not exist out there waiting the right moment to enter a person. Thinking is a creative process and he considers encounters as the necessary events to actualize what until then, had remained virtual:

Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. (p. 139)

Still I wanted to make sense of the forces moving through my interconnectedness with the art and the gallery context but also time, not only as clock-time, for both through my work as museum educator and in my fieldwork, I re-visited the same artworks. I am also interested by duration in the sense of an "immediate awareness of the flow of changes that simultaneously constitutes differences and relationships between particulars" (Stagoll, 2010, p.82). Deleuze seems to imply that an encounter is only possible, or happening if the event is unplanned, contingent. And yet, if I follow Deleuze's understanding of repetition and difference, repetition is never the repetition of the same (because Deleuze does not define in terms of identity), a repetition is always something different. And thus yes, I revisit artworks many times but if I attend to the particulars of my encounter, then each new visit is an experimentation and possibly another encounter.

Informed by Deleuze, one can say that to encounter is an experience since, as we have seen in chapter one, he understands experience as a milieu where one creates or allows opportunities for encounters. Similarly to the standard definition of the term, in *Difference*

and Repetition, Deleuze (1994) describes the encounter as something unplanned and a shock. A significant particularity of the encounter is the element of chance or contingency, he writes,

[...] even the point of departure - namely, sensibility in the encounter with that which forces sensation - presupposes neither affinity nor predestination. On the contrary, it is the fortuitousness or the contingency of the encounter which guarantees the necessity of that which it forces to be thought. (p.145)

We understand from this how, for Deleuze, if experimentation is to constitute or become an encounter, then it must contain an element of the unexpected, an affective event which acts as a force to push someone into a signifying unknown and possibly to thought. Then a question arises; can it be claimed that all experiences are milieus enabling encounters? While Deleuze did not elaborate on this specific question, one might say that according to the standard definition of encounter, for the experience to be or become an encounter both as noun and process, the element of contingency is required. This is not a rhetorical question, for as I have suggested repeatedly in my narrative, the art experience—and, I would claim, the art encounter—implies a sense of time. If the encounter is something unplanned, a coming against which cannot be predicted; then how do I consider the repeated visits in art installations I have become familiar with? Deleuze seems to favor the contingent experience as encounter, but I need to push this idea further to think of the micro encounters possible in frequent visits of the same artwork. Beside Deleuze's desire to experience encounters with paintings or cinema, it should be said that he did not argue in favor of specific modes of experiencing art. And neither am I suggesting that there is a better way of experiencing artwork; whether one meets an artwork or artistic situation by surprise or for the first time, or if it is similar to my repeated and prolonged experiences of Ai Weiwei's *Bang* or Farmer's

(2015) *Storeroom Overture*³⁸, described soon. Nevertheless, what I do claim is that encountering an artwork can happen during a first unplanned encounter or over repeated visits.

I remember standing by the large landscape by Xu Bing (2014) and E. telling me how she felt that encounters happen after seeing the works because things or impressions linger, and questions or ideas come back later. I remember how each of my visits into *Storeroom Overture* became opportunities for various encounters because there was always something different to be discovered, heard, felt, or observed such as the unobtrusive little note by the artist telling me that art experience is of my own making. I realize every time when I stepped into *The Surgeon and the Photographer* (Farmer, 2015), that my body would take another path in-between the puppet figurines and I would make new discoveries and acquaintances each time. It is relevant to note also, how to Maxine Greene (2001) encounters with the same work of art will be different on each occasion, "because we are different at different times of our lives" (p.36).

As we will see, it is important to point out how Deleuze (1994) complicates the standard definition of the encounter as a coming-against and a shock by adding a completely different set of questions: these are the issues of recognition and representation, and thought/thinking. He writes,

What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple, or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In

³⁸ On the topic of viewing duration, I wish to mention the rich and interesting study conducted by Lachapelle, Douesnard and Keenlyside (2007) with 37 non-expert viewers responding to public contemporary art. In their conclusion, the researchers have noted a positive correlation between prolonged viewing time and better art appreciation.

recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived. (p. 139)

A first characteristic of the encounter then is being distinct from recognition or representation. For Deleuze (1994), the world of representation is defined by "the primacy of identity, however conceived" (p.xix), but it also entails the notion of common sense, of presuppositions in the what-everybody-knows. There can't be an encounter when "our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed" writes Simon O'Sullivan (2006, p. 1); indeed, recognizing something implies that an image or idea is already thought, seen, solidified. Only when nothing is recognized or pinned down as a representation can there be destabilization, a being troubled by the unexpected encounter. O'Sullivan calls this the "creative moment of the encounter" (p.1) because it forces us to thought, and creates a space for us to trouble our habitual views. I think the implications of Deleuze's ideas about an encounter resonate with Maxine Greene's (2001) view that even if one has seen, read or heard an artwork previously, making a deliberate attempt to bring a quality of "presentness, attentiveness" (p.45) makes us "discern more" (p.6) and differently.

Examining further the concept of encounter, Deleuze (1994) adds a second characteristic:

[...] the object of encounter, on the other hand, really gives rise to sensibility with regards to a given sense. [...] that which can only be sensed (the *sentiendum* or the being of the sensible) moves the soul, 'perplexes' it - in other words, forces it to pose a problem: as though the object of encounter, the sign, were the bearer of a problem - as though it were a problem. (p.140)

Thus, for Deleuze the encounter requires some sort of meeting with an 'object' of encounter-as idea, material thing- but the object of encounter is not required to be identified as 'the' object of encounter because it can only be sensed and be experienced through a range of affects such as joy, fear, anger. Importantly, the 'what-was-encountered' does not give rise to an already fixed chain of signification, such as would happen in a process of recognition and representation. Deleuze does not consider encounters as a method to do philosophy, more importantly it is a practice of living (McCoy, 2012; Stivale, 2009). In his filmed interview *L'Abécédaire* with Claire Parnet (Boutang, 2012), Deleuze relates his regular practice of going to the cinema or visiting art galleries on the weekend; allowing the possibility for an encounter to happen. And how does he know if he's had an encounter? Deleuze asks himself the simple question: "*Est-ce que ça me trouble?*" [Does it trouble me?]³⁹. An encounter is always a risk to be taken, in the sense that it is an un-known. The encounter is a risk in the sense that I never know what can happen if/when I experiment—stepping inside an art gallery, walking by a piece of public art, opening a novel, attending a play, joining a chorus. For Deleuze, when the soul⁴⁰ is moved and troubled by a pre-linguistic sense of the object, body or idea encountered, that which can only be sensed forces it to pose a question, or be pushed to thought.

In summary, I entertain the thought of the art experience as a milieu where encounters are possible, encounters which provoke one to think, to notice something new about the artwork, to make connections with an idea or object of knowledge, to reflect on

³⁹ My own translation.

⁴⁰ Drawing from his studies on Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), for Deleuze; "the soul is neither above nor inside, it is "with", it is on the road, exposed to all contacts, encounters, in the company of those who follow the same way, "feel with them, seize the vibration of their soul and their body as they pass", the opposite of a morality of salvation, teaching the soul to live its life, not to save it" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987/2002, p. 62).

oneself or large social concerns, or to ask new questions. As I strolled into Farmer's installation *The Surgeon and the Photographer* and as I read over my narrative (on page 163), I reflect on the micro encounters which occurred. I did not feel constantly troubled but there was the little shocks of the first surprise when I stepped into an imposing and, at first, seemingly menacing crowd of silent puppets staring at me, the sight of figurines with cut-out photographs from a 1960s *Life* magazine sparked reflections about social inequalities, racial struggles, and ideologies re-produced through the printed medium. Informed by both Gilles Deleuze (1994) I understand the art encounter as something contingent, an event one cannot plan in advance—even if I had previously seen, repeatedly visited or already was informed about the artwork.

Revisiting Merleau-Ponty's notion of "the tutelage of perception"

If Friedrich Nietzsche brought attention to the body after centuries of Western philosophy dominated by the mind and rationalism, it is French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty who fully makes the body a central theme of his philosophical program. In 1945, with the publication of *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that we think, see, and perceive the world *in/through* our body. I do not see a world distinct out there for me to describe, rather, the world is my embodied perception. In this way, Merleau-Ponty seeks to critique the predominance of rationality, especially René Descartes' mind-body dualism, but also the view of science as an objective, self-sufficient understanding of the world. No claims are made that scientific research and experimentation should be abandoned, rather for Merleau-Ponty (2004), "we can no longer flatter ourselves with the idea that, in science, the exercise of a pure and unsituated intellect can allow us to gain access to an object

free of all human traces" (p.36). This is an attack on the arrogance of scientific thought believing it can attain absolute and complete knowledge while disregarding the role of the body, because as Merleau-Ponty claimed, " The body is our general medium for having a world" (2002, p. 169).

Drawing and expanding from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl⁴¹, Merleau-Ponty suggested that the world is not an object separate from us; we are intertwined with the world, as he wrote: "Our body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system" (2002, p. 235). In the 1948 lecture series commissioned by the French national radio, he stated his philosophy of the lived experience;

Here, for the first time, we come across the idea that rather than a mind *and* a body, man is a mind *with* a body, a being who can only get to the truth of things because its body is, as it were, embedded in those things. (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 43)

While my study is not phenomenological, this research is not about excavating an essence to the art experience, no phenomenon to isolate in order for a Subject to focus on what is internally perceived, however I am drawn to Merleau-Ponty's focus on the flesh and on one's embodied enactment in/of the world. I remember sitting under/in/amongst/as part of Ai

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) promoted a conception of experience as the basis of consciousness, especially in his work on phenomenology, a philosophical movement and method he inaugurated. While it was never a fixed system with principles set into stone, Husserl saw phenomenology as a new way of doing philosophy since it emphasized, an attempt to get to the things themselves, to describe phenomena as it manifests itself to the consciousness of the experiencer. Derived from the Greek *phainesthai* (phenomenon) meaning 'to appear' or 'to manifest itself', thus phenomenology is a desire to capture and describe the subjective (as in first-person), lived-experience by bracketing out or suspend beliefs about the phenomenon. For a succinct introduction to Husserl's phenomenology see Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). "Preface" in *The Phenomenology of perception*, pp.xvii-xxiv. For studies on phenomenology see; Moran (2000), Van Manen (2014).

Weiwei's installation *Bang*, leaning my back against the cool wall, feeling protected under the canopy of this elaborate wood structure, admiring the intricate shadow designs, the corner of my eye just catching glimpses of people strolling by. Language at the same time attempting to describe, yet too limited and leaving gaps, but paradoxically language is somehow generative and already creating another way of being with the work. I need to be careful in my choice of words; there is no essence to an 'art experience' of *Bang* as a phenomenon which is out there for me to excavate through careful description. Albeit the description precisely allows me to think and attend seriously to Merleau-Ponty's view of the body and mind as inextricably enmeshed; as the thinking body/embodied thinking.

I notice my tendency to write about *my* experience of Ai Weiwei's (2010-2014) piece or Sun Xun's (2014) video installation, this 'aboutness' that corresponds to Husserl's notion of intentionality (see Moran, 2000). Intentionality in philosophy means that we are always conscious of something. As I enter the gallery space and face a monumental sculptural installation, I am of course aware of this imposing structure that both seems to confront me, push against me and yet also entice and invite me. My scratch notes are just a few words on paper, yet thinking with Merleau-Ponty is a challenge for me to reflect on the being-enmeshed of experience which is so difficult to articulate and think through.

Ai Weiwei selected a mundane object - the domestic wooden stool - passed down from generation to generation, but whose fabrication is becoming obsolete in China due to the introduction of industrial materials. The tattered three-legged stools found obsolescence, yet now actively purchased and collected by the artist, take a new life; they become essential components in a contemporary art installation. Despite them being interlocked, turned upside down, or partially transformed by the insertion of special rods for solidity, I do not

perceive the work a simple stack of wood pieces. The artist might have chosen to break apart the wooden stool in order to reassemble in a completely different set of connections.

Dismantling the functional stool could possibly have made it difficult for the viewer to notice their original function. On the contrary, Ai Weiwei aligns himself with the strategies of the readymade and allows viewers to recognize the stool as a stool, hence a useful domestic object calling for the body. But in what way is this important? During his 1948 lectures pronounced on the French radio, Merleau-Ponty explains the importance and implications of direct experience in this passage on the 'tutelage' of perception as instruction and guidance;

No detail is insignificant: the grain, the shape of the feet, the colour and age of the wood, as well as the scratches and graffiti which show that age. The meaning, 'table', will only interest me insofar as it arises out of the 'details which embody its present mode of being. If I accept the tutelage of perception, I find I am ready to understand the work of art. For it too is a totality of flesh in which meaning is not free, so to speak, but bound, a prisoner of all the signs or details, which reveal it for me. Thus the work of art resembles the object of perception: its nature is to be seen or heard and no attempt to define or analyse it, however valuable that may be afterwards as a way of taking stock of this experience, can ever stand in place of the direct perceptual experience." (2004, pp. 70-71)

Merleau-Ponty sends us an invitation to 'accept' the tutelage of perception. The English word tutelage carries the meaning of protection or authority over someone or something; it also refers to the notion of instruction. In the French original text, Merleau-Ponty (2002) wrote about "l'école de la perception" (chap.6, ¶ 2), or as a direct translation 'the school of perception', and I see why the translator chose the term 'tutelage' as instruction. But

what could it mean to "accept the tutelage of perception" as asked by Merleau-Ponty (2004, p.70)? Thus expressed, perception is a mode of instruction or teaching, but although he did not elaborate on this, one that should, I believe, remain open to experience rather than be a prescriptive method. Hence, although I am concerned about the risks of seeing the 'tutelage' as a structure or procedure, I do see how my meaning making of *Bang* is grounded in my embodied experience. One could argue that my numerous photographs of the installation taken from different points of view provide the same information, yet as Merleau-Ponty suggested, while this analysis of the work (as mediated by the visual) could be valuable, it cannot replace direct perceptual experience.

Thoughts on the art experience following a Deleuze-Merleau-Ponty conceptual encounter

As stated by Alain Beaulieu (2009), to Deleuze, "phenomenology is neither a trusted friend nor a hated enemy" (p.261); Deleuze treats phenomenology as an enemy because "it presents an intelligibility of meaning that lends a sort of religious coherence to an ideal world of meaning and signification" (p.261), and yet Deleuze will remain interested by phenomenology because it provides the grounds to define important concepts in his work (on immanence, ontology, the event). Despite their differing philosophical views, I find it very interesting to bring together Deleuze's elaboration on the concept of recognition and its opposite the encounter, with Merleau-Ponty's expression of "the tutelage of perception". My aim is not to find patterns of homogeneity between them, but to see where they could connect as part of a larger, if fragile and temporary, assemblage.

In Ai Weiwei's installation *Bang*, my gaze catches sight of the wood and distinguishes a form that resonates with familiarity; my body recalls a particular way of behaving when I see the three legs and a round seat. Abiding by the museum rules, I will not use my sense of touch but due to previous experiences, yet I imagine the heaviness of the object, the soft texture of the worn-out edges. Some seats are scratched and the wood is splitting from old age, I feel like sitting down to repeat the gesture so often performed with them, I imagine individuals resting after a long day. I can almost hear the chatter of voices engraved in the wood's own memory. How is it that simple pieces of wood can now carry the weight of the past? Of course, this is only a metaphor, and yet the body knows, beyond seeing, beyond rationalizing, the body feels the complex layers of memories, stories and cultural history. And yet, the artist interrupts and complicates my desire to sit down or think of the object as useful. I cannot touch but not simply because I am in an art gallery. The artistic process asked for the seats to be intricately interlocked so that the entire equilibrium of the sculptural installation relies and needs the weight, resistance and counter-weight of each stool⁴². This perception of how the ensemble relies on individual parts is not something simply 'visible' or of the order of opticality-albeit it can be deduced- however these are forces my body understands only upon encountering.

Lying beside me on the carpet are images, I look down and I can gaze upon printed imaged of Sun Xun's (2014) piece *Shan Shui - Cosmos*. I recognize the immersive film installation, the semi-abstract mountains painted on the wall, the colourful birds flying across the reproduction of a landscape from the Song Dynasty, images overlapping. I am in a space of recognition while simultaneously encountering the photographs for what they are, as

⁴² As a precautionary measure, a number of discrete safety metallic cables were also attached between the ceiling in high wall gallery to various supporting sections of the wood structure.

objects. And they surprise me for I notice the emptiness of the space, as the researcher, a deliberate choice on my part. Somehow, much of the life is in the text. I read about E. and myself exploring the work, noticing, pointing out. In my mind I re-live, rewind, replay, the moment when, intrigued by the painterly mountain landscape on the walls, I decided to come closer for a look. And that's when I noticed the traces of the brush, the excess of paint that dripped down towards the floor and the graffiti effects.

As explained in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), recognition functions with "common sense" (p.139). For instance, in Ai Weiwei's *Bang*, one can recognize each individual object as a common stool, something to sit on. If I remain content with recognition and common sense, I am not in a space of encounter, because recognition Poxon and Stivale (2011) suggest, "domesticates difference by dismissing as inconsequential all of the details about this particular [object]" (p.68). The Deleuze-Merleau-Ponty encounter, brings to the fore how encounter might also be a way to accept the tutelage of perception. Accepting the shock of the encounter (O'Sullivan, 2006) with art, without going for the more comfortable (my term) image of thought, is already accepting the tutelage of perception.

Once the tutelage of perception is accepted, then what? I certainly do not want to imply a sequence of events of steps in the art encounter; I experience here a limitation of language. But thinking with Deleuze, I would claim that accepting the tutelage of perception is to enter into an assemblage, to form a partial and temporary assemblage with the artwork. This will be the topic of the next chapter.

ENCOUNTER - *Of ghost stories and things*

Another busy shift of school tours and workshops is over. My body resonates from conversations sparked by the art, learning something new from a child's comment, negotiating the gentle chaos of wrestling with a tight schedule, listening to one, laughing with another, thinking about creating a space for the students to imagine and experiment; this body feels the fullness of a day as art museum educator. Exhausted but content, I need to sit down for a while, gently massage a swollen knee and sip my coffee while I savour the soothing silence now enveloping the studio space. Time to go home but I remain, I remain at the art gallery for my research. Golden rays of a late afternoon sun ripple on the studio floor. My shoes feel one size too small due to swollen feet but I long to get into the gallery.

