Article

Object-Interviews: Folding, Unfolding, and Refolding Perceptions of Objects

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Abstract

This article describes the object-interview as a Deleuzian space in which subjects and objects, living and nonliving, entangle together. I developed the object-interview to understand the connections that 11 Midwestern family history genealogists made between objects (e.g., documents, photographs, and other artifacts) and their ancestors. The object-interview suggests an alternative way to think and do qualitative interviews informed by poststructural theories. The method draws on French philosopher Deleuze's concepts of *the fold*, *events*, and *a life*, as well as conventional qualitative interview literature. Deleuze's concepts offer a way to rethink objects and subjects as fibrous, connective, and folding entities in qualitative interviews. Such a rethinking offers an alternative to subject-centered conventional qualitative interviews in which subjects are teased apart from objects and subjects primarily produce knowledge. The object-interview, then, is a Deleuzian space in which the supposed distinctions between subjects and objects, as well as other binary divisions, become indistinct, or entangled, as both subjects and objects produce knowledge. That space enabled me to create the concept *ensemble of life*—a constantly shifting group of objects associated with a person's life. In this article, I describe the theoretical entanglement of the object-interview, the object-interview itself, the data it produced in my dissertation study, and the significance of the method to the field of qualitative research methods.

Keywords: qualitative research, Gilles Deleuze, material culture, interviews

Bullets, Bibles, hair, photographs, gardens, buildings, documents of all kinds, and all other sorts of objects were shared with me during object-interviews—conversational-style interviews of entangled objects and subjects—in my post qualitative dissertation study in which I interviewed 11 Midwestern family history genealogists about their studies of objects and ancestors. The object-interview is a poststructural exercise of Appadurai's (1986) methodological fetishism, a theoretical attention to objects and how those objects enliven and illuminate subject-object relationships. Brown (2004) described methodological fetishism as a "condition for thought, new thoughts about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects, how they move them, how they threaten them, how they facilitate or threaten their relations to other subjects" (p. 7). In short, methodological fetishism studies subject-object relationships and how both subjects and objects relationally construct each other.

Numerous authors have used some version of methodological fetishism in their work, even if it is not overtly grounded as such. For example, Miller's (2008) *The Comfort of Things* studied 30 people and the objects in their London homes to better understand the "relationships which flow constantly between persons and things" (p. 6). Pahl's and Roswell's (2010) *Artifactual Literacies: Every Object Tells a Story* takes into account how objects demonstrate the daily, sensation-filled worlds of students and how those objects can be used in literacy instruction. Turkle's (2007) *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* is an edited collection of essays written by scholars from a variety of fields about the objects they use in their personal and professional lives. More recently, Adams' and Thompson's (2011) article about interviewing technologies-in-use in educational settings offered phenomenological and actor-network ways "to catch insightful glimpses of the artifact in action, as it performs and mediates the gestures and understandings of its employer, involves others, and associates with other objects in the pedagogical environment" (p. 734). While these researchers use methodological fetishism to describe various subject-object relationships, I describe a qualitative method that uses poststructural theories to understand the confused and confounded relationship between objects and subjects (both living and nonliving) in family history genealogy.

The object-interview is a Deleuzian space in which living and nonliving subjects (e.g., living participants, me, and deceased ancestors) and objects entangle together and occupy the past, present, and future. The object-interview shifts the interview from a subject-centered conventional qualitative interview into a space in which both subjects and objects produce knowledge about family history genealogy. The object-interview transcripts in my study became spaces populated by objects and participants' connections to them. To describe the knowledge produced by subject-object relationships in family history genealogy, I created the concept *ensemble of life*—a constantly shifting group of objects connected with a person's life. In this article, I will explain the theoretical entanglement of the object-interview, the object-interview itself, the data and concept it produced—the ensemble of life, and the significance of the method to the field of qualitative research methods.

Theoretical Entanglement

Conventional qualitative inquiry is grounded in a humanist conception of the subject who is stable, coherent, and disconnected from various entities. Poststructural theories redefine the subject as heterogeneous, open to possibility, and in constant reconstruction. Such heterogeneity also includes a "confusion of object and subject" (Brown, 2006, p. 175). Or, as Latour (1993) wrote, "Consider things, and you will have humans. Consider humans, and you are by that very act interested in things" (p. 20). Subjects and objects relationally produce each other and cannot be thought apart, thereby creating heterogeneous subjects and objects. Conventional qualitative inquiry, however, thinks of subjects and objects separately. As a result, I had to "rethink

qualitative methods (interviewing and observation) grounded in that [humanist] human being" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 620). To do such rethinking, I used the Deleuzian concepts of *the fold*, *events*, and *a life*, as well as conventional qualitative interview literature. In this section, I explain the aforementioned Deleuzian concepts that provided the theoretical framework for the object-interview. Then, I entangle those concepts with the conventional qualitative interview literature.