I grab my notebook, my cellular-phone as camera and the oral consent scripts and walk toward the recently opened show *How Do I Put This Ghost in My Mouth*, a survey exhibition by Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer. Even after hours spent in the previous *Unscrolled* exhibition of contemporary Chinese art with pages of notes, hundreds of photographs, worries about generating enough 'rich data' for rigorous research creep into my consciousness. Yet, how do I speak differently and produce different knowledge on something as elusive as encountering and experiencing art. How do I problematize my own

position as an historian and art museum educator with social and white privilege? All I know is: I need to write the listening, the seeing what happens when this body moves through artworks and spaces. I swallow my doctoral researcher doubts and the fear subsides as I jump into the flow of the art gallery. In the forecourt, two heavy wooden doors mark a visual and physical barrier. Made of dark, textured wood, they are masterfully crafted and assembled to evoke the work of artist Louise Nevelson. Their presence is both imposing and subtly seductive. Dangling from the ceiling just in front of the doors, three shining blue neon rods and a bell signal an invitation to open the gates; the sparkling sound of the bell rings gently when I pull the door and peek on the other side. I walk into Farmer's in situ work but step into another world; the warm and silky voice of a male tenor bursts into a love song and envelops me.

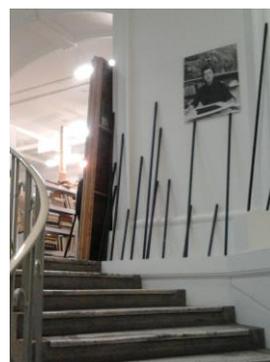


In the back of the rotunda hangs a tattered theatre backdrop painted on canvas; the colors are slightly faded, the design that of an academic library with heavy bookshelves. On a low plinth rests a black chair with a man's suit and a man's shoe and an empty frame. Close by stand two vertical figures simply built of draped cloth with a few accessories. One figure consists of a

woman's hat from the 1920s that spins around from time to time while a yellow light bulb shines and a prop knife silently, yet menacingly appears. The other tall figure shows a man's oversized foot and a hammer with a red lightbulb also marking time as it moves slowly up and down. I linger for a moment with these characters connected to the early history of the building formerly the BC Law Courts, as Farmer explains in the extended label. Farmer creates a stage into which viewers are invited to roam and witness glimpses of the unfolding drama, I imagine the sordid end of Francis Rattenbury; the architect of the building I am standing in right now, and who was stabbed to death by his wife's lover. A love triangle gone tragically sour, tension rises and a murder unfolds in/for my imagination. Eerie, strange. I've been working at the Vancouver Art Gallery since 2009 and I did not know of the terrible fate of the master architect. How many other storylines is the building trying to tell me, but I am not listening?

Like me, other visitors walk back and forth between the figures, the *Four Frankensteins* and the wall text. Farmer has set up the stage; I am pushed to think about the un-noticed of place, the events that have unfolded in these walls and the sometimes, dark underbelly of time. In the rotunda, the air seems of a different texture; heavier with moisture, sounds are muffled yet punctured by the melodramatic vibrato of the male voice. A curator rushes through the entrance and notices the sign "elevator" stuck to the side of the staircase and with the signage of a pointing arrow, a later addition I presume

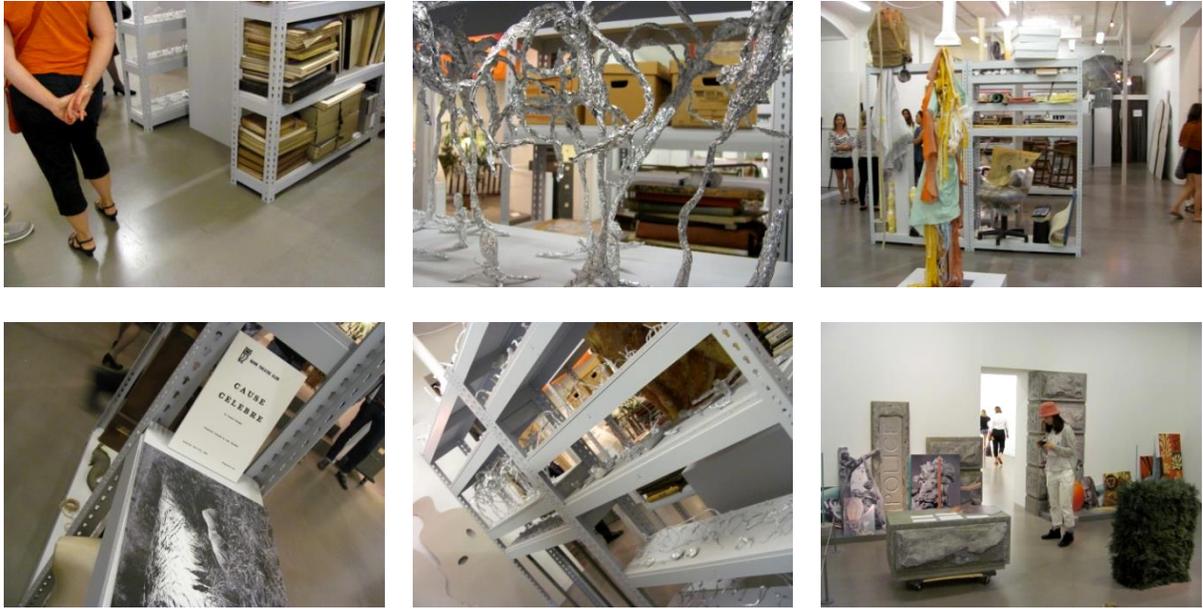
meant to help visitors and alleviate the disruption of the space. But she removes it hastily and moves it to the back wall below the staircase, the sign remains present but it is now barely noticeable. She does have a point; the sign was a visual interruption in the already porous boundaries of the installation yet apparently, the 'elevator' sign had too much agency; it infiltrated reality in the imaginary space of the installation, and thus needed to be removed. My hands rest on the cool and refreshing iron railing of the stairs, slowly I make my way up to the second floor.



Visitors walk pass me, some smiling others with a quizzical look as they stare at the old filing boxes, a sign ' No eating here", a black and white photograph of a librarian, black rods and a broom lining up the staircase; Geoffrey Farmer has already invited us into the staging of his survey exhibition; a mise-en-scène of his work, a looking back at his own artistic practice entangled with the history of the Vancouver Art Gallery. At the top of the staircase, the white cube of the exhibition entrance now resembles a storage room or the basement of an art gallery filled with odd fragments of art projects, a video performance of the artist walking blindly with a basket over his head, a sculpture of staked coffee cups as if done by a bored employee, old wooden gavels, library metallic shelving, dusty faded art books, laminated photographs, architectural fragments, archival photographs, fake rocks, props from theatrical sets. On a shelf, next to a traditional attorney's court attire is a police photograph of Rattenbury's former lover Alma who committed suicide and whose body was found on a river bed, things related to the previous function of the gallery as a courthouse and the script of an English play based on the Rattenbury murder case. As the interpretive text panel explains, Farmer suggests here the space of a storeroom, or a theatre's backstage where categories between randomly placed objects collapse. In here, material traces of the Vancouver Art Gallery's history as a courthouse where Farmer's own father worked an attorney but also its archival role, and of exhibition, and projects from the artist's early art practice intertwine.

Here and there I see labels indicating the presence of an art project, but often I have to read the list of materials to discover all the elements of a piece amongst the jumble of things. An old wooden door from the courthouse stands close to props from an early performance, his collection of delicate aluminum foil sculptures made during a project seem to speak with a collection of the museum's old art books resting nearby on a shelf. I can't help but imagine other possible storylines beyond Farmer's own projects; between the artists as performer, the museum as producer of exhibitions, and exhibitions as stages for the telling of art. A profusion of props, fragments of art projects surround me and my sense are overloaded with the desire to touch, grapple, feel a texture, explore the weight of matter. By installing objects in carefully curated juxtapositions, I can't help but imagine connections and stories emerging or needing to be spoken. I am overwhelmed by the narrative possibilities.

I overhear muffled voices coming from the ceiling. Is it a recording? I look up and notice two white, long and thin serpentine ventilation tubes curving down from the ceiling. Out from their opening ends above my head, I hear sounds and the faint mumble of conversations coming all the way from the conservation work-spaces in the museum's basement. I probably would not have been able to hear this on a busy day, but this late afternoon there are fewer visitors and, because of the sounds coming in real-time from the basement, I am suddenly reminded of the unseen, of the complex life inside an institution. What a beautiful metaphor.



Farmer's choices of ordinary or found materials, of seemingly low-skilled artistic processes can certainly be disconcerting, humorous or strange at first, even for me and I have been working with contemporary art for over twenty years. However, as an encounter and proposition, the installation makes me think of the gallery differently; I am pushed out of my routine of way of being in the space. As if for the first time, or is it a different way, the work allows me to experience the architectural structure of the Gallery as a vibrant organism. For me, *Storeroom overture* operates as an enfolded metaphor of museum work and artistic practice; hearing people working in the basement of the Gallery evokes the memory of place and the role of the museum as keeper of artistic memories, but walking amongst Farmer's art becomes a labyrinth of neuronal connections connecting stories of past works in relation to, and activating other possible relations to the Vancouver Art Gallery as a

site of exhibition making. Mostly, I experience this as a space where I can imagine; I am invited to imagine new stories or connections.

"For what you experience is of your own making, whether speaking to a friend or involved in the activity of baking. Let it be a reminder of this; when the light is on, consider it a kiss". These words are typed on an unobtrusive 8 x 11 sheet of paper pinned on the back wall. I caught sight of it from the corner of my eye and it intrigued me. I nearly missed this discrete intervention; like a beautiful secret whispered to those who cared to stop and read. I have walked and strolled so many times before in Storeroom overture, why did I notice it only today? 'What you experience is of your own making' says Farmer, this echoes John Dewey's (1934) belief that one can't be lazy or idle to perceive. Indeed, and yet there is no model or best strategy to do so. Reading the note extended a line of poetry in my experience of the piece, something I was not expecting. Curious about the little treasures I may have missed, I wander amongst props, a giant vase with photos moving in and out and an old filing cabinet probably found in the museum's basement. I found it, next to the elevator entrance. Another opening for the imagination: It reads; "Now you are standing at the declaration of a beginning, in a storeroom that is the backstage of an overture of a remembering".

CHAPTER 4

Assemblage

Assemblage is the English term chosen by Brian Massumi for the word '*agencement*' in his translation from the French of *A thousand plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Phillips (2006) and Buchanan (2015) are prompt to remind the reader that, while this translation is now widely accepted by Deleuzian scholars, there is an analytical and theoretical difference between the ideas of "*un agencement*" and "*un assemblage*". Albeit I will not follow up the thread of this fascinating linguistic distinction, suffice to say that both words imply "processes of arranging, organizing, and fitting together" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18), but the word *agencement* implies more of a dynamic process (Buchanan, 2015), which is why it has been favored by Deleuze and Guattari. Interestingly, in their writings Deleuze and Guattari did not use the French term *assemblage* as often, and never in a philosophical sense (Phillips, 2006).

This chapter will open with summary comments about the concept of assemblage as developed by Deleuze and Guattari. The second part of the chapter turns to the concept of play in Gadamer, and the last section puts forward thoughts on the experience of art following Deleuze and Gadamer's conceptual encounter.

The concept of assemblage in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari

Notwithstanding these *disputatio* concerning the translation of a term, what are the characteristics of an assemblage for Deleuze and Guattari? Here is their definition as stated in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987),

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage had both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away. (p. 88)

In this passage, the authors put to work various metaphors, the notion of territory, of forces and expressions, the Cartesian coordinate system of horizontal and vertical axis, and Marxist references to the machine as a mode of producing something, in explaining the concept of assemblage. But when I use the word metaphor, in no way was it a desire on the authors' part to 'represent' and fix a concept. As noted in the previous section on the encounter, Deleuze was a fierce anti-representationalist, claiming that representation could not help us see the world in the flow of time, because either representation is a reductive moral view of the world, or it implies a hierarchy between an original (the real one) and a simulacrum (Marks, 2005).

In stating the characteristics of an assemblage, Deleuze and Guattari's machinic metaphor supports our understanding of the assemblage as a dynamic process, it is, as Livesey (2010) explains, "a constellation of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that

come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning" (p.18). It is important to note that one can be part of a multitude of different assemblages some at a very micro level and temporary such as becoming a cyclist for a short duration, but others consist of larger and more complex structures such as the home or work environment

Albeit not seemingly connected to the arts, but I think a rich metaphor, I chose the word 'ocean' to serve as a useful example to better explain and understand the concept of assemblage as described by Deleuze and Guattari. What constitutes an ocean? A basic definition might be that of a body of saline water partially surrounded by land, but a closer look reveals its complexity. An ocean is a dynamic assemblage of saline water certainly but also of rocky shores and sandy beaches, of tidal movements, of rich marine life, of quiet surfaces and crushing waves, of deep currents, of sounds and smells, of various connections to peoples, economic and political forces and to lifestyles. The water, salt or the tides are not in themselves the ocean, but they become so when placed in a productive arrangement (or machinic arrangement) of heterogeneous elements, or when as Deleuze and Guattari describe, they form an "intermingling of bodies reacting to one another" (p.88). And what produces difference in the ocean? What I have described is the content but the other element on this same axis is expression, the various forces and qualities of expression in the speed of a wind, the pull of a tide, the sudden storm. This system of things, forces, expressions form what Deleuze and Guattari call an assemblage of enunciations, it becomes a "semiotic system, a regime of signs [...] an assemblage of enunciation" (p.504).

On the other axis, an assemblage is about marking a territory, not solely in a topographical sense, as Wise (2011) points out, "territories are more than just spaces; they stake a claim, they express" (p.92). Certainly, the Pacific Ocean, for instance, marks a certain territory but the effects of the ocean impacts communities and ecologies all along its coasts.

Economic forces and States can also distort, reshape the physical or socio-economic boundaries and thus re-territorialize the ocean-assemblage. Furthermore, the ocean can possibly transform and shift, let's say after an earthquake, into a narrow strait, a series of rivers, an interior sea, or eventually into a desert if some parts of the assemblage are cut-off. Hence territories are temporary for they can be made and un-made.

So whether the assemblage is at the individual level of the cyclist, an artwork, visit to the art gallery, the life of a living organism, a day, or else at the larger socio-political level of the State assemblage, the war machine or global economic forces, Wise (2011) reminds us that an assemblage can certainly be destructive and break down, but in most cases it can be productive of "a new reality, by making numerous, often unexpected connections" (p.19). Of course, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of assemblage engages more complex philosophical and political territory than suggested by my example of the ocean⁴³ as assemblage. But to summarize, Deleuze and Guattari specify clearly in the glossary at the conclusion of *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) that an assemblage consists of four dimensions: states of things or beings (contents), modes of expression or utterance, territories and movements of de-territorializations. By revisiting these four dimensions, I now turn to the concept of assemblage in order to examine what using this vocabulary produces as I inquire on the art experience.

⁴³ In Deleuze and Guattari, references to the concept of assemblage are scattered throughout *A thousand plateaus* (1988, original French publication in 1980), with a special entry in the glossary included as the final chapter. For secondary literature, see Buchanan, 2015; Livesey, 2010; Marcus & Saka, 2006; Phillips, 2006; Wise, 2011. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of assemblage has sparked much interest in the social sciences and humanities, extensions can be found in Actor Network Theory with a focus on complexity and undecidability (Latour, 1999; Law, 2004), and the new field of assemblage theory developed by M. DeLanda (2006, 2016) - for some reserves expressed against the simplified views of assemblage in ANT or assemblage theory see (Buchanan, 2015; Marcus & Saka, 2006; Wise, 2011). Finally, for some strong research examples I suggest: (Mazzei & Jackson, 2016; Nordstrom, 2015; Waterton & Dittmer, 2014; Webb, 2009).

The state of things or state of beings of an assemblage corresponds to its content. An attempt to describe the various human and non-human components of an art experience already points to its complex dynamic and relational nature because assemblages are always changing, shifting. What is the content or the state of things in my encounter with Farmer's (2015) *Storeroom Overture*? One of course would start with listing the archival bookshelves, Farmer's early aluminium foil sculptures formed with the use of his toes, the museum's exhibition catalogues, the fake plants and rocks, the props, a lawyer's tail coat, references to a play about the murder of the building's architect Francis Rattenbury, various artworks by the artist, the physical space of the gallery, and the sounds coming from the basement of the gallery. Then there is also my own body interacting with the materiality of the work, but also already bringing in what I have previously read or seen about the work in various media. Furthermore, I am also taking in with me former experiences of contemporary art which, as Dewey (1934) pointed out in his writings on the concept of experience, already inform and give shape to this one. But this description would be too reductive if it did not mention the content of Farmer's work also consisting of the public (social, cultural, political) sphere conveyed by the printed media, questions of artistic practice, and the museum discourse.

And to this already lengthy list of content in my experience of the installations, I need to add the path and exploration of Farmer's exhibition since my entrance into the Vancouver Art Gallery and, as I have pointed out in my narrative, I would also include the point of view as I approached *Storeroom Overture* from the staircase and could visually peek into the installation. Moreover, as part of the 'state of things' in this encounter, one must account for the joint curatorial choices made by the gallery and the artist regarding the works on display, the presence of labels and interpretive material, the negotiation of space which have created conditions of reception to my embodied experience. The list could be extended as each

element of the art experience could be further dissected, but I will stop here. Suffice to say that even the simple exercise of describing the content or state of things/beings of an art encounter illustrates quite convincingly the rhizomatic structure of the event and how coming into the artwork one adds other parts and assemblages to the one that was formerly produced. This new assemblage produced by the encounter is one that is difficult to circumscribe with boundaries, in my view more complex than the conventional binary structure of visitor/artwork.

Another dimension of the art experience as assemblage is expression. A form of enunciation, experience is an intensity and a movement; it can be understood Claire Colebrook explains as the "power of life to unfold itself differently" (2010, p. 96). Albeit closely related to content, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) nonetheless insist repeatedly that expression should never be seen as determined by causal action, even if sometimes a form of content and a form of expression can indeed seem to coincide partially. "One can never", they write, "assign the form of expression the function of simply representing, describing, or averring a corresponding content: there is neither correspondence nor conformity" (p.86). The relation of content to expression is not another way to talk about signified and signifier, and neither should expression be conceived as communicating a pre-existing content since the expressed does not exist outside of the expression. This is complex and I will provide another example. In a video interview with Claire Parnet recorded in 1988-1989 (Boutang, 2012), Deleuze explains the concept of expression, by setting it in the context of a coffee shop. Why do I like to go into this coffee shop and not into that other one? It may be because of the people I know, the decor, the ambiance, this is the state of things or the content. One loves being in a particular coffee shop because with friends we talk in a particular mode, each cafe has a style

and mode of expression and enunciation; one not imposed from the outside but dependent on complex set of relations mutually affecting each other.

Again, thinking alongside the Deleuzian assemblage, the content of my experience in *Storeroom Overture* is the gallery space and display, the artworks, the ambience and sounds, my body moving, various sense impressions, etc. But what might be the form of expression? That would be the singularity of each event; my slowness or speed as I move in the room, bend and turn, observe, compare, reflect, stop here to linger and think, or walk absent-mindedly past another plinth, or fragments of previous pieces by the artist. But it is also the resistance of things stopping me, the way Farmer's installation engulfs the body in a swarm of props, bookshelves, found objects, surreal assemblages and prevents me from having a totalizing gaze, or compels me to twist and turn in order to examine, or how the soundscape influences my perception of the various storylines. Content and expression are inseparable. There is no essential substance, meaning or content of the artwork being expressed. Although written in a different context, Brian Massumi's (2002) brings forward how a body, as he writes, "fresh in the throes of expression, incarnates not an already-formed system but a modification—a change" (p.xvii). Hence this carries the notion of art experience where expression is an event, rather than a purely internal and subjective psychological enunciation.

Lastly, I will now address the concepts of territory and deterritorialisation, two important dimensions in an assemblage. "Every assemblage is basically territorial" (p.503) declare Deleuze and Guattari (1987) thus to understand someone's assemblage—whether human or animal—one must first determine its territory. If both terms avoid being easily categorized, in the concluding chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the authors put forward a definition of territory as a system of any kind; it might be conceptual, affective, cultural,

political, or social, but it can also be a favorite bench, a table at a cafe, a home. As I revisit the narratives of my art encounters, it is interesting to examine the territories I established, at times unconsciously and sometimes derived from a prolonged habit of visiting museums. In Ai Weiwei's sculptural installation *Bang*, I recall and still feel my body sitting crossed-legs on the carpet with my back discretely leaning against the wall, a precarious canopy of assembled wooden stools enveloping me. This was my favorite place, always the same little alcove, my secret territory to scribble notes, and to observe other visitors interacting with/in/amongst the artwork. In complement to this spatial territory, I was also occupying a cultural, artistic, and even social in terms of my privileged access being familiar with the exhibition as discursive space, knowing the system of linguistic signs belonging to art theory, and having learned the ways of being with contemporary art. Nonetheless, occupying these territories are not, I claim, necessary nor will they ensure a better art experience; for to enhance a life, one must, according to Deleuze, create or discover assemblages favorable to oneself. And the best way to find out is in experimentation.

Necessarily related to the concept of territory, deterritorialisation, "is the movement by which "one" leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight" explain Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.508). It is important to note, according to Adrian Parr (2010a), that for the authors territory and deterritorialisation are not binary opposites in terms of movement or process. Indeed, territory always/already contains vectors of deterritorialisation working it from the inside; hence there is always the possibility for a system or territory to change, open up onto something else. Granted that change is not always positive, and the line of flight leading outside of a given assemblage or system may become obstructed, broken, destroyed or be found unsatisfactory. Deterritorialisation always carries a risk for it is impossible to predict

in advance whether opening up and leaving one's conceptual, social, linguistic territory will be generative or not.

I revisit and re-enact in my mind that late afternoon of note taking in the company of Xu Bing's sculptural installation *Background Story* and I map out some lines of a Deleuzian territory. There's of course the spatial territory of my body moving back and forth around the work as I establish relations between the view of a traditional Chinese landscape and the materiality of the piece. My art experience as an assemblage also included: the information in the text panels, previous readings from art theorists and an interview with artist Xu Bing, the facsimile scroll from the Song Dynasty displayed nearby and which served as a source image for the mountainous landscape in *Background Story*, the taking of photographs for my own research, random thoughts about a gallery tour I animated the day before, and, and, and. Much can be said about my temporary and singular assemblage with *Background Story*. But what about the vectors of deterritorialisation already part of the territory? Were there elements of escape or departure from my current assemblage towards other connections? I remember watching two individuals coming out of the elevator and who scoffed at the sight of the strange assemblage of repurposed materials; I approached trying to share a word but to no avail, we were not to become part of each other's assemblage. This line of flight was stunted—at least this was my perception at the time. Yet the moment resonates today, one I often revisit, and so the line of flight continues, as I wonder about the assemblages that these two created in the gallery. There was also my encounter with E. who was here to re-visit Xu Bing's *Background Story*; some conversation led to wonder, and then to more interrogations about the video installation by Sun Xun (2014) in the next gallery. Leaving Xu Bing's piece, we thus created a line of flight; we departed one territory, one assemblage, walked into the video

installation, embarked in dialogic play according to Gadamer's sense of the word, and started to recombine elements for a new assemblage.

In summary, based on and as a potential contribution of my study, using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage produces significant understandings about the art experience, that is, I contend that the art experience is not to be understood as the relation between person-artwork-gallery space, but as a 'function' in the complex coming together of a constellation of elements. And ideally, as Livesey (2010) reminds us, "the result of an assemblage is a new means of expression, a new territorial/spatial organisation, a new institution, a new behaviour, or a new realisation" (p.19).

In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of assemblage occupies an essential role in relation to the emergence and the flow of desire. Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari asserted, an assemblage has to be made for desire to circulate. On the question of how does one 'make' an assemblage, I think it is important to remember that, assemblages are always already present. Wise (2011) suggests that, "we can enter an assemblage through a process of taking up or taking on the particular relation of speed, slowness, effectivity and language that makes it up" (p.94). And in terms of intentionality, one must keep in mind that we are made of multiple assemblages and they are always moving and fluctuating. And one of the reasons why assemblages always fluctuate, is desire. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explained that:

Assemblages are passionate, they are composed of desire. Desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them. (p.399)

But then, if desire has nothing to do with internal motivation or subjective intentionality, my question in this section turns to desire as a plane of experimentation and how an assemblage must be created for desire to circulate. To support my understanding of the art experience as desiring-assemblage, in the following chapter, I will examine Deleuze and Guattari's major characteristics of the concept. Desire is non-subjective, it is relational—and it needs connections and the creation of assemblages to flow, and lastly desire is positive and productive.

Revisiting Hans Georg Gadamer's concept of play

The details escape me but it was in the late 1990s; I was introduced to German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer's notion of the hermeneutic circle⁴⁴ of interpretation and the concept of play through the influential work of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 2004), a scholar whose writings are widely read in the field of museum education. I remember being drawn to her writings for she juxtaposed constructivist learning theory⁴⁵, with critical theory, feminist theory and cultural studies in order to examine the changing values transforming the way museums perceive their role. Since the British Museum opened its doors to the public in

⁴⁴ Drawing from the work of Martin Heidegger, Gadamer (2004) describes the hermeneutic circle of interpretation as such:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (p.269)

⁴⁵ Albeit not the only theoretical model for museum learning, my formative years as a museum educator were steeped into the influential work by George E. Hein (1998) on constructivist theory. Drawing from his readings of Dewey (1997), Piaget (1929) and Vygotsky (1978), Hein invited museum curators, exhibition developers and educators to acknowledge that the meaning making started with the visitor, how it was individually/socially constructed, and how it involved combining prior knowledge with their lived experience in the museum.

1759, the modern museum had perceived knowledge as "objective, singular and value-free" (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004, p. 560), museum curators and educators considered their role as one of transmitting disciplinary information about art history (as a linear mode of top-down communication and yet without challenging the discursive nature of art history). Hooper-Greenhill highlighted how, with the pressures from feminist art history and post-colonial studies, museums embarked in a critique of disciplinary discourses and the structures of power(s) at play—whether in the absence of women in the canon of art, in the exhibition display, the curatorial choices, the sharing of knowledge. Thus, since the 1960s while curatorial knowledge still takes precedence in the gallery space, there is a significant turn away from the conventional transmission model towards a cultural model which recognizes the engagement of the public, and how meanings are not singular and value-free but rather negotiated (historically, culturally, individually). Of particular interest for me was Hooper-Greenhill's choice to reflect on the new discourses in museum interpretation through her reading of Gadamer's (1976, 2004) hermeneutics circle, a methodology of interpretation in which meanings are made through a dialogical process with the artwork *by* (rather than *for*) the visitor.

As mentioned in the introduction, there were various moments in my intellectual history and references to Gadamer's work resonated at a time when I was searching for other modes of mediating and talking with/about artworks, ones different from the tools provided by my discipline as an art historian and focussed in the formal description as analysis, the artistic intention and the use of theoretical lenses whether it was semiology, feminism, post-colonialism or the social history of art. And while in the late 1990s I also remained caught up with/in the language of educational psychology, I sought another set of concepts, a different way of thinking my work in the gallery space.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is complex and my foray into his work was and still remains selective and therefore partial; I have focussed on the concept of play because it is a concept I've been drawn to since my early days at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. I worked with the concept of play as an entry into a process of interpretation, one not focused on an end point or meaning outside of the work, but interpretation as part of the experience of encountering. In other words, Gadamer's concept of play; provided me new understandings on the experience of being with art and the question of interpretation (which I see as a form of knowing-in-the-making rather than the discovery of a core 'meaning' in the artwork). For Gadamer, hermeneutics should not be considered as a method or a procedure for understanding⁴⁶ visual or language based texts but rather, he writes, a way "to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place" (2004, p.295). Among these conditions are the prejudices or presuppositions and fore-meanings already in the consciousness of the interpreter (related to tradition, cultural knowledge, past experiences), and which can be challenged, confirmed, and revised during the hermeneutic circle of interpretation or the inter-play with the text (whether visual, auditory or written).

As Gadamerian scholars (Di Cesare, 2007; Grondin, 2001; Vilhauer, 2009, 2013) point out, the concept of 'play' is an integral part of the hermeneutic experience of understanding: because understanding is dynamic, it is a movement, a back and forth in-between the players. Playful yet, for Gadamer (2004) play is not recreation since it, "contains its own, even sacred, seriousness" (p.102). Of course, the player knows herself that she is playing, that the play is play, but to play means that the player accepts to lose herself in the play which happens

⁴⁶ In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004) insists that understanding is not only a reproductive activity but mostly a productive activity; not in the sense of producing a better understanding but as understanding in a different way. He also explains that, "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well" (p.296).

"without goal or purpose" (p.103). Even outsiders observing the players can embark in the play. As Gadamer explains,

The act of playing always requires a "playing along with." Even the onlooker watching the child at play cannot possibly do otherwise. If he really does "go along with it", that is nothing but a *participatio*, an inner sharing in this repetitive movement. This is often very clear in more developed forms of play: for example, we have only to observe on television the spectators at a tennis match cricking their necks. [...] The spectator is manifestly more than just an observer who sees what is happening in front of him, but rather one who is part of it insofar as he literally "takes part." (pp. 23-24)

Hence the players (but I think the quote could also be valid for a museum spectator) are not the subjects of play, adds Gadamer (2004) but simply that play moves into a space of representation through those who play. To 'play along with': I recall E. and I in Sun Xun's (2014) mixed-media film installation *Shan Shui - Cosmos* as we played *with* the work. Or more precisely, we played with a work in emergence, constantly changing through our play of interpretation as we made connections between a painted motif and its translation in digital media, between brush strokes on the wall and our knowledge of traditional Chinese landscape paintings, between the ink paintings and the film animation, and, and, and.

Deeply inscribed in Gadamer's (1986) thinking, is that the challenge requiring play exists because of the structure of the work. The identity of the work does not reside in the formal description but it is, he writes, "secured by the way in which we take the construction of the work upon ourselves as a task" (p.28). I am reluctant nevertheless to follow Gadamer humanist view in seeing the "hermeneutic movement guided by the anticipation of the whole, and finally fulfilled by the individual in the realization of the total sense" (1986, p.28). There

seems to be a paradox, even a contradiction, in Gadamer's position between the dialogical movement of play when experiencing an artwork of the art without seeking a goal or purpose, and the idea of a fulfillment of the work where as a participant reaches the full meaning or essence of a work.

I recall the two visitors who disdained Xu Bing's (2014) *Background Story* and were not intent in looking at it. For some unconscious reason, I was hoping that by my pointing to some elements of the structure as a way to enter the play, might entice them into also becoming participants. The two visitors, it seemed, refused to engage in the movement of play, nonetheless they may have done so in their own way, or perhaps they did later in their visit but differently. Furthermore, I need to think how art experience is not only with 'one' specific artwork but rather as the playful moments throughout the exhibition space, the art gallery, but also how the art experience extends beyond the walls of the gallery space. And I am not talking about the cognitive processes of what remains in the consciousness of the spectator/visitor after encountering art. I think rather alongside Deleuze's concept of assemblage and even Dewey, about the productive lines expanding and extending the art experience in time and space. The example of Brook leaving the Maurithuis to ride a train towards Delft certainly comes to mind. I also remember standing by Xu Bing's *Background Story* and hearing E. telling how for her things and ideas happened after coming to the gallery and seeing the artworks.

In *Truth and method* originally published in 1960, *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (a lecture delivered in 1974) and the later essay *The Play of Art* (1986), Gadamer attributes to the concept of play an essential role in hermeneutics philosophy and, in particular, as an ontological explanation of art. Art becomes art, and it manifests as art, when the work is

played with, played along with the work's becoming (as a dynamic of change) in interpretation; we create representation and understandings through this hermeneutic play.

He writes,

When we speak of play in reference to the experience of art, this means neither the orientation nor even the state of mind of the creator or of those enjoying the work of art, nor the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play, but the mode of being of the work of art itself. (2004, p. 102)

Gadamer uses the concept of play also as a way to claim that the art experience is not reduced to a subjective understanding and internal response; rather we are drawn into the space of the artwork. As Grondin (2001) points out, employing the concept of play enables Gadamer to critique subjective views of aesthetics in favor of the art experience as an event in which the viewer is intertwined, and in which previous experiences and expectations play a role. Hence, are interwoven in the art experience: the play *with* the artwork, and the playing *of* art. And the play of art, reminds Grondin, does not reside inside the artwork we are looking at, hearing or reading, it lies rather, "in the fact that one is touched by a proposition, an address, an experience, which so captures us that we can play along" (p.45).

Thoughts on art experience following a Deleuze-Gadamer conceptual encounter

Playfulness, playful, play; these words bring to mind the world of the child. I remember the child joyfully moving under and around clusters of stools in Ai Wei Wei's (2010-2014) installation, I relive the situation and I imagine my own body following her movements, but mostly responding and trying to engage with the architecture of the

sculptural installation by twisting and turning, bending to avoid destabilizing the delicate structure. I think of the mother and child exploring Xu Bing's (2014) *Background Story* who engaged in discovery by walking back and forth from one side of the work to the other, as they observe the transformations of a mundane material into a cloud, tree or mountain. If the word play also carries ideas of amusement or entertainment, one needs to remember that for Gadamer, play is serious for it makes one enter the world of the artwork.

This idea of *entering the world of* brings to mind Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage. As I indicated earlier in this study, my purpose is not to conflate the very different philosophical perspectives of Deleuze and Gadamer. Uninterested by hermeneutics, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) take a definite position against interpretation because interpretation implies something transcendent, a meaning 'out there'. Deleuze and Guattari even created a term 'interpretosis' which, added to the concept of significance, is a disease "in other words, humankind's fundamental neurosis" (p.114). Hence, I am not suggesting that the concepts of Gadamerian play and Deleuzian assemblage are equivalent but they do resonate in harmony within the context of the art experience.

And so Gadamerian play, takes a life of its own if one respond to and embarks in the hermeneutic movement without goal, the play of seeing the parts and the whole, of moving beyond the obvious subject matter or formal recognition while daring to examine one's own prejudices in light of what the work brings forth. The Deleuzian assemblage with the artwork also takes a life of its own, but since we are constituted with a multiplicity of lines connecting us to ideas, people, experiences, things, social norms, aren't these also participating in the kinds of assemblages one enters? After visiting and walking through an art museum, claims Gadamer (1986) in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, we do not leave it the same way we came in

and "with exactly the same feeling about life" (p.26) because the experience somewhat changed us. Assemblages are also generative and, in the context of an encounter, can produce change. How was E. impacted, moved or changed emotionally, intellectually, in her relationship to art or the gallery, her being in the world due to our play with/in Sun Xun's (2014) film installation? This I will most likely never know because meeting her in the gallery was a chance encounter between two strangers. Yet, memory lines linger like the rhizomatic roots of a strawberry plant. Sun Xun's video installation now resonates for me as *an* experience, somewhat in the Deweyian (1934) sense of having achieved a sense of unity, but certainly the playing and the assemblage I have entered by connecting in/to the work have enlarged my perceptions of it.