The Fold, Events, and *A Life*

Three interweaving Deleuzian concepts—the fold, events, and *a life* (I use italic font to denote *a life* throughout the article to eliminate confusion between a person's life and *a life*)—constitute the theoretical design of the object-interview, which was the primary method of data collection in my dissertation study. These concepts allowed me to rethink and put into practice a different qualitative interview space, that is, a space in which living and nonliving subjects and objects occupy the past, present, and future. I explain each concept in the following sections. While I explain each concept separately, the concepts work together and therefore cannot be epistemologically thought apart from each other.

The fold.

Deleuze's (1991, 1993) concept of the fold is useful in elucidating the confounded relationship between subjects and objects in my study. In this study, objects refer to documents (e.g., government documents, scientific papers, personal journals, and personal letters), photographs, and a variety of other artifacts (e.g., buildings, gravestones, steerage trunks, sewing needles, articles of clothing, and tools). Subjects are both the deceased ancestors associated with those objects and living people, especially the participants in the study. To describe the folds between objects (matter) and subjects (souls), Deleuze used the figuration of a Baroque house in which the first floor is comprised of matter and the second floor of souls. In between those floors there is "a correspondence, even a communication between the two levels … a fold between the two folds?" (Deleuze, 1991, p. 229). It is useful to think of the floor between the two levels as porous, which enables correspondence between the two levels. That correspondence can be thought of as a fold, a continual transfer between the two entities. In other words, the two floors, or matter (objects) and souls (subjects)—which are themselves folds, fold together.

Before I explain the folds between objects and subjects, I first discuss objects and subjects separately. Matter constitutes all objects. Deleuze (1991) described matter as follows:

> Ceaselessly dividing, the parts of matter form little swirls within a swirl, and in them there are other, smaller ones, and still more in the concave intervals of the swirls which touch one another. Matter thus offers a texture that is infinitely porous, that is spongy or cavernous without empty parts, since there is always a cavern in the cavern: each body, however small it may be, contains a world insofar as it is perforated by uneven passageways. (p. 230)

Quantum physics is useful in understanding Deleuze's description. Quantum physics explains that matter is always in motion. While an object may seem stable, the atoms and quanta that comprise an object are in constant movement, and that movement can be understood as the swirls within swirls that Deleuze described above. Moreover, movements outside of an object define the atoms and quanta of an object. Quantum physics explains that matter, for example an American Civil War era bullet that one of my participants shared with me during her interview (Figure 1), is always in motion.

Figure 1. An American Civil War era bullet.

While the bullet appears to be in a stable state, the atoms and quanta that comprise it are in constant movement, and that movement can be understood as the swirls within swirls that Deleuze described. For example, when I took the photograph of the bullet in June 2010, the camera's flash interacted with the atoms and quanta of the bullet. Likewise, when I held the bullet in my hand, the oils from my hand interacted with the porous bullet. In addition, the world of the bullet is affected by larger historical and social events, such as the American Civil War. The bullet, a minié ball, was first used in the Crimean War and later adapted by the United States Government before the Civil War. The seemingly stable bullet is porous—the outside always interacts, or folds, with the inside—the atoms and quanta.

Objects, then, are defined by the constant swirls of matter that constitute them as well as outside forces (e.g., physical, social, historical, and cultural forces) that procedurally define the object. Halewood (2005) explained that objects are "to be defined in terms of [their] processes" (p. 63). For example, the bullet is at once defined by the swirling matter and the following processes: it was made, it was loaded into a gun, it was shot by an enemy during a battle in the Civil War, it was lodged in the head of the participant's great-grandfather, it was removed, it was saved by the great-grandfather, it became a treasured object in the family, and so on. The potential definitions of the bullet are endless, because the bullet can still undergo other processes as long as its material lasts.

The bullet interacts, or folds, with many subjects (e.g., the great-grandfather, the surgeon who removed it, the family, and me). Like objects, subjects are also comprised of matter. Atoms and quanta comprise the tissues, organs, blood, and so on in the physical body. In this way, subjects are also defined as processes; however, those processes are not limited to the physical body. Halewood (2005) explained:

> Each subject or fold is a social, physical, and historical rendering: social in that it incorporates elements of the public into a singular entity; physical, in that it is an actual rendering of elements of the universe; historical, in that its formation arises from the prior and particular arrangement of previous folds, and problems within which it is situated. (pp. 74–75)

For example, the great-grandfather is defined by social, cultural, physical, and historical forces. He is defined within the social and cultural times in which he lived (1835-1909). The subject

positions of man, father, farmer, immigrant, and Union soldier produced him within those social and cultural milieus. In a historical and cultural sense, he immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1847, the height of the Potato Famine during which many Irish people immigrated to the United States. He enlisted in the Iowa Infantry of the Union Army and was shot in the head at the Battle of Tupelo, July 14-15, 1864. That shot left an indentation in his head, his physicality, and the swirling matter that made that indentation folds with him. Hence, he is defined by social, cultural, historical, and physical forces.

The great-grandfather is also defined with the bullet as he folds, unfolds, and refolds with it. Deleuze (1991) wrote, "The infinite fold separates, or passes between matter and the soul" (p. 242). In other words, the fold passes between the bullet, itself a fold, and the great-grandfather, himself a fold. Thus, the bullet and great-grandfather fold together. Deleuze went on to explain, "But in differentiating itself [the infinite fold], it swarms over both sides: the fold differentiates itself into folds" (p. 243). The swarming folds render the person and object indistinguishable. Halewood (2005) explained, "There is hence no distinction between the material and the social, between subjects and objects; all existence is a complex combination of the two" (p. 75). That is, existence is shaped by the folds between subjects and objects. The folds, not the subject and object, are a priori. In other words, the fold, itself a fold, is universal without its being singular. The fold, without beginning or ending, produces both subjects and objects such that the two can no longer be thought apart. Thus, it is more productive to think of *objects-subjects*, the hyphen denoting the infinite folding, or correspondence, of the two, which can, in fact, never be separate.

Events.

The folding subjects and objects help to materialize, or embody, life events in family history genealogy. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) suggested that monuments (e.g., memorials, statues, and other pieces of art that commemorate an event such as a war, battle, or heroic figure) are events, an idea that can be extended to the objects of family history genealogy. They wrote: "The monument does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe" (p. 177). Correspondingly, the objects of family history genealogy both conserve and commemorate an event in an ancestor's life in that the objects express events (e.g., a land deed denoting a purchase of land and a photograph commemorating a wedding). In addition, the objects contain "an irreducible persistence of life" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 74) that continually opens the object-subject to constant reinvention, or "virtual survival" (p. 74) of the object-subject. In other words, the objects of family history genealogy are small-scale monuments that embody an ancestor's life events and open those events to possibility. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) defined the event as follows:

> The event is not the state of affairs. It is actualized in a state of affairs, in a body, in a lived [experience], but it has a shadowy secret part that is continually subtracted from or added to its actualization: in contrast with the state of affairs, it neither begins nor ends but has gained or kept the infinite movement to which it gives consistency. (p. 156)

The American Civil War era bullet (see Figure 1) was actualized in several states of affairs, which Fraser (2006) explained as "taking place in a physical time characterized by succession" (p. 130). First, the bullet was made in a factory. Then, the bullet was loaded into a gun. After that, the bullet was shot from a gun during the Battle of Tupelo and lodged in the head of a participant's great-grandfather. It was later removed and saved by family members. The bullet, then, is "not bound to a particular space and time … [and it] retains an openness to reinventions" (p. 130). The bullet is open to new reinventions because it is not bound to a singular state of

affairs. As long as the material bullet lasts in some form or another, it can undergo constant reinventions in different times and places and in a variety of ways.

Because the object-subject is not bound to a particular space and time, it occupies a coexistence of time—a nonlinear sense of time in which past, present, and future coalesce together. The object-subject operates in a coexistence of time because it at once holds all the various states of affairs and the potential for future interactions. For example, the bullet-grandfather resides at once in the past, present, and future states of affairs, some of which are listed above. As such, the object-subject is always already past, present, and future.

With each reinvention of the bullet (e.g., the great-grandfather-bullet, the surgeon-bullet, and the family members-bullet), a new sentence is created: He was shot, a surgeon removed the bullet, the great-grandfather kept the bullet, his great-great grandchildren played with it, I studied the bullet, and so on. Each predicate in these sentences expresses a relationship between time, space, and objects-subjects. Deleuze (1990) wrote:

> All objects = x are "persons" and are defined by predicates. But these predicates are no longer the analytic predicates of individuals determined within a world which carry out the *description* of these individuals. On the contrary, they are predicates which *define* persons synthetically, and open different worlds and individualities to them as so many variables or possibilities. (p. 115)

The object-subject is intimately linked to the event. As the event happens in different times and spaces, it defines the folding object-subject again. Each sentence reinvents, or redefines, an object-subject again and again. Those definitions are not singular and cannot be exhausted. Deleuze (1995) wrote, "But possibility remains, because you never realize all of the possible, you even bring it into being as you realize some of it" (p. 3). Each time the bullet-grandfather is reinvented with the event, it conveys the possible. Here, the possible is the wide range of potential sentences that reinvent the folding object-subject and event. The possible cannot be exhausted—new sentences of object(s)-subject(s) and event(s) can always be created in different times and spaces. In this way, meaning-making never ceases—a new sentence can always be reinvented.

Thus, it is useful to think of object-subject-event, because each concept cannot be separated in family history genealogy. The *object-subject-event* defines a person by opening her/him to new and different potentials. Here, I use the term object-subject-event to denote the interconnections between the three concepts. The term gestures toward the inseparability of the three terms that exist in a spatial arrangement as object *and* subject *and* event. In that spatial arrangement, objects and events continuously define a person as those events are reinvented through a coexistence of time.