Gadamer claimed that an art experience would leave one with a different feeling about life, A Deleuzian encounter can also provoke change and difference, even if the changes are subtle and beyond the threshold of language to describe them. What I do relive today as I read my narrative, is I remember telling E. about the connection between the reproduction of a Song painting as a source for Sun Xun's projected landscape. We both entered the video and mixed-media installation with the desire to walk E. up to the reproduction hanging from the wall. For a moment, I was performing as the museum educator. But somehow another movement, a different flow overcame us as we stepped into the installation. Was it due to E.'s love of Chinese ink painting, my own fascination with the juxtapositions and layering of images and mediums? I am not sure but we certainly got caught up in the play of the artwork itself; noticing parts and whole, comparing the semi-abstract painted shapes of the mountains and the detailed projected landscape. We lost track of time, all the while involved in revisiting a motif in relation to another one in the room, or commenting on the information from the extended text panel.

I do not wish to imply that there is a sequence in the interaction with art yet, it is important to remember that there is a sacred seriousness to playing for "the game itself is a risk for the players" (2004, p. 106) since all play is also accepting to be played by the artwork and in the game (or event of art) the work asks to be understood in what it 'says'. The work, Gadamer (1986) writes,

Issues a challenge which expects to be met. It requires an answer - an answer that can only be given by someone who accepts the challenge. (p. 26)

Did I accept the challenge of the artwork calling to me? I did and put in Deleuzian terms, I claim that play is like entering an assemblage. Of course, this is play distinct from the project of hermeneutic philosophy. Overtaken and interwoven in a movement of back and forth with Sun Xun's film installation, E. and I lost track of time but it was an active reading of the piece. We did accept, if for a moment, the risk of playing, of entering the assemblage of *Shan-Shui-Cosmos*, as a letting go to the play *of* the work as assemblage. Because an assemblage is also a dynamic flow and interaction, we responded to the work with movement of to-and-fro without any goal or purpose but the play-as-assemblage itself.

ENCOUNTER - *Silent words, visualizing time*

Calling upon my learned skills as an art historian, right from the moment I enter Geoffrey Farmer's (2007) installation *The Last Two Million Years* I am drawn to notice the formal and material characteristics of things such as: the delicate cut-out paper images standing up with the help of folded paper, the spatial distribution, Plexiglass framed images on the walls, a torn book cover, cold white neon lights, precarious plinths fabricated of white foamcore. These things easily call for names and words so I can formally describe their 'objectness' and identify them as signs. But something else is at play here, or needs to be at play. Farmer refuses to allow me the possibility of a totalizing gaze, and even if I could see, look at and identify every figurine, there is an excess that vision cannot contain. Something else is at play. And I imagine Farmer's curatorial choices as an invitation for the public to move around and to physically explore the complex spatial and discursive materiality of the piece.

Glaring white neon tubes draw perpendicular lines on the ceiling, a multitude of white bases in various sizes and heights create a strange topography in the center of the room. White walls and the grey cement floor make the gallery space feel clinical, cold, objective. In contrast, the seemingly playful, minuscule and delicate paper figurines welcome me into the installation space. Farmer installed the figurines turned towards the



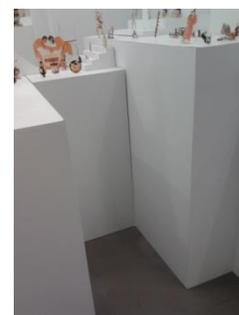
entrance, as a mesmerizing confrontation about to swallow the visitor or as a solemn march performed for the incoming public. The first tiny figurine, merely a centimeter high, stands strong as she opens the procession. Carefully and wondering if only the force of my breathing could make the figure fall down her pedestal, I bend and kneel down to enjoy a closer look. All the figurines are cut-out from old printed material: image in black and white, some in faded colors. Each cut-out image is supported in the back by a small piece of folded paper, printed words are visible, the artist having used the actual printed pages where the images were inserted. Egyptian Pharaohs, a fragment from Watteau's painting of *Pierrot*, sculptures from Ancient Greece; a thin line marching time. But no, this is a folding of times; I feel hit in the stomach when I recognize the photograph by Nick Ut of Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the young girl tragically burnt with napalm in the Vietnam War, running in atrocious pain and terror. With no apparent chronology or logic, she stands in between a Caryathide from the Erechtheion and a figure, perhaps, from the Medieval period but unknown to me.



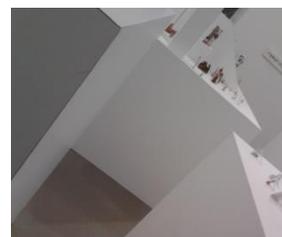
As I followed and slowly let my body be guided up the thin line drawn by the plinth, my first thought was to interpret this eclectic march of figures in terms of chronological time, a tale of technological progress. But then my understanding of History, as learned in textbooks, became disrupted, challenged, troubled; there are no labels or names, some of the figures I vaguely recognize but cannot identify because the artist has precisely only cut-out the image and used the text, that is language, as a mean to support



the visual. In the printed media, and in particular history books, the photograph is always subordinate to the text, which is deemed more significant and the carrier of knowledge. I find this extremely interesting because, in a witty sculptural manner, Farmer's installation operates a reversal, it introduces a slippage in the conventional relationship between text and image; here there is no text to read and the hundred images of artefacts or people stand as the main players in a new reshuffled historical stage set-up by the artist and the Vancouver Art Gallery.



Around me people smile, point with a finger, bend forward, crouch down to get a better view, snap a picture, stroll from one group of figures to another. Standing close by, a visitor nods and makes me notice a clever grouping of heads of states, over here is the theme of music, and over there I notice Jacques-Louis David's painting of Marat but without the head....strange, I wonder where Geoffrey Farmer displaced it, what other narrative he created by introducing the head somewhere else. I spend some time looking for it but I lost interest and simply forgot about it. A plethora of other groupings exert a fascinating pull. Printed images from material culture, photographs, archival documents, monuments, historical figures have been reshuffled, configured differently from the Western canon of a linear, chronological historical narrative. On the wall next to the entrance, encased under glass is the table of content of a history book written in English. The narrative for the Western world numbers more than one hundred and fifty pages, conversely I notice that the history of India and China, both spanning thousands of years



of history, seemed glossed over since each empire's history is told in less than ten pages.



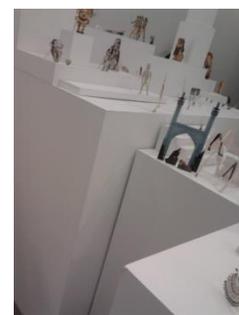
A printed book can be, or is best, read sitting down comfortably; a story of cultures, geographies and times I can hold in my hands, and engaging in as I turn the crisp pages one by one. But in Geoffrey Farmer's installation, my body has to negotiate carefully through, around and in-between the plinths to see a grouping of images on the other side. Sometimes a high plinth blocks a view or a passage and forces me to turn my body sideways, thus twisting and turning I am pushed to see the work from an unexpected angle. In the narrow passages formed between the bases and standing plinths, now and then I come face to face with another visitor. We must look at each other to gently negotiate who will go first; if the exchange of gazes is denied, we both turn sideways, and thus obliged to look from a different point of view, I often make an exciting discovery as I notice other thematic assemblages of cut-out images.



Calmly overlooking those two million years of historical narrative, the photograph of a sculpted Buddha looms at the top of a thin column almost reaching the ceiling. The Buddha, which turns out to be one of the largest pictures in terms of size, is the apex and from there the plinths draw a gentle cascade, all the way down to the floor. On a low plinth, almost level with the gallery floor Farmer displays the empty shell of a book titled *The Last Two Million Years* and a sculptural version of it in pristine white marble. Farmer



found the book published by *Reader's Digest* in the 1970s while strolling in his neighborhood. After purchasing a second copy, the artist eventually embarked on the delicate task of cutting out all of the images from the book, created the figurines and liberated them from the grips of one historical discourse into another one; fluid, open ended, calling for the body to move through. Moving about, I feel, I become, I am entangled in the materiality of the work which consists of the heights of plinths, the numerous angles and corners, the narrow passages making bodies move in certain ways in-between the (re)staging of a mainstream historical narrative circulated via the 1970s printed media, then something called an "art experience" emerges. Or rather, rather the experience emerges as my being intertwined and performed with/in the materiality of the work.



Differently from the root-thinking of conventional historical writing, Farmer asserted creative license to critique, reshuffle, reconfigure and complicate history as discourse. *The Last Two Million Years* invites bodies to manifest an experience of art as a rhizomatic mode of telling, only by experiencing can I imagine different conceptual threads, different connections between people and events. The installation proposes another narrative of Western history, one which is open and fluid, one which is enacted because of the agency of the work itself: the narrow passages, the imposition of empty spaces and turns, the fragile, the minuscule inviting the body to crouch and bend down or stare up, the bumping into plinths, the juxtapositions and possibilities for new narratives, the floating gazes.



CHAPTER 5

Desire

Desire is a key term in Deleuze's philosophical work. In his first writing collaboration with Guattari, Deleuze introduces and elaborates in *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983) a view of desire both encompassing yet also much distinct from the common meaning of the term; that of a strong wish or wanting to have something, or a strong sexual feeling⁴⁷. In this chapter, I will first examine the concept of desire in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In the second part of the chapter, the focus will turn to Maxine Greene's concept of imagination as a cognitive faculty but mostly as a capacity to create new experiences, The closing section is about thinking the art experience following a Deleuze and Greene encounter.

The concept of desire in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

The etymology of the word desire goes back to the Latin *desiderare*, which means one ceases to see, to regret the absence of, and hence to seek (Partridge, 1966). In contrast, throughout his work and his collaboration with Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze develops a complex definition of desire as: de-individualized, not reduced to sexuality, related to the construction of reality and acting in the social sphere, and as positive and productive (see (Deleuze, 2007a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Deleuze & Parnet, 1996)).

As stated in their collaborative work *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) position themselves against the Platonic logic of desire and a Lacanian psychoanalytic view which are forcing us to take, they write, in "making us choose

⁴⁷ Online *Oxford Living Dictionaries*: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/desire> Retrieved on June 15, 2017.

between *production* and *acquisition*" (p.25). More precisely, for Deleuze and Guattari, desire is not about wanting something outside of itself and it does not emerge from a place of lack, of missing *in* something. Locating desire on the side of acquisition implies that desire becomes "an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception" (p.25) and this goes against Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, where relation is thought of relation 'in', but not as a relation 'to' something outside.

What might be the reasons or interest for the authors to make this bold conceptual move in the early 1970s when, in France, Marxist materialism and the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan were the pillars of intellectual life? In his rich preface, Michel Foucault (1983) warns the reader that *Anti-Œdipus* is "less concerned with *why* this or that than with *how* to proceed" (p.xii). From his perspective *Anti-Œdipus* is a book of ethics, a book provoking one to inquire how to live. And we must remember that for Deleuze and Guattari desire is not only at the micro, personal level, since its realm is also that of the political. Foucault will come to asks: "How can and must desire deploy its thought within the political domain and grow more intense in the process of overturning the established order?" (p.xii). May (2005) also agrees that the question of how to live is key in Deleuze's conception of philosophy, and the ways he wonders "what other possibilities life holds open to us" and how we might think about "things in ways that would open up new regions for living" (p.3).

It is important to remind ourselves how, among other things, Deleuze saw the arts (visual arts, cinema, music, literature) as a milieu for experiences and encounters, and thus possibly as a milieu that could open up new regions or possibilities for living. I will return to this idea in the final chapter of my dissertation. For now, I mention this because I am aware that my dissertation chose not to address many other important questions in museum education such as access for all and what that means, or the problem of "What knowledge is

of most worth?". My interest and focus on the art experience could be judged as elitist and reproducing a (my) socio-economic, racial and cultural privilege. Nonetheless, as I have alluded in the introduction, my fascination for the experience of art and focus on Deleuze's thought on the desiring-assemblage makes the art experience not simply, about experiencing the art's materiality, embodiment, wonderment, knowledge, play, imagination, and possibilities albeit they are crucial; I also think and consider the art encounter as a mode of experimentation and a way to increase one's capacity to live and act in the world.

Deleuze and Guattari's conception of ethics takes as its premise an immanent quality rather than transcendent ideals. What does this mean, and what are the implications? Deleuze firmly rejects Descartes' view of the body as separated from the mind, and the implied hierarchy viewing the mind as superior to the body. This has important implications when thinking about desire within the frame of immanence. Lorraine (2011) explains that Deleuze and Guattari's view of immanent ethics requires us to attend to the complex, textured and embodied situations in our lives and to be open to find responses that go beyond familiar automatic responses in order to "access creative solutions to what are always unique problems" (p.1).

This ties in well with the concept of encounter I covered previously. An immanent ethics of the art encounter requires me to attend to the embodied experience and the complexities of each artwork in their singularity, without the desire to stay in a space of recognition and seeking to impose a signifier. It means: to see the three-legged stools and know they are useful to sit on, but wonder what they produce when Ai Weiwei (2010-2014) interlocks and balances hundreds of them over my head in a gigantic rhizomatic structure. It means surely to see and know that Geoffrey Farmer's (2007) figurines in *The Last Two Million Years* are simply made from cut-out images and rolled-up text from a 1970s copy of a Reader's

Digest encyclopedia, yet be open to play with new insights made possible by the anachronistic juxtapositions of fragments extracted from the printed media, the disposition of the plinths imposing on the viewer's body a different way to move in and through the installation.

As a philosopher of immanence, who is emphasizing connections over separation, in *Anti-Œdipus* Deleuze adopts Guattari's interest in the machinic model and develops a materialist conception of desire by first describing the human body as an organic machine;

(...) at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, it heats, it eats. It shits and it fucks. What a mistake to have ever said *the id*. Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. (p.1)

Through this deliberately crude metaphor, the body is described as an organ-machine made of partial objects, partial machines—such as the mouth, eye, hand—always seeking to connect to another machine because there is “always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 5). And the most important is desire: desire is what causes the current to flow. Desire itself is a machine, a synthesis of machines, a desiring machine producing the unconscious. It is important to point out that, while *Anti-Œdipus* displays a provocative tone and does not hesitate to confront major tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis, it does acknowledge the significant discovery made by Freud that was the creation of the concepts of desire and the unconscious. Nevertheless, what they do critique is psychoanalysis's decision to turn the unconscious into a theatre only capable of expressing itself in dreams, fantasies and myths. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) contend that Freud never stopped “trying to limit the discovery

of a subjective or vital essence of desire as libido” (p.331). For Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious is not a theatre, it does not need to be interpreted, it poses no problems of meaning. On the contrary, the unconscious is like a factory, it is productive and is always seeking more connections. In terms of immanent ethics, by that I mean the questions of "how might one live?" (May, 2005, p.1) is, in part, by creating more connections; for Deleuze life is movement and change, forever avoiding the fixated, stable and unified position. These ideas are important and significant in my study because, the arts are milieus of potential experimentation and thus of more connections.

To define desire as the desire of the Other according to Jacques Lacan (2004), places desire on the side of acquisition (desire as a way to fill something missing in one's life or consciousness) and thus it implies that one desires what one does not have. Again, I must point out that, while in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) Deleuze and Guattari engage critically with the psychoanalytic field of their time—they do not always mention which school of psychoanalysis they refer to—but in particular Jacques Lacan's conception of desire, they do write an important note recognizing Lacan's nuanced view of desire as both lacking and productive. In a note written in the chapter "The desiring-machines", Deleuze and Guattari discern an ambivalence in Lacan's theory of desire since it appears to have two poles; one related, they write "to a desiring-machine, which defines desire in terms of a real production, thus going beyond both any idea of need and any idea of fantasy", and the other "to a signifier, which reintroduces a certain notions of lack" (p.27). For my study, I return to an important characteristics of desire in Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) work which is that desire, "does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire (...) Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of machine" (p.26). I mention this quote for it contains two important ideas: 1) there is no desire *for* an

object outside of desire, and 2) it is the person that is missing in desire; if I do not enter as assemblage or make connections then it is obvious that no desire can circulate. I will return to this after introducing another important characteristic of desire as assemblage, and moreover, a producing assemblage.

The mechanistic vocabulary of flows, plugging-in and connections used to describe desire in *Anti-Œdipus* will eventually be abandoned. In the follow-up volume *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari replaced the term 'assemblage', with the concept of desiring-assemblage. "Désirer c'est construire un agencement, c'est construire un ensemble. [To desire is to construct an assemblage, to construct a whole.]" explained Deleuze in the eight hours interview *L'Abécédaire* (Boutang, 2012). Desire is about connection, about constructing an assemblage, it is relational, a line; not a fixed point. As we have seen so far, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire has nothing to do with filling a void, with or by something external to the individual. Indeed, they refuse to subjugate the multiplicity of desire, explains Foucault (1983); "[...] to the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna) [...] prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems" (p.xiii). But there are certain conditions to be put in place for desire to start flowing, to circulate and that is: the assemblage. An assemblage must be created and that is why for Deleuze, it is not desire that lacks something, but the subject who lacks in desire. As I walked through the spaces and installations, I have had to create my own assemblages and connections with partial things, bits of information or people. In creating my assemblage with Ai Weiwei's *Bang*, I connected to a tattered and old wooden stool into which I saw traces of a hand, the visual memory of a person who carved characters into the seat. I connected with the little branch sticking out from the sides of Xu Bing's (2014) *Background Story* and calling me

into playing with the work's materiality, and an information read on extended labels that nudged me into noticing aspects of a work I had overlooked. By a chance encounter, I connected with another visitor such as E. and we went on connecting through play with Sun Xun's (2014) video installation *Shan-Shui—Cosmos*. My art encounters both are and emerge in those assemblages of desire, existing as flow, curiosity and desire for more connections.

With no assemblage, no desire can circulate; the equation seems quite simple yet it has many implications for me, as a viewer/visitor in the art gallery. There must be a willingness to take risks, to accept and be open to encounters. But one could also wonder about the conditions external or internal that could enhance, block or prevent the construction of an assemblage. As Deleuze (1987) explained:

[...] desire only exists when assembled or machined. You cannot grasp or conceive of a desire outside a determinate assemblage, on a plane which is not pre-existent but which must itself be constructed. All that is important is that each group or individual should construct the plane of immanence on which they lead their life and carry on their business. Without these conditions you obviously do lack something, but you lack precisely the conditions which make a desire possible. (p. 96)

This passage reassured me that Deleuze did not hold blind faith and utopian ideas concerning the possibilities of desire and assemblage. He recognized that many individuals do not have the conditions to create assemblages where desire circulates; because of constricting external situations of repressive power, but also due to stultifying internalized ways of thinking/being. This is a complex question for me; I often wonder why the two gentlemen coming out of the elevators, sneered at the sight of the scavenged materials in the installation by Xu Bing, yet why did they not connect to the intriguing materiality of the piece? At least,

just enough for desire to start circulating? My pedagogical hope for them to be transformed is another question, but I think this last point brings us back to the concept of encounter and Deleuze's philosophy of immanent ethics. One recalls how a real encounter with ideas, things, people, situations, is a contingent event without recognition or desire to affix a signifier on what is experienced. This shock experience created partial and temporary assemblages, but someone might not want to connect, or refuse to be open to the encounter because of habits. As I write this line, I still see the two gentlemen stepping out of the elevator and who scoffed at the sight of the seemingly random assemblage of old papers and twigs in Xu Bing's *Background Story*. For some obscure reason, I wanted them to connect and construct their assemblage with that singular piece, but they did not. Thus, as a museum educator, I reckon the question begs to be asked in terms of the conditions to put in place, yet without instrumentalizing the desiring-assemblage.

Therefore, it appears that not only do certain conditions prevent the creation of a desiring-assemblage, but equally, we must realize that some connections and assemblages will break, abort or turn out to be life reducing instead of augmenting one's power to affect and be affected. For instance, I relive my experience of walking in-between the plinths of *The Last Two Million Years*, my pace coming to a stop here and there at a paper figurine I notice for the first time, twisting my body so I can better see the fragmented image, and hope to find somewhere else the missing fragment from the Hokusai print, for instance. I strolled around the installation for almost one hour without locating it, granted that I was not being very systematic since I enjoyed going with the flow of being drawn to one image, color, or visually intriguing element, and these focus for the gaze all leading/connecting me to others. But at some point, my body became hungry and tired, the body's call was decisive and the desiring-assemblage I had created with this singular space/artwork suddenly broke and I moved on.

Is there a 'self' as agent of desire? This question raises the complex notion of subjectivity in Deleuzian thought. Throughout his writings, Deleuze abandons the humanist view of the subject as possessing a fixed, stable, essential identity. On the contrary, subjectivity is never a given, it is always in construction, always in becoming. As Boundas (2010a) points out, "the Deleuzian subject is an assemblage of heterogeneous elements whose source is not the interiority of the traditional image of thought" (p.274). In the same way that subjectivity is always in construction; desire is only possible with the deployment of a plane of connections, it cannot be reduced or located to a point of origin. Deleuze asserts that,

Desire is therefore not internal to a subject, any more than it tends towards an object: it is strictly immanent to a plane which it does not pre-exist, to a plane which must be constructed, where particles are emitted and fluxes combine. There is only desire in so far as there is deployment of a particular field, propagation of particular fluxes, emission of particular particles. Far from presupposing a subject, desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power of saying 'I'.
(Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 89)

Being relational and a process, desire is not internal to a subject, it is not something which pre-exists and afterwards gets manifested by the subject. It doesn't even need the prompt of an internal drive. Not even pleasure? Questioned by Parnet, during his filmed interview, Deleuze addressed the many misunderstandings concerning *Anti-Œdipus* since its publication in 1972, especially in relation to the philosophy of desire. Many individuals – mostly students at Paris-Vincennes, saw Deleuze and Guattari's new position on desire as an invitation for absolute spontaneism and a quest for forbidden pleasures. But desire "does not have pleasure as its norm" (Deleuze, 1987, p. 100) and he considered it a false alternative to see

desire as the opposite of Law. Deleuze's position on pleasure is extremely interesting. I think about the art experience and the oft-repeated conversations around the pleasure(s) gained by a satisfying art experience, how there is a 'lack' of pleasure when visitors feel they don't understand the meaning of a complex work. Of course, Deleuze does not deny, for instance, the pleasure of being with loved ones, or that enjoying good company is agreeable. He makes a philosophical distinction between desire and pleasure since he considers the word 'pleasure' to be inscribed within the logic of Lack; to say that desire is the attainment of, or that it leads to pleasure, necessarily implies that desire is lacking in something. On the contrary; desire is an assemblage, it is relationality, connections and process.

One of the most important questions posed by desire, write Deleuze and Guattari (1983) is not "What does it mean?" but rather "How does it work?" (p.109). To think desire and the unconscious are merely producing fantasies or a psychic reality is very reductive, and promotes idealist principles according to them. The desiring-machine is not a metaphor, and if desire produces, then what it produces is real. Desire produces reality. One might ask: what is the relationship between my study on the art experience and desire as a producer of reality? I contend that the educational implications of thinking the art experience as a desiring-assemblage extend beyond the museum and the perceived elitist appreciation of an artwork; for it touches on a mode of living in the world. The desiring-assemblage with artworks produces my own subjectivity as a viewer. It is that process which makes me realize the relationality of the art experience. The desiring-assemblage produces affects, insights, ideas, questions, new ways of seeing something. Furthermore, I have stopped wondering about the meaning, now preferring to ask about the artwork: "how does it work if I connect with the piece?" Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'How to live?' involves the never fixed concept of

subjectivity, the openness to embrace change and to experiment in order to discover satisfactory assemblages where our desire can flow.

In the following section, I turn to the writings of philosopher of education Maxine Greene, in particular her understanding of the concept of imagination. Greene's work is informed by phenomenology and existentialism, and she frequently quotes authors such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, just to name a few. This, of course, places Greene as a contrasting figure to Deleuze. Nonetheless, I find an interesting and rich resonance between Deleuze's view of the desiring-assemblage as productive and Greene's concept of imagination.

Revisiting Maxine Greene's concept of imagination

To teachers gathered at the New York Lincoln Center Institute where she lectured for twenty-five years, Greene (2001) explained that artworks only "emerge as an aesthetic object or event in encounters with some human consciousness" (p.15). Drawing from Dewey's (1934, 1958) view that one's subjectivity must be fully involved in the act of perception, Greene reminds them how artworks "do not reveal themselves automatically" (p.15), and furthermore viewers must take time in being/looking—whether it be reading a poem, watching a dance performance, painting or sculpture— to enter into conversation with artworks. And although she returned often to the importance of "informing awareness" (2001, p.58), this educated understanding is not the same as accumulating information about an artwork or practice. More importantly, she reminds teachers that modes of attending to art cannot be translated "into statements of competencies or quantifiable skills" (2001, p.29).

I encountered Greene's writings later in my studies, as far as I am aware, her work did not circulate in the literature I turned to during my years as a museum educator in Montreal. In my case, the discovery happened during the doctoral program following conversations and seminar readings⁴⁸. Grounded in existentialism and phenomenology, Greene's work and eloquent writing style always richly woven with quotes from poetry and literature, is seductive for its appeal, as Janet Miller (2010) suggests, to notions of personal freedom, ethical choices, and the emergence of more just social spaces. Throughout her lengthy career, Greene remained a formidable advocate for the arts; in her view encounters with the arts enable human beings to, as she wrote, "break through the horizons of the ordinary, of the taken-for-granted, to visions of the possible, of "what-is-not"" (1977, p. 287). Aesthetic experiences have the potential to bring transformation of the self, and a self-acting in the public sphere. Indeed, due to perception and the cognitive processes involved in the experience, encountering the arts can open up new directions in one's life. Reading Greene's emphatic prose is always inspiring for her passionate plea against passivity and convention in favor of a renewed capacity to be authentically present to an experience. Greene (1995) admits her interest for a mode of utopian thinking but, while she warns that educators cannot predict what will happen in aesthetic encounters, there remains at the core of her project, and in this I agree with William Pinar (2011), a quest to bring about something. As Pinar points out while it is all lovely ideas she wants to bring forth, yet "even a lovely objective is an objective nonetheless" (p.98) and such approach may unintentionally risk to instrumentalize the aesthetic experience— even for noble ends. That being said I deeply respect and appreciate Greene's acute sensitivity to the art experience⁴⁹ as "opening windows on alternative realities"

⁴⁸ In particular, thanks to Dr. Dònal O'Donoghue, Dr. Rita Irwin and Dr. William Pinar.

⁴⁹ In this dissertation I use the terms art experience and aesthetic experience interchangeably. Inscribing herself within a Kantian lineage, philosopher Maxine Greene uses predominantly the term

(2001, p.44). In this section, I wish to pay attention and think with/about her sustained interest in the concept of imagination.

Throughout her writings, and in particular her book *Releasing the Imagination* (1995) and the article "Imagination and learning. A reply to Kieran Egan" (1985), Greene's understanding of imagination is not simply an ability to come up with abstract images or concepts such as the fantastical—and not as the conventional 'being creative' in the sense of coming up with original propositions, but as a "capacity to create new orders in experience, to open up new possibilities, and to disclose alternative realities" (1985, p. 167). In other words, imagination "opens windows in the actual and the taken-for-granted toward what might be and is not yet" (1985, p.170). This idea of imagination as a doorway, a cognitive faculty, and a perceptual process; making possible the looking at things differently and "as if they could be otherwise" (1995, p.16). I do not wish to think of imagination as the magic concept or irrefutable keyword for successful educational programs. Indeed, as Greene (2001) herself mentioned, it is undeniable that imagination "is not always benevolent" (p.123) referring to the 1999 Columbine massacre and other horrendous acts of violence, fascism and racism perpetrated under the call for another reality. And neither, Greene adds, does exercising imagination or active encounters with the arts promise to make people morally better, or make them more critically conscious about their capacity to impact on the world. I keep in mind those concerns and, following Pinar (2001), both "respect and fear" the concept of imagination.

For Greene (1995), the way to break with static and fixed perceptions is to "tap into imagination" (p.19). I find her choice of metaphor intriguing; imagination as a separate

aesthetic experience; she defines as 'aesthetic'; "what we come to know directly and at first hand in an aesthetic experience, when we enter in a kind of dialogue with a given work of art" (Greene, 2001, p.52).

enclosed faculty locked inside a person and one needs to tap into it to let it flow. I tend to see imagination not as something one taps into but as emerging in the process of being/sensing/making connections as one is with the work. But for the moment, I want to follow Greene in thinking about imagination as the seeing of what might be, especially since I have repeatedly been in Geoffrey Farmer's *Storeroom Overture*. The works of art—whether it's a poem, a dance performance, a play or visual art—do not reveal themselves automatically suggested Greene. One needs, she writes; "[...] to attend, to be present, to wonder, to explore" in order to be drawn "into the open-ended process of noticing, paying heed trying to see and to hear" (2001, p. 37). I am not so inclined to think that a work needs to 'reveal' itself, thus implying that an essence of the work is hidden and that a deeper meaning to the artworks should be discovered, yet I value Greene's insistence on qualitative characteristics such as being present - albeit she does not further define this quality - for one must be drawn into an open-ended process of noticing and making connections. I am reminded of the discrete little note written by Farmer (2015) and whispering; "(...) what you experience is of your own making (...)". In many ways, I think of this note as the key to tap into the imaginary of the installation. Even if it was my second or nth time stepping into Geoffrey Farmer's *Storeroom overture*, the column of taped styrofoam coffee cups, the aluminum foil sculptures, the museum shelves displaying architectural fragments retained their thing-ness as mundane objects. However, Farmer's choices in staging the conditions to enable, facilitate, question, invite, destabilize my experience, the information provided, others visitors who made me notice new parts created an invitation to see relations between things, and these relations brought forward ideas and possible knowings, or seeing differently. Informed by Greene, I want to see the working of imagination when I see, hear, get an embodied sense of; theatrical props, fragments of early performances, museum shelving's, books and photos of *Storeroom*

Overture as both retaining their object-ness *and* operating as an artistic space for thinking, among other things, about time and memory, archives and collections, the workings of a museum, artistic process, exploration and narration. Imagination is what makes me conscious of the connections would say Greene; and yet, I wonder if we could put it differently. What if it is actually in making a connection, let's say between hearing the sounds coming from the basement of the gallery and the role of a museum, which then activates or triggers imagination to make further connections? This is not I believe how Greene would see it, since she adopts an internal view of imagination, but I appreciate how she thinks of imagination as a move towards, hence as a movement or process.

On another note, it could be objected that little imagination was needed to make the connections or see the relations between the various art projects and objects in the installation, because one has the choice to read (or not) the information provided by the artist and the gallery in the extended labels and text panel for *Storeroom Overture*. Informed by the writings of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1987), one could also argue that, as an art historian and art educator, my eye is the product of those disciplinary fields and thus, what I see and experience is already endowed with meaning and value, my body already knows ways to *be* with contemporary art even if the work troubles or destabilizes me. A key point for Greene (2001), as she advises teachers attending the Lincoln Institute, is to remember that "[t]he more we know, the more we are likely to see and hear" (p.29), but never does she value disciplinary knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

To think with Maxine Greene and the concept of imagination puts forward the importance of making or seeing the ordinary in a less familiar way, of not falling into habits of seeing, of the need to trouble the taken-for-granted, in contrast one must constantly be able

to accept and embrace the unknown. And thus while Greene values informed encounters—and I agree that contextual, formal, theoretical information does provide entry points into an artwork—, nonetheless to work within imagination and truly experience the art, as an art historian and educator, I must also defamiliarize myself from art concepts and theories which have become my ordinary, my taken-for-granted. For instance, walking in *Storeroom Overture*, I recognized without a doubt Farmer's video piece, hand drawing and various props used in his early career performance *Actor, Dancer, Carver* (2003) which I had seen some year ago at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Yet, this particular display of *Actor, Dancer, Carver* at the Vancouver Art Gallery was different, Farmer staged it as part of the larger complex installation *Storeroom Overture*, furthermore the various fragments composing the video installation were now scattered and mingled with other film props, plinths, items from the old building, etc. According to Greene, one would assume I had an informed encounter that could enhance my experience, and yet I claim that to activate imagination, I also had to defamiliarize myself and be open to the new set of possibilities. Indeed, Farmer clearly staged the work differently, and I was invited to encounter *Actor, Dancer, Carver* within another context, establish new narrative or conceptual connections with/between *that* particular piece and the surrounding objects in *this* particular space.

According to Greene, one can say that being open to uncertainty and enjoying ambiguity as opportunities created by the artist/artwork/exhibition space has to do with a willingness to bring full attentiveness to the art encounter. She further mentions the importance of time as a being present to the work; but it is a time she never seeks to empirically quantify in order to pin it to optimal conditions⁵⁰. I also find important to

⁵⁰ In the article *The spaces of aesthetic education*, Greene (1986) wishes the encounter with works of art to be "personal and preferably wordless" (p.57) aiming to achieve a "rapt absorption" (p.57) which

mention her interest in the repetition of an encounter. One might wonder how I can write fieldnotes with/in artworks my body already knows because I see them daily. Can my experience of encountering, to borrow O'Donoghue's (2008) term, still be relevant in terms of research and to whom? Yes, I have been in this installation previously and yet, as Greene suggests in *Variations on a Blue Guitar* (2001) the idea of having repeated meetings with a work is beneficial because a "second or third encounter with a complex work...(allows us to) discern more, we begin to see differently." (p.9) Indeed, every time I (re)visit a new sound is heard, every time I watch a visitor curious about something or stopping to get a closer look at an object makes me notice something, somewhat differently. Every time I establish new connections between what previously seemed disparate objects or fragments of a past performance or installation, and notions of time, artistic practice, narration, experimentation, metaphors of space as memory. Extending from this, Greene brings the idea of renewed changes and possibilities, as she writes:

Because we are different at different moments of our lives, the works that we encounter can never be precisely the same. Viewed as open possibilities each time we come to them, they will begin to appear as events in the ongoing human career, not objects, or sediments, or *things*. (2001, p. 36)

It appears therefore that having repeated meetings with a work is beneficial, since with every encounter we (possibly) discover something new, we might see differently. Reading my scratch notes, I re-experience my first visit of the Geoffrey Farmer exhibition; I shadowed a museum colleague who was touring with an adult group. In my notes, I read about surprise, bewilderment, curiosity but I do not see any grand or profound statement. I

echoes a desire for the Romantic sublime moment of the suspension of time. I do not subscribe to Greene's interest in the rapt absorption.

was enjoying being with the group, actively listening and engaging in the conversations and did not have time to write down my thoughts. Nonetheless, I distinctly re-live my amazement of walking into a rhizomatic web of connections in *Storeroom Overture*; how Farmer has entangled his personal and artistic history into/with the space and building of the Vancouver Art Gallery as a space of accumulated histories and metaphor for memory. Although repeated, my art encounters opened spaces of possibilities as impressions, desires to connect, new information activated differently every time I walked into the exhibition.

But what brings together: the art experience, open possibilities, a sense of the not-yet, the going beyond the known, of weaving parts into a whole, the question of time and being present and the seeing differently? For Maxine Greene this would be, imagination. Drawing from Dewey, Greene (2007) considers imagination as a way to bring new alternatives, of embarking on uncharted territories. She relates imagination to authenticity, empathy, an ability to structure chaos and to retrieve (new) meanings from encounters with art works. Thus, I understand Greene's definition of imagination as both singular and multiple. If seen as singular, imagination is a cognitive capacity (Greene, 1995) that needs to be fostered and developed. As a multiple, imagination is a process, it connects and produces.