A life.

Deleuze's (2006) conception of *a life* is useful in thinking about the possible definitions that emerge from the object-subject-event in family history genealogy. Rajchman (2000) explained *a life* as "a resource or reserve of other possibilities, our connections" (p. 84) that can occur in different times and spaces. The object-subject-event, then, is animated by *a life* that arouses all objects-subjects-events with possibility. Deleuze (2006) wrote:

> A *life* is everywhere, in every moment which a living subject traverses and which is measured by the objects that have been experienced, an immanent life carrying along the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects. (p. 387)

A life, then, is an atmosphere that surrounds the objects-subjects-events of family history genealogy. For example, the objects-subjects-events associated with the great-grandfather's life, even though his physical body is long dead, are always encompassed by *a life* and are open to constant reinvention. As people (the great-grandfather, family members, I, and perhaps, readers of this article) make connections with those objects-subjects-events, these people realize the bountiful reserve of potential of *a life* with their connections. Because *a life* encompasses objects-subjects-events it opens up potentials and possibilities in a person's life.

It is useful, then, to add yet another term, *a life*, to object-subject-event. *A life* is always already a part of objects-subjects-events and cannot be thought apart from those terms. The object-subject-event-*a life* serves as a reminder of the epistemological interconnectivity of these concepts. This term demonstrates the Deleuzoguattarian (1987) "logic of the *and*" (p. 25) that emerges from the movement and connection between the concepts.

Putting Folds, Events, and *A Life* to Work in the Object-Interview

Conventional qualitative research is subject-centered in that it primarily uses face-to-face methods such as interviews and participant observation to draw information *from* people in order to produce knowledge *about* people and try to understand the meaning they make of their lived experiences. If objects such as documents, photographs, and other artifacts are included in a conventional qualitative research project, they are generally viewed as secondary, ancillary data sources *about* people. In my study, however, objects as well as subjects (participants) were primary data sources as evidenced by the hundreds of objects shared with me during interviews. Because objects are as important as subjects in the production of knowledge in this study, the subject/object binary does not hold. As a result, I developed the object-interview, an entangled conversational interview of objects and subjects, during which I mediated folds of objects, subjects, events, and *a life.* Although I discuss the concepts of the fold, objects, subjects, events, and *a life* separately here in respect to conventional qualitative inquiry, they are entangled as I described above.

When objects are described in conventional qualitative inquiry, they are conceptualized as stable entities that yield information about human life. For example, Collier and Collier (1986) referred to the photographs of photo elicitation—a qualitative data collection method in which participants share and discuss salient photographs about the research topic with a researcher—as "concrete and explicit reference points" (p. 105) in an interview. Although the objects in this study may be concrete in the sense that they are material, I do not theoretically conceptualize them as concrete entities. Instead, I see objects as "blurred, tangled, paralyzing, aporetic, perhaps undecidable" (Derrida, 1994, p. 188) entities that refuse permanence, as I explain above. Objects, then, do not provide any constancy to an interview as De Leon and Cohen (2005) suggested with their idea of the object probe—a practice of using participant-selected objects as probing devices in semi-structured interviews in order to keep participants focused on a topic. Because objects form "many trajectories that material items can take through shifting meanings" (Hodder, 1998, p. 120), any information about them will also have shifting meanings that defy order and focus. For example, I photographed the objects participants shared with me at the end of each initial and follow-up interview. Many times, participants shared different and sometimes seemingly unrelated connections to an object when I photographed it. In this way, objects blurred the focus of the interview as the objects took us, the participants and me, along many pathways.

As participants shared objects with me, they told me verb-rich connections about the ancestor associated with the object. As I discussed earlier, objects materialize an action, or event, in an ancestor's life (e.g., a land purchase and a marriage). Because the object materializes an action, the object is defined by processes that occur in various times and places. For instance, a purchase of land occurred in a specific time and place, and that event materializes again whenever anyone interacts with that land deed. The reserve of potential, or *a life*, is linked to those events and happenings. For example, participants shared with me connections that other family members made to objects. In addition, I also made connections to those objects. In this way, the event is always open to potential connections. The verb-rich, or event-rich, connections that participants told me are always available to something new and different.