In closing, I wish to focus on the important role Greene concedes to the arts in education since artists and art institutions create spaces and pedagogical situations to foster imagination. From *Variations on a Blue Guitar* (2001), I share this important quote, one that encapsulates many of Greene's ideas on the aesthetic experience, education and the role of imagination;

What has been encountered, becomes an event within personal consciousness; it may begin shining toward the lived world. Clearly we cannot *make* that happen; nor can we

intrude when people are becoming aware of this way. We cannot grade them on whether or not such a phenomenon does occur. All we can do is to try to invent situations that make it more likely—allowing for time, for privacy, for silences. We have to try to move persons to think about alternative ways of being alive, possible ways of inhabiting the world. And then we may be able to help them realize the sense in which an active imagination involves transactions between inner and outer vision. And, indeed, all sorts of relationships may be created between the world of the work at hand and the worldhood of the one who attends. (p.31-32)

Because I am critical of the way the term 'imagination' has been taken up by neo-liberalism and marketing with the trope of "imagine = be creative", imagination is not a concept I use frequently or lightly. Yet the event of being in the Geoffrey Farmer (2015) installations still inhabit me; I wish to hear the old recording of the melodramatic love song, I remember the armless clock, the theatre backdrop, I visually recall a knife slowly moving up and down. As a visitor, stepping into the gallery's rotunda, I entered the stage of a sordid historical drama involving the building's famous architect. Moving further into the exhibition, I entered the curated space of Farmer's own artistic practice en-folded with moments in the history of the gallery -from past to present. Playing with fragmentation, the uncanny, sound and space, the artist succeeded in destabilizing the visitor, around me I did hear laughs and manifest expressions of interrogations such as "Where is the art?" Stepping into *Storeroom Overture*, even I was surprised and destabilized by the overwhelming assemblage of everyday objects and materials. One might claim that I already carried expectations of making meaning, of creating a sense of artness of whatever I was seeing because of the art gallery's discursive framing. I had to let go of the taken-for-granted, my encounter and bodily experience became for me an event through the working of imagination as a capacity to see

structures and create images which then "begin shining toward the lived world" (2001, p.31). The art experience lives on —or not— if imagination is activated, yet as Greene reminds us, we cannot control it or force it to happen, nonetheless spaces and situations can be put in place. And, for Maxine Greene the arts are a privileged space for experiences and thus imagination to be activated.

Thoughts on the art experience following a Deleuze-Greene encounter

Greene (2001) insisted that the more we are informed, the more we can perceive what is meaningful in a work; and the more we perceive, the more we can imagine and connect what is perceived to an alternative reality (whether artistic, social, ethical); both ways of thinking about and considering imagination are important for our role as educators. Because if Greene (2001) considered informed art experiences as more satisfactory, I think that art museum educators do have a role in opening a 'milieu' and affordances for visitors to enter other desiring-assemblages. Although the conditions of this milieu of experimentation are always allowed to emerge during the experience and the specifics of the gallery space, the artworks, the audience.

As I read my narrative, I feel propelled back into the Farmer's exhibition space and re-create the experience. I step into *The Last Two Million Years* (2007), and my gaze swiftly scans the installation. I see almost everything, to the exception of what extend beyond a wall blocking my view. I kneel down and crouch to examine the tiny paper-cut figurines and already I guess that the rest of the installation is probably made of the same type of images. I can make the choice to move on and visit the other room. Some visitors passing by are doing just that; they slow down for a moment to look at one or two figurines and they traverse into

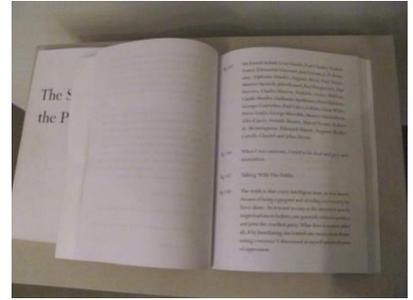
the next room of the exhibition. But I remain and read to the extended label found close to the entrance. I had read it before but a few details had escaped me. Now I want to learn more about historiography and historic narratives written in the USA around 1970. I have been in Farmer's installation countless times, but it leaves me speechless always. I return to my walk and continue to follow the thin line of white Foamcore crowned with its procession of paper figures. A sudden desire to see from the other side, but since the thin line is getting higher and blocks me, it is impossible for me to step over. Walk back or continue. The work—via the curatorial and artistic choices in terms of display—is somewhat guiding, or inviting me into a particular mode of experimentation. The plinth widens, I see cut-up images of kings and queens, heads of states, means of transportation, ancient tools, works of art. Without apparent chronological order, I move from one large plinth to another and play at discovering the various possible narratives. I imagine Farmer art making process in cutting up the book from *Reader's Digest*, and then of spending days delicately spacing out and reworking history for us. A narrow passage opens up in-between rows of white columns, I walk towards a few images looming above me. I stretch my neck but I still can't see them very well because of their small size. But here the passage is a dead end, and my body swivels with the troubling discovery of the dead *Marat* from Jean-Louis David. I follow a passage between plinths, bend over to see better, negotiate a turn so I can see the front of the images and feel the excitement of walking inside a revised history.

In light of the Deleuzian concepts of desire and assemblage, Greene's focus on the importance of having an informed experience brings into focus how information provided by an extended label, a museum educator, or other pedagogical strategy can potentially invite visitors to enter the assemblage of the artwork. Although it is manifested in different ways, even below the threshold of visibility, there is a flow that circulates; a desiring-assemblage

imagining new realities. This is where I find the greatest cleavage between Greene's existentialist philosophy and Deleuze's philosophy of immanence. I have noted previously how Greene's project is one of subjective and social transformation, indeed an important and noble project. Yet, there is an objective and a goal the person or educator aims toward. In contrast, for Deleuze, experience and the desiring-assemblage hold potentials: the potential to actualize something that had remained virtual until the experience of encountering.

ENCOUNTER - *Tic-toc, barking dog, bells ringing and
three hundred sixty-five puppet figurines*

With his subtle architectural intervention, Geoffrey Farmer (2009-) chose again to play with the gallery space. This time he created a special entryway for the installation *The Surgeon and the Photographer*; just a narrow opening, just a one person at a time sort of entrance, just a slit in a huge expanse of wall. For such a large gallery space, it's a Peeping Tom of an entrance. I try to remember what the gallery educator said during a guided tour of the exhibition, for I recall him mentioning and explaining the reason for this choice but I cannot remember what is behind this artistic and curatorial decision. I can't remember the 'why' but today it does not matter, I am not trying to figure out what it means, yet I am really fascinated to see what this choice of a narrow entrance produces. Simply put, the narrow entrance creates a beautiful point of view; the two white walls of the gallery framing what appears to be a colorful crowd of delicate figurines. But it also makes me slow down upon entering, my body feels a change, I am moving into a different space, different from the space I am now. In what way, I do not know yet, I have to walk to the other side.



As I approach, a few steps before passing through the entrance, a dash of red color catches the corner of my eye and I turn my gaze upward. Above the entrance, placed on a small ledge just below the ceiling, I glimpse soft cylinder shape covers sown out of plain pieces of fabric, like faceless figurines large enough to cover an adult hand. Albeit unseen from my low vantage point, I suppose them each supported by a stand of some sort. Strange, why placed so high? There, yet hiding in plain sight. I wonder if all visitors notice them. In my scratch notes, there is no mention of these silent objects, they are like props calling forth the staging, the play of the exhibition. Because of my photograph, I feel physically brought back into the gallery and my encounter with them. I take a moment to read the extended label written about *The Surgeon and the Photographer* about the interesting references to Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, and I move across the narrow entrance.



The sheer vision and physical impression of being swallowed by a sea of mysterious puppets are overwhelming. The totalizing gaze is impossible, and I need to surrender to time, to fragmented points of view, to the demands of close meetings with each figurine. How can I meet them all? Farmer places a beautiful but exacting demand on the public if one wishes to discover each character. I have been in this installation more than once, yet the bodily affect is always renewed, always a mix of delight and sense of the uncanny. All standing on elegant white plinths of various heights, the puppets or figurines are assembled with sewn pieces of cloth and cut-out images from old second-hand books, each fragment of image held by double-sided tape. Thus, Farmer

has introduced a three-dimensional effect into the use of the photograph and each fragment, each cut-out detail remains autonomous, recognizable. Each fragment remains a trace of a person, body or thing in time, yet no longer within the logic of origin. Most of the figurines reveal at least two personalities, stories and sometimes more. At the base, all show a number. Upon entering, I am met by figurine number one and I wonder if number two is nearby, but it is not, it is nowhere in sight. I was wondering if Farmer had displayed the figurines with a specific pattern, if there was an order, perhaps chronological but no, there is no apparent order in the numbering. Or is there? The tombstone label indicated that the installation was composed of three hundred and sixty-five figurines. Why should my expectations of a numerical order dictate the orchestration of such a chorus of historical voices? Perhaps

Soft and diffused lighting, expertly oriented so as to avoid creating harsh shadows, envelops the wide expanse of the gallery space. Suddenly, I become aware of another presence in the room: sound. Bells ring, a clock ticking, the brushing of teeth, gurgling, tic toc tic toc, radio noise, busy voices, dring dring, a dog barking, more bells ringing, more ticking of the clock. Rhythm and the flow of time, three hundred and sixty-five figurines, a different way of presenting time since each figurine retells history differently in the juxtaposition of photographic fragments from old printed media. Quizzical, hilarious, coy or frightening, I feel their stare: the figurines exude a silent yet

eloquent and powerful presence. I'm not sure why; perhaps it resides in the hilarious or witty juxtapositions of cut-out body parts from different magazines, the formal strategies to suggest volume and an embodied presence, the rich mix of gender, the conflation of cultures, the disregard for social stratifications and decorum, the politics of gender identity, the critique of racism, the deliberate anachronisms or the posthuman hybridity of the cyborg.



"Hey, that's a good one!" I hear beside me. Most people grab snapshots of the puppet figurines, some enjoy strolling with Farmer's book written specifically for this installation. Each figurine has a number and an entry in the catalogue. I saw a few of the books on a low plinth, easy to find for the entering public. Watching other visitors read make me curious. My body must weave, zig zag and gently swing beside and around the plinths in order to walk back to the entrance and grab a copy. Let's see what number 310, the large eyes and a red flower which I just photographed, is saying: "A number of important exhibitions have been presented by the society over the years, the latest being

our *Golden Anniversary Exhibition* held at the Powerhouse Museum in 1999, entitled *Fired with enthusiasm*." And just below, another entry numbered 310 (v), "Bringing A Flower To My Husband's Grave". Being familiar with the strategies of contemporary art, I was not expecting an 'explanation' of the figurines but these words can leave one frustrated for being left in the dark concerning the artist's choice or absolutely delighted with the added layer of narrative possibilities in the piece. I smile, delighted. The information about the exhibition in question may come from the article where one of the images was cut-out, however it may also refer to something utterly different. It does not matter; the imagining is better than receiving an answer. But then Farmer also wrote a more narrative and poetic sentence about a husband, a flower and a grave. Perhaps it is a personal reference to the artist's life or a sad and touching event imagined for the puppet figurine. I shall never know. Instead of having the text inscribing a fixed meaning to the image, language opens up narrative vistas, fabulous or sordid stories, provocative juxtapositions and new ideas. As mediated in these coffee-table books bought second-hand in Vancouver, history now becomes reshuffled and reconfigured in different narratives.

Intrigued, I keep reading. No 312 is about "1) Active kidney stone problem; 2) High blood pressure; 3) Critical mass of paperwork driving me nuts; 4) General mental fatigue from overextending, workaholic and sedentary labours" Curious to see what this might look like, or seeing the third space

created by the strange meeting between these words and the visual, I go on a search for number 312. Tic-toc, a dog barking, a bell ring; all markers of time passing. I stroll between the figurines and search for 312; but I get lost in-between looking, being, trying not to knock over a puppet figurine. The work itself feels like a web gently catching me and pushing me here and there. I look for 312 and then sometimes, I'm not sure if I already examined a particular grouping or not; the identity of each figurine becomes a blur. I need to be more systematic in my search. I recognize some features, Henry Kissinger here, the intense dark eyes of Pablo Picasso there, an old brand of cigarettes, the curve of a Dior skirt, famous sculptures; what does this say about the printed media in relation to the digital image?



In the middle of this silent crowd, I lose track of time and even sporadically forget that I am looking for number 312. My search for 312 becomes a game but it is not so important for me to find the right answer. I enjoy the play for itself; for new encounters are at every turn. As I move around and swing gently to avoid hitting a figurine, I discover another one, another narrative,

another rich juxtaposition, another memory or curiosity, another Deleuzian line of flight. After an hour, my body now thirsty and starving pushes me towards the other narrow opening, or exit, situated at the far side of the gallery space, in a line opposite the entrance I came in. I finally meet number 365. On a black bodice, at eye level is glued the cut-out in color of a beautiful, perfectly toned, naked male posterior. Exquisite sense of humor Mr. Farmer. The artist did provide a narrative, albeit a fluid one; one which we have to experience but, first, accept getting lost into.

CHAPTER 6

Mediators

My doctoral work does not aim to provide a unified perspective or definition of what an art encounter really 'is' or should look like. Nonetheless, one could claim that my argument in favor of thinking the art encounter as a desiring-assemblage is already suggesting a view of what an art encounter 'should be like'. But to this I would reply that Deleuzian thought does not have to do with points of origin or destination. On the contrary, concepts are thought in terms of flows, processes and connections. And thus my study does not aim to provide any "best model" of practice, nor research tools claiming to identify and establish, "de minute en minute l'expérience d'un visiteur adulte [from minute to minute the experience of an adult visitor]" (Dufresne-Tassé et al., 2014, p.187) in order to systematize and categorize desirable learning and affective art experiences. Differently, with a focus on inquiry with Gilles Deleuze's philosophical concepts, this study aims to create a milieu inviting other museum practitioners or other scholars concerned with the experience of encountering art, to establish connections relevant to various social, cultural, geographical, historical, institutional, and educational contexts.

My study was conducted in a public art museum but one can encounter art in an office lobby, a public park, a back-alley covered in graffiti, the local community centre, a cozy cafe or an artist run gallery. Whatever the situation, what can be studied and followed are the fluid desiring-assemblages in their singularity, that is, what makes the art encounter as assemblage both a unique event yet general at the same time; what are the ramifications, the sudden cuts, the connections and flows, and what do they produce?

Over the course of writing this dissertation, the work by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze has become progressively mingled with my thoughts and conversations. It has evolved in such a way that I benefit from the occasional gentle tease by close colleagues at the Vancouver Art Gallery, since I often bring Deleuzian concepts into our professional conversations. Interestingly, I see that as I engaged with a few Deleuzian concepts, these new connections have slowly and subtly produced changes, not only my own practice as a gallery educator, but also that of my colleagues. During our team meetings, I recently noticed there were fewer quizzical looks if, as we talk over and discuss a new exhibition display or a specific artwork, I bring forward Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) desire never to ask "what a book means" (p.4), but rather—and I claim this goes for artworks also— that "there is no difference between "what a book talks about and how it is made" (p.4). Furthermore, they also suggest that we should ask;

[...] how it [the book] functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed [...]. (p.4)

This is but one instance, among many others, to give an example of a major shift in my own thinking as art museum educator. Over time my rhizome will keep expanding; of course, embracing Deleuzian ideas and moving away from 'essence' or 'interpretation', does not necessarily imply that I deny the cognitive, perceptual, social and emotional aspects of experiencing art, neither does it imply a rejection of art historical/theoretical knowledge about an artwork or exhibition theme. I contend that it is the role of museum education and exhibition curators to bring about those milieus of experiences, thus allowing encounters and assemblages—with ideas, information, memories, affects, other bodies, places, etc.— to

happen and produce further connections. As scholars (Baugh, 2010; Boundas, 2010a; Semetsky, 2010) have clearly explained, while for Deleuze, experience is a-subjective⁵¹, qualitative, complex, affective and sensorial, it is important to remember that it is only experimentation which can reveal "what a body or mind can do, in a given encounter" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). This last point makes me think of the privileged spaces of experience made possible, facilitated, challenged, stimulated, questioned, renewed by the arts and contemporary artistic practices, many artists today exploring beyond art as 'object' towards art as dialogue and as social practice (see Birchall, 2015; Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2002; Helguera, 2011; O'Neill & Wilson, 2010; Wang, 2017).

While Deleuze passed away in 1995 and, it is well known that he and Guattari were not keen on conceptual art—which they sharply critiqued in *What is Philosophy?* (1994), I still consider their ideas as extremely generative to challenge the view that being with the arts is an affair of reaching a meaning, or understanding what the work 'communicates'. Indeed for Deleuze (1995) art opens a way for life to emerge:

Creating isn't communicating but resisting. There's a profound link between signs, events, life, and vitalism: the power of nonorganic life that can be found in a line that's drawn, a line of writing, a line of music. [...] Any work of art points a way through for life, finds a way through the cracks. (p.143)

Hence art, like a book, is not about representing the world, it is "not an image of the world" wrote Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* but "it forms a rhizome with the world" (p.11). This dissertation posits that, if the artwork forms a rhizome with the world,

⁵¹ As a reminder, for Deleuze, experience is a-subjective, because it is not about the internalized, psychological process of a fixed Subject pre-existing before the experience; rather, the process of subjectivation emerge within the experience itself (Baugh, 2010; Boundas, 2010a; Semetsky, 2010).

through one's encounter with the art (as object and what is produced by the encounter, which interestingly is also an idea found in Maxine Greene), one expands the rhizome and opens more cracks for life to emerge. Knowledge about/of the artwork is still important but not as an objective or a destination. The materials, aesthetics choices, the artist's intentions and engagement with themes and ideas do not mark an ontological point of origin but constitute some of the rhizomatic lines that connect the artwork with the world. Put simply, drawing from Deleuze, the experience of encountering art is not simply a method to allow new encounters and provoke thought, it constitute a mode of living (McCoy, 2012; Stivale, 2009).

Following these notes, there will be two brief sections in this chapter. First, I turn to Deleuze's (1995) concept of the *intercesseur*, or the mediator as a springboard to think my role an art/aesthetic educator in light of the new knowledge produced by this study. Second, I will consider how a research informed by Deleuzian concepts may be generative for research in art museum education, curatorial work, and I contend also useful for museum practices or in the larger field of museum studies⁵² interested in visitor's experience.

On Deleuze's concept of mediators and curricular considerations for art museum education

It was the consequence of a fortuitous encounter while screening down some results from an Internet search on Deleuze. I forgot what my keyword was at the time. Albeit

⁵² Also referred to as *museology*, the term *museum studies* is the term favored by Anglo-American universities and etymologically speaking means the study of the museum (Mairesse and Desvallées, 2010). The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines museology as "museum science" and explains it as; [...] the study of the history and background of museums, their role in society, specific systems for research, conservation, education and organization, relationship with the physical environment, and the classification of different kinds of museums" (Carbonell, 2004, p. 4).

unrelated to the context of museums, Gilles Deleuze's (1995) comment on mediators discovered in an 1985 interview translated in *Negotiations*, resonated for me. And yet again, it provoked me to thought but some time went by before I could play and work with the concept. The interview in question was a general conversation with Deleuze, loosely covering subjects such as the interplay between philosophy, art and science, and the act of creation, Deleuze asserted:

Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people—for a philosopher, artists, scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists— but things too, even plants or animals, as in Castaneda. Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It's a series. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself, and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own. (p. 125)

On this Deleuze is very clear, to produce and create—whether new ideas, visual forms, musical lines, or anything—we need to *form* our mediators, that is become part, create or embark in a series—however multiple, temporary, unstable and imaginary is the assemblage. Again, for me it is important to underline this; one has to *form* one's mediators; mediators are not assigned 'out there', awaiting to transmit, share, communicate a pre-existing idea. Deleuze did not develop or define further the concept of mediators—which, in the text, is only found in its plural form—, if only to mention how Michel Foucault and Félix Guattari became his "*intercesseurs*" allowing him to create and to say what he had to say. Neither did he elaborate specifically on the context of museum practice; yet I contend that his views on

mediators are generative, if provocative, to produce a new perception of the art museum educator.

I see the value in Deleuze's way of thinking about mediators because I realize that I have been forming my own mediators—some humans and some non-humans. Forming my mediators has enabled, or should I say created the movement of thought, and thus allowing further assemblages with the artwork—thoughts about my inquiry and work as museum educator, new connections and meanings. As I return to my research and pose on it a retrospective gaze, I share what I think have been *some* of my mediators; mediators which were formed during the experience, not before it. For instance, in Ai Weiwei's (2010-2014) sculptural installation *Bang*, the sheer materiality of the delicate yet expertly balanced wood structure towering above and around me was key and especially the moment when a visitor sat on one of the stools. Of course, I knew already about Ai Weiwei and had read various articles on the installation but seeing that man answering the call of an empty, old, hand-crafted Chinese wooden stool triggered an entire series of ideas around notions of the individual and the group, labor, traditions, the fragile equilibrium of modernity and change. With *Background Story* by Xu Bing (2014), this may seem anecdotal but the small tree branch coming out to the side of the large frame became my mediator especially when I embarked in the movement of thought as I wrote my narrative. The reader may also remember E., whom I met while looking Xu Bing's installation, but our conversation soon prompted us to move into another gallery space, and we embarked into a dynamic moment of play—in Gadamer's (2004) sense—with Sun Xun's (2014) video installation. Another significant mediator turned out to be a guided tour taken in the early days of the Geoffrey Farmer's exhibition. As I write these lines, of course I am reminded of John Dewey's (1958) critique of the gallery tours that were not conducive, in his view, to quality aesthetic experiences. Although I will not open a

line of argument against his position, isn't it interesting to note that while being part of a large gallery tour may not be conducive to art encounters-and yet, we never know- a gallery tour, and I would suggest other educational strategies such as text panels, artist talks, printed or digital support, can prompt a visitor to form its own mediators. And, according to Deleuze (1995) creation is all about mediators, without them nothing happens.

I now take up another challenge raised by this dissertation. Albeit without the desire to produce a fix set of prescriptions, I will entertain potential avenues of practice and research for/in art museum education. As I bring into play Gilles Deleuze's (1995) concept of *mediators*, all the while looking to understand how the concept of mediators functions, I further aim to "gain insight into what it can do" (Bal, 2009, p.17) to tease out what Deleuze's use of the term can mean for my role as a museum educator and approaches to curriculum. More precisely, of interest are the concepts of curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived proposed by curriculum scholar Ted Aoki (2005) and how these could potentially inform one's approaches regarding the educational in the gallery, for instance via the gallery tours, public programs, artist talks, gallery interpretation, or exhibition display. In the next pages, I will cover these points but it is important to remember that, while I enumerated them previously in a linear fashion, working within a Deleuzian frame calls for me to address my interests in the art experience, my role as educator and ethics as a way of living, as entangled and connected. Instead of the image of the tree imposing, write Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the verb "to be" (p.25), they prefer the horizontality and type of connectivity of the rhizome whose "fabric [...] is the conjunction, "and...and...and..." (p.25).

I did not choose to focus on the term 'mediator' lightly, especially since the concept has many different and contested definition and uses. These understandings range from

being a general term to describe or name the function of the museum, museum exhibition and/or museum educator as interpreter, intercessor or intermediary between the exhibition content or artworks, and the museum public; to indicating someone's role in conflict management, organizational development or restorative justice (Andreasen & Bang Larsen, 2007). In Desvallées and Mairesse's (2010) institutional definition for the International Council of Museums (ICOM), museum or cultural mediation refers to a wide range of activities carried out in "order to build bridges between that which is exhibited (seeing) and the meanings that these objects and sites may carry (knowledge)" (p.47), the definition also recognizes the subjective quest for self-discovery through the act of mediation. This metaphor of the mediator/museum educator as a bridge or as providing means and opportunities to bridge one side to the other over a gap, is a powerful metaphor which has fueled my work for many years. But working with Deleuzian concepts is inviting me to shift away from the metaphor of the bridge, towards perceiving my role as one who puts in place 'milieus' as sites of experiences where visitors can form their own desiring-assemblages with artworks, knowledge, ideas, other beings and place.

We as persons are a set of connections, and throughout this dissertation journey I was never alone, being always already connected to other interlocutors; first of all, with the immediate circle of my doctoral committee, but I further engaged in written-but also imaginary- conversations with philosophers John Dewey, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans Georg Gadamer, Maxine Greene, and of course Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. These have been, and still remain as I write these lines, the mediators populating my series, my research-assemblage, and thus allowing me to create a movement of thought, produce new knowledge and the art encounter and my role as a museum educator.

As mentioned previously, mediators can be people, material or imaginary, animate or inanimate. Over time, I have formed a mediator out of my own art encounter and the myriad of human, non-human, conceptual materialities, such as my research notebook, not only because of what it contains in terms of data, observations and thoughts but browsing through, and reading through my notes has prompted the movement of thought. I formed inanimate but forceful mediators, as I strolled into Geoffrey Farmer's work *The Last Two Million Years*, responding to the materiality of the work which called for my body bend down, twist and turn while carefully stretching my neck in order to get a closer look at the delicate cut-out paper figurines. Lastly on this point, I agree with Deleuze that one needs to form one's mediators to create the movement of thought. But, my finding is that I cannot determine in advance what mediator I will form, or put another way, what mediator an art experience can allow me to encounter.

Before closing this chapter, I return to my role as an art museum educator and flowing thoughts on curriculum. Not curriculum in the conventional understanding of a course of study but rather, the way Pinar (2010) contends how "through the curriculum and our experience of it, we choose what to remember about the past, what to believe about the present, what to hope for and fear about the future" (p.3). Each artwork I encountered in this study encompasses a multiplicity of complex knowledge- related to politics, culture, history, art practices, identity, technology and the environment, etc.- brought forward in the material/conceptual choices made by the artists. Furthermore, each experience as a desiring-encounter produced the work as art, produced new connections and ideas I never thought before experiencing the artwork. Thinking the art encounter as desiring-assemblage produced my subjectivation as difference and becoming, but this was a process which happened without me noticing it because things/ideas can emerge much later in time. The specific

assemblage I momentarily created with/in the artwork may break but some lines in the encounter as desiring-assemblage pursue their course, and create new lines of thought.

Deleuze's (1995) concept of mediators caught my attention because, drawing from this study, I consider it the most important role for art museum educators (and curators). But again, not mediators as the metaphors of the bridge linking two fixed entities, but the mediator needing to be formed. This brings me back to Aoki's (2005) notion of the curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived. An equivalent in museum education of the curriculum-as-planned in Aoki would be, for instance the various steps for an arts based workshop or a gallery tour outline. The curriculum-as-lived are the lines of escape made, pokes, created, opened inside the tour outline of the planned steps in the studio because a participant wants to experiment something different, a visitor makes a comment of question during the tour and the entire group moves along to discuss another topic, explore another work not previously in the outline. In the context of my study, my main point is to claim that while our role as museum educators is to create that milieu of experimentation for our visitors, yet in terms of the curriculum-as-lived, we will never know what mediators the visitors will form. We will never know what, when or how encounters will happen, and what desiring-assemblages have been formed. Addressing teachers at the Lincoln Center Institute, Greene (2001) explained it well as she reminded everyone that there is no guarantee that their students will value the artwork, "anymore than there is any guarantee that they will have an aesthetic experience with it" (p.26). But mostly, engaging with the arts is to foster increased attentiveness, open-mindedness and "a sense of exploration" (p.28) and, with the help of imagination, "open windows on the actual and disclose visions of what might be" (p.110).

This brings me to my last point; what I see as the ethical dimension of being and

experimenting with the arts and my interest in Deleuze's project of immanent ethics. As outlined by Marks (2010), while Deleuze is not interested in morals which are a way of judging life in terms of what it *should be*, he is strongly committed to ethics which asks how to live in this world. For Deleuze, ethics is related to becoming—as the very dynamism of change moving towards no specific goal (Stagoll, 2010a). So becoming is not about changing from one state of being towards another, becoming is always in the middle because there is no arrival point, no destination. Most important to remember is that Deleuze embraces a philosophy of immanence; a philosophy of connection and relations *in* and not *to* something (J. Williams, 2010). What does this imply? This is how it should be done according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987):

[...] Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. (...) Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole “diagram” as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs. (p. 161)

Becoming therefore, is not about moving towards transcendent values—such as hoping or moving towards becoming a view of the Self as we should or hope to be. For Deleuze, this view of becoming prevents us from actualizing the potentials that are already in life. And how do we actualize those potentials? Through experimentation, because only in experimentation can we have encounters. Throughout this study, I have aimed to bring the reader into this inquiry process and created an invitation to study the visual arts as a privileged milieu of experimentation and encounter. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) have suggested;

"we will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities" (p.4). In this quote, the 'it' I want to see and think as the artwork, the space of the gallery, the exhibition display.

In closing this section, I wish to bring forward again the connections between life as formed by virtualities (not possibilities because the term implies a goal outside of), and through/in experiences and experimentations or encounter, one actualizes something—yet one can never tell in advance what the body will do. Deleuze (2007b) condenses all these ideas in the last text written shortly before his death in 1995. He writes;

We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing more. It is not immanent to life, but the immanence that is in nothing else is itself a life. [...] A life contains only virtuals. It is composed of virtualities, event, singularities. What I am calling virtual is not something that lacks reality. Rather, the virtual becomes engaged in a process of actualization as it follows the place which gives it its proper reality. The immanent event is actualized in a state of things and in a state of lived experience.

(pp.391-392)

This quote could become a *motto* for art museum educators; it is important to consider and value the art experience, simply to live an experience of encountering for one never knows what it can connect with, that will depend on each person's political, social, cultural, or personal assemblage, and what virtual potentialities will be actualized. Furthermore, educators will also recognize the educational in terms of what the art encounter produces; whether different knowledge, learning, meaning-making or self-expression. And even perhaps, new avenues for research. This will be examined in the next section.

Considerations for research in art museum education

This study began by posing a question; what particular reality of the art encounter—not in terms of Being or the essence of what something 'is', but as process— emerge or is generated when using the concepts of encounter, desire and assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987)? In order to proceed, I first accepted Lather and St.Pierre's (2013) call to consider the ethical responsibility regarding one's work as inquirer, I accepted to "question our attachments that keep us from thinking and living differently" (p.631). As described in the introduction and chapter one, in my work as a museum educator, I had long relied upon late twentieth century empirical research on the art museum experience, inquiries rooted in representational logic and binaries such as subject/object, mind/body, discourse/matter, Self/Other. But, from the beginning of this study I was determined to adopt a philosophical and methodological approach that embraced connections and multiplicities, rather than one reproducing the Humanist binary logic of dichotomies invested with hierarchy and power.

And thus, I decided to think the un-thought and explore a different path, somehow not the one already cut out by the inquiry methods well respected and frequently used in my professional and academic circle of art museum educational research, such as: process of data generation from interviews or the Thinking Aloud method, coding and extracting themes and then proceeding to the analysis. Instead I turned to research as assemblage and found insights, such as working with the methodological concepts of contiguity and living inquiry, in the arts-based research methodology of a/r/tography. The research-assemblage was a constellation of scratch notes, sounds, artworks, fleeting images of visitors walking by, a computer screen where the embodied act of reading my notes and typing also re-create anew

an encounter yet differently for my purpose, of looking closer at one of my photograph and noticing a detail which had escaped me in Xu Bing's(2014) installation *Background Story*, remembering E. telling me how things happen after, grappling with Deleuzian thought by my side, thinking of Brook who might never have stood at the exact spot where Vermeer framed his composition had he not, by chance, encountered *View of Delft*. But the summing up of all this is not the research-assemblage, it is in the connections and how each aspect of research impacts on the other, at different speeds, time or mode of expression. Yet, how to account for the importance in this study of walking in/among the artworks, a walking necessary to encounter the artworks but also, the walking translated or re-enacted in textual and visual language? A/r/tography (Irwin, 2013; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay *et al.*, 2005) provided insights, and I found particularly generative the methodological concepts, called renderings (2008, p. xxviii), of living inquiry and contiguity. This study on the experience of encountering art could not have been done without the performative walking and being in the gallery space but, the living inquiry can also be, Springgay et al. (2005) explains, "an embodied encounter constituted through visual and textual *understandings* and *experiences*" (p. 902). To Deleuze, experience is a milieu that provides the potential and the capacity to be affected. In this research, the walking, being in the gallery, the text and the photographs are not simply modes of representing (although they are this as well), brought together in contiguity is performing the knowing in relations. Hence, knowing does not reside in either one of those three nodes (walking, text, visual), but in-between them when they are brought in relation.

It is important to mention that even though it has been difficult not to mention the 'I' in relation to 'my' experience, informed by postqualitative research, I do not presume experience as "a stable source of knowledge but as an event that needs to be constantly reinterpreted again and again" (Jackson and Mazzei, 2008, p.304). But rather, as Richardson

and St.Pierre suggest (2008), I write in order to think and inquire, but also I would add, to mindfully map some desiring assemblage created in the art encounter. The art encounter is not a phenomenon with a fixed, all-knowing viewer (in my case also researcher) internalizing the experience of something 'out-there', an experience which can be isolated and traced in order to fix and essentialize boundaries

Of course, some enactment of boundaries is necessary and impossible to avoid (Law, 2004); I could mention for instance, my choices of artworks where I decided to linger, the impact of my body and the richness or 'quality' of fieldnotes whether I was more or less tired or hungry, and my linguistic representations for this dissertation are just a few examples of the cuts and boundaries I establish. What is important, reminds John Law in *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (2004), is that conventional methods of the normative kind precisely strive to control and determine fixed boundaries, but what he claims is important if we want to attend to complexity and multiplicity, is to find methods where we "might imagine more flexible boundaries" (p.85). This is what I aimed to demonstrate in working with Deleuzian concepts to inquire into the art encounter in an art museum setting.

In the introduction and chapter three, I shared my interest in the generative potential of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical ideas (and his collaborative writings with Félix Guattari), to see a different art encounter emerge because I put to work a set of concepts such as encounter, rhizome, assemblage and desire. More specifically, the entire dissertation writing process became a desiring-assemblage, echoing what Brian Massumi (2002) described provocatively in *Parables of the Virtual*; "If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. And that you have to be willing to surprise yourself "writing things you didn't think you thought" (p.18). As discussed in chapter two to five,

drawing from a number of theoretical concepts, I engaged Deleuze and Guattari's thinking about desire as a force circulating and producing of the assemblage, to support my study for an understanding of the art encounter as a multiplicity and a dynamic assemblage emerging in/through the meeting, relationality and intra-acting of bodies, spaces, discourses, and various materialities. An assemblage through which desire circulates and acts as a flow producing new ideas and subjectivity.

Albeit I recognize the benefits I gained as a museum educator from the knowledge put forward in empirical and qualitative studies of visitors' experiences, I remain cautious about researcher's quest for more exacting methods of recording and coding but I also wonder what art museum educational research is thus shadowing and how we can collaborate so as to give due place to the materiality and fluid complexity of encountering artworks in a gallery space. Thinking with Deleuze made me consider the fieldnotes and my narratives not as a way to capture with words the art encounter as presence. On the contrary, I see fieldnotes and the narratives as operating on the Deleuzian mode of the and, and, and,... hence as a process (a desiring-assemblage) thus adding multiple connections to the space of possibilities. My point is not that conventional qualitative methods should be abandoned in art museum educational research, absolutely not. Nonetheless, I agree with social scientist John Law (2004) who suggests that inquirers—and I think this applies well to my topic and my own work— should 'unmake' many,

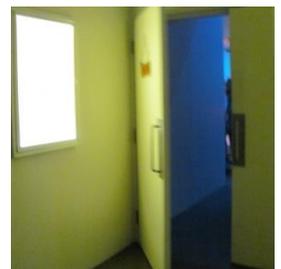
[...] methodological habits including: the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; and the expectations of generality that

are wrapped up in what is often called 'universalism'. But, first of all we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security. (p.9)

On a similar note, Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose (2013) also make a stand, in their edited book *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, for research methodologies interested and capable of addressing "the issue of multiplicity [which] is currently central within the social sciences" (p.9). The crafting of his study along Deleuzian ideas enabled a folding both a research methodology, as a multiplicity which is a complex structure not part of something larger or with any prior unity (Roffe, 2010), and the enactment of my object of study; the experience of encountering art as a desiring-assemblage.