Those events, then, are connected to ancestors, to deceased persons. The event of death (to die) in an ancestor's life "makes them rise, descend, and rise again" (Deleuze, 1993, p. 74). As a result, the ancestors are in movement, "infinitely folding upon [them]selves" (p. 74). The deceased people, in their infinite folding, exceed their own lives. That surplus is *a life*, the animating force of possibility in which multiple interpretations proliferate. Participants frequently became visibly emotional (e.g., tears, laughter, and silence) when discussing an object. For example, one woman shared with me several objects and told me that she cries upon just seeing them. She could not clearly express to me the rationale(s) of her emotional reactions to the objects. Nor could any question elucidate those emotional reactions. *A life* sometimes defied easy explanations. Moreover, objects shared during the object-interviews connected with objects from my family history, as I explain later in this article. The objects in this study, then, do not yield the "precise and at times encyclopedic" (Collier, 1957, p. 856) data about subjects (people) that Collier claimed they might in photo elicitation. Objects constantly shift because they are constituted by innumerable pleats or folds, expressed events, and animated by *a life*. Data, then, cannot be fixed or precise. Data explode with folds and *a life* feeds those explosions. While such explosions might be considered encyclopedic in size, the encyclopedia of exploding data refuses clear and organized understandings of a person's life. Object-interview data are generative and create multiple connections.

The event is also linked to the participants' thoughts and actions about the objects. Like the deceased ancestors, the living participants constantly fold, unfold, and refold with the objects, amongst a host of other forces in their lives. The fold is constantly folding and cannot be known in its entirety. Thus, complete knowledge about a participant and her thoughts is impossible. Derrida (1989) wrote, "You will never know, nor will you, all the stories I kept telling myself as I looked at these images" (p. 20). A researcher will never know or be able to know *all* the stories about the objects and ancestors that participants tell themselves. For example, a participant told me that I would never know all the connections she sees with the objects that fill her house. In this article, I use the term *connections* rather than *stories* to illustrate one point. The word "stories" assumes a stable narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. However, the participants did not tell stable, linear narratives during the object-interviews. The term "connections" better illustrates what the participants told me. I use the term "connections" in a Deleuzian, rhizomatic sense to denote what participants told me—unstable narratives that simultaneously occupied the past, present, and future. The objects, then, cannot be used as probing or prompting strategies as McCracken (1988) suggested in his idea of auto-driving (using researcher-selected objects to drive the direction of face-to-face interviews). No probing question, no matter how carefully worded, will guarantee entrance into participants' thoughts that fold with each reading of the object. Moreover, the fold cannot be directed or told what to do in an interview. The connections shared during an interview, then, are also shifting and plural and will "always exceed and transgress attempts to capture and categorize" (Scheurich, 1997, p. 73).

Objects, then, did not provide "a cultural map that [can] be read with equal clarity by [a] knowing informant" (Collier, 1957, p. 846). Collier's map is one of fixed entities and specified directionality. The folding objects, subjects (both living and nonliving), events, and *a life* frustrate such a map, because these terms are not fixed. Instead, these ideas create a map that "is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; … detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). Such a map is not a superposition of the terms onto the data. Nor is the map a coding of the terms and data. The terms and data work together to produce a multi-dimensional map that constantly generates possible meanings. As a result, the purpose of the object-interview is to follow and work with the map of objects that constantly transform each other in a multidimensional map. Such a purpose throws into radical doubt Patton's (2002) description of the purpose of conventional qualitative interviews. He wrote:

> The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

The object-interview challenges several of Patton's claims. First, I do not believe that a researcher can "enter" into another person's perspective. If I am a fold and participants are folds, we fold together in a Deleuzoguattarian map. In this way, we are always folding with each other's perspectives. Deleuze (1993) wrote the following about perspective: "I am forever unfolding between two folds, and if to perceive means to unfold, then, I am forever perceiving within folds" (p. 93). Perspectives are folds that move within folds, and perspectives cannot be explicit in a constantly modifying map. While I did assemble connections, they are folding, unfolding, and refolding happenings of objects that are always animated by *a life*. In this way, each interview produced its own generative map of folding perspectives about objects.

In summary, the object-interview, informed by Deleuzian ideas about objects, subjects, events, and *a life*, shifts the conventional qualitative interview from one that assumes a humanist subject. The object-interview occupies a space in which objects, subjects, and events continuously fold together. Such a space is animated by *a life*, which opens objects to possibility. Each object-interview generated its own map of folding perspectives that produce a space of proliferating and folding perspectives about objects-subjects-events-*a life*.

Entanglement

Theories are never truths slapped onto data and existing literature. The Deleuzian concepts are not "extra-textual truths" (Colebrook, 2005, p. 1) that I have placed on the objects and subjects of family history genealogy and conventional qualitative literature. Theories, data, and existing literature are an entanglement that emerges from a particular project. The object-interview's theoretical entanglement is an in between space of Deleuzian theories, the confused and confounded relationship between objects-subjects-events-*a life* in family history genealogy, and conventional qualitative inquiry's descriptions of objects.

Earlier, I suggested the use of the term "objects-subjects-events-*a life*" to demonstrate the interconnectivity of these concepts. Because these concepts cannot be divorced from the study, it is useful to add "my study" to my hyphenated term. Given that "my study" adds more density to an already laborious term, I will use the term *objects* for the remainder of the article. Similar to St. Pierre's (2011) discussion of the subject in which she argues that the "I" of research is an entanglement "with everyone, everything else" (p. 619), objects are also entanglement. In this article the word "objects" is put to work as "objects-subjects-events-*a life*-my study-and probably

other ideas that I have yet to come across." Objects, then, are the spatial arrangement, or entanglement, of these concepts that cannot be thought apart and work together to produce knowledge. I have chosen the term "object" because objects are not privileged in conventional qualitative research, as noted throughout this theoretical entanglement. By using the term object, I am placing privilege on objects and their interconnections with subjects, events, *a life*, data, and so on. Subjects, events, *a life*, data, and so on, however, are not secondary to objects—they are always already connected to objects. Each concept is equally important in my use of the term objects and in the object-interview.

The Object-Interview

The object-interview is a conversation in which subjects (participants, ancestors, and I) and objects are entangled. I asked participants to share and discuss objects associated with their ancestors that captured their interest. Object-interviews lasted between 2-4 hours each, and in those many hours we talked about hundreds of objects and ancestors. Conversations were, of course, quite different from each other as each interview produced its own middle, entangled space or map as I described earlier. Such entanglement warranted different questions that did not rely on interpretive questions (e.g., What do you mean?) or phenomenological questions (e.g., What was that like?). Instead, I asked connective questions (e.g., How does this object connect to the ancestor?) that sought to bring about a space of possibility and impossibility of folding object relationships. In this section, I describe the impossible interpretive and phenomenological questions and the connective questions I did ask. Then, I describe the object-interview as a middle space where the researcher is characterized as a mediator.

As I mentioned above, Deleuze (1993) suggested that perceptions are folds. Folding perceptions undulated during interviews, and no interpretive or phenomenological question could still those swells of folds. As a result, I had to assume what Somner (1994) called an "impossibility of sharing" (p. 542) during interviews. No question can enter into those folds of perception about objects. Nor could I assume that I could "understand" those folds or make them mean anything. Simply put, I could not insist on meaning during the interviews. For example, during one interview a participant shared the following photograph (Figure 2) of her great aunt and the following memory with me:

Figure 2. A great aunt.

> My great aunt has a daughter-in-law, that every time she sees me, she just says, "Oh, it's something to see her alive again and young." Of course, I'm not young anymore, but I do look more like her now. … But when I went to her funeral, it was really hard to see myself in that casket… .

When I transcribed the interview, I inserted a comment, "!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!," in the transcript as a meager notation of the monstrously pregnant moment I remembered during the interview and that I heard again as I listened to the digital audio file. Some researchers might have pressed the participant with a probe like "Tell me what it was like to see yourself, or your image, in a casket." Or, "What does that make you think about?" "What did you feel when that happened?" I did not ask these interpretive and phenomenological questions that insinuate that something was missing when, in fact, nothing was missing—everything was folding. I could only let the folds and connections reverberate in space.

In my thinking, the photograph of the participant's great aunt made at least four connections. First, the participant discussed her great aunt's daughter-in-law and how the daughter-in-law saw the genetic fragments of her mother-in-law in the participant's face. Then, a connection was made between the participant's more mature face and her great aunt's face in the photograph. A third connection was made when the participant called up her great aunt's funeral and the seeing of the great aunt's, and her own, face(s) in the casket. Finally, I saw a connection of genetic repetition between the participant and the photograph of her great aunt.

These connections occurred in several contexts. The first occurred in a somewhat murky space-time of whenever the great aunt's daughter-in-law saw the participant. The second returns to the context of the interview on January 15, 2010 at the participant's antique store and post office in a small Nebraska town. The third refers to the great aunt's funeral, a specific time and space. The fourth refers to the connection I made and continue to make between the participant's face and her great aunt's photograph. As a result, the photograph and connections occupy a heterogeneous space of past, present, and future containing multiple great aunts. I do not know which of the great aunt's physical features the daughter-in-law sees in the participant (e.g., a facial expression, a slight turn of the head, a smile, a certain age, among others). Nor do I know the age of the great aunt the participant saw in the casket (e.g., a younger woman or a woman about the same age as the participant). Numerous connections were produced by the undated photograph of the great aunt. On that day in January, connections and folds were made between multiple people in multiple space-times. Multiple great aunts, multiple space-times, and multiple daughters-in-law, participants, and researchers exist in this object-interview. The intensity of folds was so strong that I could only make exclamatory marks to ward off interpretation.

The photograph of the participant's great aunt and the participant's words also connected to my own family history. My namesake and grandmother, Naomi Vivian Swanson Nordstrom, died in 1966 from brain cancer 11 years before I was born in 1977 (Figure 3).

Figure 3. My grandmother.