ENCOUNTER - *Closing time: Frank Zappa and lingering thoughts*
of an art museum educator

Closing time. It was the last day, the last hour of the Geoffrey Farmer exhibition *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?* At the Vancouver Art Gallery. The idea, metaphor, representation of time is a recurrent theme and compositional motif in Farmer's exhibition: institutional time, personal history, history as discourse, traces of time in the found object, passage of time, the time of artistic labor, clocks marking time, my own body experiencing the time it takes to move in/through the artworks. Farmer is able to somehow poetically materialize and visualize time, yet how I wish he could slow down the movement of time. How I wanted to turn what felt like time as crystalline water running through my fingers into a viscous substance, resisting the flow and embracing slow time so I could dwell longer, and continue to be affected and be surprised by the works. But this wasn't going to happen. And now here I am over a year and a half later, sitting at my computer, pouring over my field notes, looking at visual traces of my walks through the exhibition, and ready to embark in writing the last chapter of my doctoral dissertation.



In this closing section, I return to the questions which prompted this study yet, my theoretical stance implies that I do not address my research questions as problems needing to be fixed or taken one step closer to

being resolved, but rather as ways of developing a different theoretical and conceptual vocabulary, and mapping a new territory to develop and expand research on the art encounter.



By no means, does this study discount the significant body of research addressing the cognitive, emotional and social components of the art experience. But instead of trying to find the meaning of what an art encounter 'is' or can be, this study is interested in the "onflow...of everyday life" (Thrift, 2008, p. 5), and aiming to inquire the affective, embodied, relational experience of encountering art in a gallery context. While the desire to write my conclusion in the form of a narrative writing was not part of the original plan, somehow now I long to push back the moment of inscribing the final period, and wish to continue dwelling with/in the last artwork I visited during my research-assemblage at the Vancouver Art Gallery. And so here I am, sitting at my computer with my field notes and glancing at the visual traces of my art encounter as a moment in time. I enjoyed scribbling notes and words in the same way that Roland Barthes (1978) wrote about "Language is a skin. [...] It is as if", he said, "I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words" (p.73). Even though as Bruno Latour (1990) reminds us, any mode of inscription invariably flattens our experience of the world, during my field work, the writing and taking pictures was a way to linger with the works, lovingly touch them with my gaze. Resisting the predominance of data-driven research in our time of accountability, post-qualitative scholars such as Jackson (2013),



MacLure (2013), Mazzei (2010), Nordstrom (2013), St.Pierre (1997, 2013) have started to trouble and complicate the conventional methods which treat data as a reflection of reality, data as ready to be coded and categorized. Throughout this study, I do not consider the data generated in the field notes, the photographs as "speaking for itself by stabilising the essential 'being-ness'" (Jackson, 2013, p.114) of an art encounter, instead I see the field notes and photographs them as intricate and dynamic parts both producing the encounter and as part of the research-assemblage. The material documents are important because our mutual 'intra-action', to borrow Barad's (2007) terminology, enacts and constitutes my art encounters and my thinking as a researcher.



Zappa (1940-1993). The work consists of thousands of audio files and is an experiment with acoustemantic sound, which is the transformation of a sound once it has been removed from its source. This approach, which developed both the advent of magnetic recording in the 1950s and would come to be known as musique concrète. Early musical pioneers such as Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995) and Edgar Varèse (1883-1965) looked at sound as "living matter" and designed new organizational principles to create their compositions. Zappa used similar methods, mixing together previously recorded musical sessions to create a technique he termed "New Music" or "strange time".

Foster takes a similar approach to Zappa's biography, while incorporating his own influences: the post-war methods of Kathy Acker (1947-1997) and the cut-up techniques of writer William S. Burroughs (1914-1997). Commonly in the installation's programmed assessments and light are recombined each day by a computer algorithm. At times the work is highly choreographed and refers to specific scenes in Zappa's life. At other times it functions more like a jester, creating compositions spontaneously. The installation begins its sequence in coordination with the time of day and the museum's open hours, with Zappa reaching his death at the

The clock is ticking, it's now time to move along. Only one hour left to linger in Let's make the water turn black, the last installation piece in the exhibition. I walk through the narrow opening separating the room where *The Surgeon and the Photographer* is displayed into the low-lit corridor and liminal space leading to, a projection room on my left, and a banal set of closed doors with the sign "Theatre entrance" on my right. The marquee style light box grabs my attention. I have passed by it frequently, sometimes only glancing because I was touring a group and would stop to point it out, or then I quickly read the first paragraphs in my impatience to move into the installation. Like the synopsis of a theatrical play, the poster explains: "This is a work in progress...It is not a rock and roll biography. Here everything becomes melody or sculpture play." I learn



about some excerpts included in the installation's soundtrack, such as; a talking doll recorded by Edison in 1888, an excerpt from K. Schwitters, a piece by John Cage from 1939. There are also beautiful quotes allowing me to understand again how this piece will inquire time; the quotes alluding to the relation between time and sound- the soundtrack being chronologically organized to parallel Frank Zappa's life span, and time conceivable as an image.



The door gently responds to the pull of my hand and soon my body feels swallowed into a world of collaged sounds and fluctuating jewel-like colors created by the lights. I am always surprised by the spectacle of the low stage crowded with 'characters' made of salvaged props from movie sets or the theatre, and an eclectic selection of found, quirky, bizarre and often hilarious objects. Some of the props are animated sporadically, other objects are adorned with light bulbs switching on and off with different rhythms. The room is mesmerizing, a theatrical performance with non-human actors is underway. No matter how often I have entered this space, I always feel that words -even visual or audio recordings for that matter- can't do justice to the piece, and neither be exacting enough to enact my encountering. What's going on? This performance appears to be an organized and well-orchestrated chaos, but I think it is preferable to let the body accept to be carried away by the momentum of the piece. Accepting just to see, sense, and hear what will happen next. In *Art Matters*, philosopher Peter de Bolla (2001) wrote about the affective



experience of being in "breathless wonder" (p.142), but furthermore, the state of wonderment "requires us to acknowledge what we do not now or may never know [...] It is, then, a different species of knowledge [..]" (p.143).



This is a crucial point; "the real is a closely woven fabric" (p. xi) wrote Merleau-Ponty (2002), and this is precisely the metaphor which I find generative to think my experience of encountering Farmer's installation; not as the fixed perceiver outside 'of' but as part of a woven (relational) fabric made of sounds, my own affects in response to the materiality of the artwork, images, ambiances, other bodies walking by, the theatricality of the display, and the curatorial discourse.



In Farmer's exhibition design, a particular attention was brought to the flow of visitors, of one's movement through the spaces, like a storyline or thematic thread weaving one's experience in/of the exhibition as narrative discourse. As I turn my head, I notice right next to the doorway, neatly placed on the wall, a didactic panel explaining that the title of the installation *Let's Make The Water Turn Black* (2013-2015) refers to a composition by the American musician Frank Zappa. Rich in information, the text details Geoffrey's Farmer's interest in experimental musical structures and interest towards composers such as Pierre Schaeffer and Edgar Varèse, Zappa's own experimentation with recorded sounds and various cut-up techniques employed by writers Kathy Acker and William



S. Burroughs. Like every person entering the art gallery, I come to the artworks with always already a considerable amount of personal, cultural, educational, psychological baggage. What's more, in my case as an art historian and museum educator, I have also been long immersed and become familiar with the language of contemporary art. Nonetheless today I am quite-pleasantly perplexed and dumbfounded by the complexity of Farmer's installation and the information provided by the art gallery about Farmer's installation is extremely relevant and welcome. Relevant for what, one might ask? Throughout her book *Variations on a Blue Guitar*, Maxine Greene (2001) repeatedly insists that it is "best to have informed encounters" (p.36) in order to have richer and "more vivid, more consequential" (p.58) experiences with the arts. By 'consequential', I think Greene alludes and is in accord with John Dewey's (1997/1938), admonition that to be of quality, an experience must lead to growth (p.40) but also, in terms of its effects, that it lives "fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p.28). As William Pinar (2011) remarks, by knowing more, Greene is not so much interested in academic knowledge or information, as with the lived experience "providing a passage to imaginary worlds" (p.97). Nonetheless, Greene (1984) does acknowledge that teachers do have a role in empowering "individuals to notice what there is to be noticed in the works of art" (p.124). Who gets to decide what is important to notice opens up an entire set of questions already addressed in critical museology (see Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Karp & Lavine, 1991; McClellan, 2008; Sherman & Rogoff, 1994). With this in mind,



I do think it is the role of art museum curators and educators to provide and offer, among other practical/intellectual/physical considerations, situated information which can help critically frame one's understanding, interpretation and encounter with an artwork (Bal, 2002). And more specifically, drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I suggest that an important role for curator and educator is to create and offer various conditions to engage with art, and these may perhaps be for some visitors a milieu of experimentation. A milieu where visitors can possibly make encounters and be pushed to thought. And one can be pushed to thought, or create an assemblage leading to new ideas and becomings, not only in relation to the artworks (as object or situation), but also in relation to a gallery space, other visitors or, a new element of information read on a panel.



As I stroll along and linger in *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, I realize how the information panel has become one more line in my encounter as assemblage. For instance, the panel explains that Farmer has structured the soundtrack which is part of the multimedia installation, in relation to the opening hours of the gallery. When the art gallery opens to the public at 10am until closing time, the artist and his collaborator created a soundtrack corresponding to Frank Zappa's life cycle, and significant events in American history. Knowing this made me listen with renewed attentiveness. Yet the assemblage also produces new ideas/questions which did not exist, or would not have presented themselves before my



art encounter-as I wish to make clear, composed of the objects of display but also the gallery space, the sounds and lights, the other visitors, the information provided. I have become fascinated how an artwork spatializes and visualizes time, and how Farmer has explored, in my view, the biographical and produced a fabulously rich portrait of Frank Zappa, in a non-representational way.

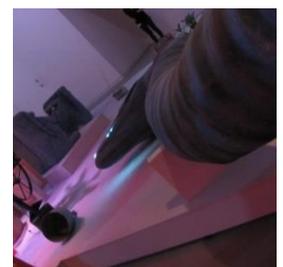


A bench by the side of the gallery is gently inviting me to sit down, all for the privilege of a different point of view. Other visitors around me are doing the same. In terms of physical experience, this installation is very different from *Storeroom Overture* or *The Last Two Million Years* where my body had to constantly move around and negotiate that space to be able to see. There is definitely a theatrical quality in *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*. A security guard who recognizes me approaches, he tells me of a woman who stayed a long time in this work and upon hearing a parody of the *Blue Danube* waltz spontaneously embarked in an improvised dance around the space. She received a warm hand of applause. What a fabulous art encounter and rich assemblage she created, one that produced a line of flight expressing itself as a dance. This is precisely why I wish to argue in favor of exploring methodological approaches regarding the experience of encountering art to expand on the well-rehearsed techniques of tracking or the 'thinking aloud method' or exit surveys.



People around me are chatting and pointing now and then towards a prop acting as a pendulum, a visual pun, the poetry of a moment. I notice some people stepping closer to the low-raised platform, one person bends down to get a better look at something. The eloquent body gesture makes me curious; this is intriguing, what secret of the work might I be missing as I sit here comfortably? Letting myself be taken over by the fragmented but mesmerizing soundtrack, and swallowed by the colored lights, I make a mental note to go and have a look a well, in a moment, not yet. As I write these notes a year and a half later, I realize that I cannot remember all the props and objects in the installation, and yet I did experience a vivid encounter. But my body does relive, recreate the suspended moment of watching the other visitors also engaged with the installation. Except that I will never know what their assemblage will produce. At the time, I still had no idea what my desiring-assemblage with Farmer's installation *Let's make the water turn black* would produce....

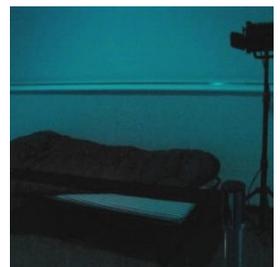
Yesterday while I was writing this narrative, a visual of the marquee style light box at the entrance of Farmer's installation was on my computer and I glanced at it again. Suddenly a sentence in the poster jumped out for me. In her materially informed post-qualitative research, MacLure (2013) aims to show that data is not simply to be seen as "inert and indifferent mass waiting to be in/formed and calibrated by our analytic acumen" (p.660), because a piece of data can affect the researcher, data can "glow"(p.661). The piece of data that glowed for me was constituted by the following



words: "[...] time has transfixed itself within the sound. There is still movement, but it has become nothing more than the breathing of the sound itself." I wasn't sure if the words were from Geoffrey Farmer or the list of names written at the bottom of the poster; such as Edgar Varèse, Frank Zappa, Morton Fieldman. I am in a race against the clock to finish writing my conclusion, but I was too curious, I just had to know. Thus, I reactivated the desiring-assemblage previously established with Farmer's piece and needed to find out who had spoken so beautifully the idea of time as the breathing of sound. It was 1:30am but I started to explore, and after an Internet research I discovered that the quote was from New York musician Morton Feldman (2000), a pioneer of experimental music defined as 'indeterminate', friend of composer John Cage and abstract expressionist painter Jackson Pollock (Diggory, 2009). I became mesmerized by the slow sounds of his composition *Rothko Chapel*. Yet, my dissertation was calling and, after some wonderful and luxuriously suspended time, I decided to cut the assemblage and stop listening. Still too much work to do, but I know I will someday return to study Feldman's musical pieces.



Why do I mention what may appear as a banal anecdote or a trivial bifurcation in the narrative about my experience of encountering *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*? Briefly put, there are two reasons; one relates to contributions brought forward in this study of the art encounter with the Deleuzian concepts of desiring-assemblage, the other concerns



research in art museum education. Indeed, I want to pause for a moment and return to what was for me an unexpected encounter with a poetic quote chosen by the artist Geoffrey Farmer for his installation. An encounter perhaps aided by the dissertation research as a milieu that prompted a possible encounter, but a contingent encounter nonetheless which pushed me to thought: I want to know more about the relationship between time and sound, I want to read more about Farmer's fascination with time and interest in experimental music, etc. What does it do or in what way is it generative to think of the art encounter with the concept of desiring-assemblage?



My seemingly trivial anecdote might be considered irrelevant, not interesting or difficult to account for with regards to empirical and socio-constructivist research since these focus, and not surprisingly so, on the visitor's experience inside the art gallery. As I have attempted to show in this study, thinking with Deleuzian concepts enacts a view of the art encounter as one where affects move a body to create assemblages (some more generative than others, however of long or short duration with things, ideas, spaces, sounds. Creating an assemblage allows desire to circulate, thus producing the artwork as art, new thoughts, ideas, subjectivation. Thinking with Deleuze means thinking in terms of rhizome, multiplicities and assemblages, rather than the dichotomy intellectual knowledge/embodied experience.



But most important in this research, is that as framed by Deleuzian theory, but also in conversation with Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, Greene, the emerging contribution is that all, in their own ways, have proposed a view of the arts as a privileged space for a different kind of knowing in being. Albeit written for a different context, the following quote by Rita Irwin (2003) brings together well this idea of an aesthetic knowing in being:

An aesthetic awareness open to wonder and surrender, while being attuned to what is unfolding. Rather than relying on structures or routines to form final products, surrendering to the unknown often brings disruption and surprise that in turn allows aesthetic knowing to emerge. (p.67)

As examined in this study, the experience of encountering art can be a shock to thought (Deleuze), a need to submit to the tutelage of perception (Merleau-Ponty), or daring to shake the familiar and the known. This knowing in being I see as creating openings towards questions of Deleuzian ethics and “how to be in the world’. There’s a knowing in being and yet, as an art museum educator most certainly I can and will never know what the art encounter produced, or when a line of flight as thought or process will end or, via a seemingly banal experience, be activated again.

"The art gallery is now closed Marie-France. It's time to go.", gently said J. the security guard. Somehow Farmer’s multimedia installation still evades



me, but that's fine. I remember that for Deleuze (1994), being with art is not about interpretation and ascribing meaning. On the contrary, the work of art is: "A theatre where nothing is fixed, a labyrinth without a thread (Ariadne has hung herself). The work of art leaves the domain of representation in order to become 'experience' [...] " (p.56). I glanced around the room once more, trying to swallow in the installation through my skin, breathe in the sounds and colors, slow down time. This desiring-assemblage in the gallery space may be physically terminating, but lines of flight as ideas and desires are always already creating new ones.



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ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT

*On the art encounter in museum spaces:
Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire*

Version August 24, 2014

STUDY TEAM

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dónal O'Donoghue, Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy, UBC Faculty of Education.

Co-Investigator: Marie-France Berard, PhD candidate, Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy, UBC Faculty of Education.

This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Marie-France Berard's doctorate of philosophy program of study. Data from this study will be made public in her dissertation and any associated publications.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation research is an investigation into the art encounter; what does it mean to encounter art? Is encountering art simply about looking, experiencing, being in the physical proximity of the artwork, getting to know an artwork or seeing it for the first time? Can the art encounter resonate in time, days or weeks after experiencing a work, can casually strolling in the gallery also be an encounter with art? What does the art encounter produce? Through the researcher's autobiographical and phenomenological writings, this study examines how

the art encounter functions in terms of the complex and intertwined play of affects, looking and being in the presence of artworks, the display, but also memory and time, the materiality of the gallery space, the wall texts provided by the museum or the social aspect of other visitors present in the gallery.

You are invited to participate in this study because you have directly interacted with the researcher to talk about your art experience.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you accept to participate in this research, you will encounter the following procedure: the researcher will take written field notes of the conversation.

There is no time commitment; your participation is voluntary, you may refuse to participate, and you may end the conversation and withdraw at any time.

STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate doctoral dissertation, at academic conferences, and published in academic journal articles and books.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY

Participating in this study may offer some benefits to you in terms of enriching your social experience at the Vancouver Art Gallery and being an opportunity to learn about art.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will take written notes of the conversation but it will not be audio or video recorded. You will not be asked to provide your identity or sign a form and your identity will remain anonymous.

Only the study team has access to the written field notes, which will be stored on a secure computer or a locked filing cabinet on the UBC campus. Until it is no longer deemed necessary, data may be selectively circulated through publications and conferences.

CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Marie-France Berard or Dr. Dònal O'Donoghue. Their names and telephone numbers and emails are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

CONTACT FOR COMPLAINTS

If you have any concerns about your experience while participating in this study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance email RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.