I was named for her because of her absence in my family and the presence of my red hair, her red hair, a physical trait originating in the Swanson family. At the time of my birth, my parents did not know that I would also grow into her face, a resemblance that numerous family members still comment on to this day. When the participant shared her great aunt with me, I thought of what it would have been like to see Naomi in her coffin, to see the genetic fragments shared by two women with the same name. I also thought of the times when I see myself—certain turns of the head, a smile, and a look—in photographs of her. Thus, the monstrously pregnant moment in the interview, when the participant described seeing her great aunt in her coffin, extended well beyond the confines of the interview into my own life.

I made other connections during the interviews with connective questions that sought to make associations with/in the interview. Participants shared entire family lineages with me and used words such as "tie" and "connect" to denote lines between objects. I asked questions about who was related to whom, about connections between objects, among others. Learning about the objects, or what some may call "reading" the objects, then, was about making connections. Grosz (1994) wrote:

> It is … no longer appropriate to ask what a text means, what it says, what is the structure of its interiority, how to interpret it or decipher it. Instead, one must ask what it does, how it connects with other things (including its reader, its author, its literary and nonliterary context). (p. 199)

Although Grosz discussed literary texts, I read objects for similar information that sometimes connected disparate objects. Many of my questions sought to make lines or connections or to clarify connections between objects. Connective questions, such as "Now, so and so is related to you how, again?" or "This object also has to do with this person, yes?" populated the transcripts. In addition to questions about the people associated with the objects, I also asked questions about places as the people associated with the objects moved from place to place. In my mind, I also made connections between one participant's family to another participant's family (e.g., similar immigration patterns, photographs, residences, and occupations) that later materialized in the transcripts.

There were also times when I struggled to make a connection. For example, a participant shared several Navajo baskets that her great-great uncle gave to his family members (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Navajo baskets.

She told me that he was a Rough Rider, a member of the 1ˢᵗ United States Cavalry, with Theodore Roosevelt during the Spanish-American War in 1898. After the war, he moved to Arizona, taught school, and sent baskets made by the Navajo there to family members. He then went to explore Baja, Mexico and died there. It was rumored in various newspapers, including the *New York Times*, that he was cannibalized by the Seri Indians in Baja, known at the time for cannibalistic activities. While some believed he died of dehydration and starvation, rumors of cannibalism persisted. When she asked me, "What questions do you have?" I did not know how to respond. I did not know how to ask questions about cannibalism. Although I made numerous connections with other objects, I struggled with making a connection with the baskets.

The object-interview occupied a middle space of object relationships that brought about connective questions instead of interpretive or phenomenological questions. Each object-interview, then, became a Deleuzoguattarian map, in which object relationships intersected and wove together. Those object relationships "compose us, as they compose our map. They transform themselves and may even cross over into one another" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 203). Each interview, even initial and follow-up interviews with the same person, became a space of composition, relationships, and transformations of objects. I could not anticipate nor could I necessarily control how those compositions, relationships, and transformations would play out during interviews. No guide could help me. I simply had to let the map make itself. Moreover, I was, and still am, part of the map. I became a *mediator* of relationships between participants, objects, and myself, as we constantly folded, composed, transformed, perceived, and created each other. A mediator is not an interpreter or a phenomenologist. A mediator is a connector who does not shut the map down by introducing interpretations that stultify the play of concepts and meaning. A mediator lets the map remain open to composition, transformation, and multiple perceptions. In this way, my study does not end because the object-interview continues to fold, compose, and transform. I was and still am a mediator.

In summary, the object-interview is a middle space produced by objects, or foldings of objects, subjects, events, and *a life*. Each interview occupied its own middle space in which stories and perceptions folded together. Connective and follow-up questions were used to follow the folds of objects. I did not ask interpretive and phenomenological questions under the assumption that

those questions would arrest the foldings. The foldings also produced unanticipated connections between my family's history and the family histories of the participants.

The Ensemble of Life

The ensemble of life—a group of entangled objects connected to a person's life—emerged from the interviews, especially during transcription. I transcribed each initial and follow-up object-interview. As Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) suggest, transcription is a vital process in qualitative analysis. Transcription, then, constituted a part of my analytical work with the data, but a complete description of my analytical practices is beyond the scope of this article. In this study, language is understood as "a heterogeneous and variable reality" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 100). Transcription became a way for me to study participants' pragmatic use of language that constructs reality(ies) and reality(ies) to come. In each transcript, I noted the participants' use of grammar, including shifts of verb tense and the use of demonstrative pronouns, which created a generative linguistic space for the ensemble of life to emerge. In addition, photographs of objects populated that linguistic space. In effect, language became a generative patois of discourse and objects. In this section, I explain how the work of transcription helped produce the ensemble of life.

As I transcribed the interviews, I noticed frequent changes in tense—for example, past and present tense in the same sentence—that I did not notice during the interviews. For instance, one participant said the following (verbs are italicized and initials represent the names of ancestors):

> They [the parents] *did have* a daughter in 1894 about the same time that G. *was attending* the university and her name *was* S … And so then S. *lives* with them and *goes* to school … D. *is* born in Chicago and R. *is* born in Arkansas, when, uhm, G. *was doing, had* a practice in Arkansas.

The past tense verbs bookend the quotation, and the present tense verbs occupy the middle space. In this instance, as with so many others, I inserted the comment, "The time is out of joint," to note a sensation of time in which "time unfolds itself (that is, apparently ceases to be a circle) instead of things unfolding within it (following the overly simple circular figure)" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 88). Simply put, the comment served to remind me of the simultaneous unfolding of past, present, and future. The verbs also helped me to understand the relationship between objects, events, and time. Deleuze (1990) wrote:

> Just as the present measures the temporal realization of the event—that is, its incarnation in the depth of acting bodies and its incorporation in a state of affairs—the event in turn, in its impassibility and impenetrability, has no present. It rather retreats and advances in two directions at once, being the perpetual object of a double question: What is going to happen? What has just happened? (p. 63)

As the participant described the events of ancestors' births and deaths, she seamlessly used past and present tenses of verbs. The retreats and advances of the verbs, which are events, helped me to work with the coexistence of time in events—a time in which past, present, and future are indiscernible. As participants moved between tenses in the transcripts, their transcripts became seas of events in which a linear time was irrelevant. "The passing of the present, and the preservation of the past" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 151) occurred simultaneously. The ensemble of life, then, is a group of objects that is simultaneously past, present, and future.

When participants introduced an object to me during the interviews, the object was usually not a birth certificate or death certificate, which are objects that suggest linearity. For example, the participant who shared with me the bullet (see Figure 1) used that bullet to describe her thoughts about her great-grandfather's life rather than present a linear (i.e., from birth to death) description of his life. Likewise, when I shared the bullet earlier in this article, I began the trajectory of his life with the bullet and described other life events from 1864, the year that he was shot. A different object creates a different trajectory or history. For example, the same participant who shared the bullet with me also shared a photograph of her great-grandfather (Figure 4) with me later on in the interview.
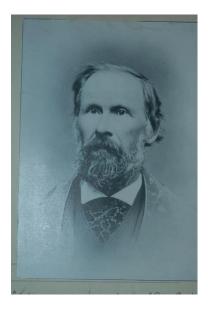

Figure 4. A great-grandfather.

She explained that the photograph was taken later in his life when he farmed in Iowa in the late 1800's and 1900's. She told me about his farm, its location, the crops he farmed, and his death. For example, she told me that at her great-grandfather's funeral, her grandmother stuck her finger in the bullet indentation in his head. The line produced by the photograph had a different beginning (the late 1800's and early 1900's) and presented a different ordering of his life events, which included the bullet. Different chronologies also occurred when I took photographs of the objects at the end of the object-interviews. As participants shared the objects again, they told me a different connection. Each connection presents a different chronology of a person's life that operates in a coexistence of time because of the verbs used to describe the objects. Simply put, each object sets into motion a line that has its own temporal structure that operates in a coexistence of time. In this way, the ensemble of life is an ensemble of multiple chronologies formed with objects.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of transcription was trying to understand the participants' use of demonstrative pronouns when introducing me to ancestors and objects. For example, they said, "This woman" and pointed to a photograph, and later they shared the woman's name. I soon learned that I had to make brief descriptive notes of each object and also take photographs of the objects to keep track of which object went with which ancestor. Both notes and photographs were invaluable during transcription, when I began to insert the photographs into the transcripts. In other words, "this woman" was accompanied by the object associated with her. In describing the extension and vibration of events as well as the coexistence of time of events, Deleuze (1993)

wrote, "It is something rather than nothing, but also this rather than that: no longer the indefinite article, but the demonstrative pronoun" (p. 77). The demonstrative pronouns, then, marked how an object reverberates across time and space. The demonstrative pronouns became markers of intensity, or *a life*, as the person and object became all possible versions of that person and object. In this way, multiple perceptions can be made about the objects in a person's life. Thus, the ensemble of life is open and available to multiple perceptions.

As I mentioned earlier, I also made connections to my family's history and other participants' ancestors. I inserted comments in the transcripts to denote such connections. Those connections helped me to understand that a person's ensemble of life is always open to new and different connections, even after death. The ensemble of life, then, is about connections that entangle lives.

The photographs of objects in the transcripts enticed me with their folds. I began to think of the photographs, the language, and the connections as ensembles. The photographs, language, and connections continuously work together as a group, or ensemble, to create knowledge about a person's life. Such work is characterized by rhythmic folds between living and nonliving subjects and objects. I use the term *ensemble* in three ways. First, the term punctuates, or ensembles, a group of objects connected to an ancestor. In other words, the ensemble provisionally groups, or punctuates, those concepts at work in an ancestor's life, so that I can work with them on a smaller scale. Second, because each object overflows with possibility, the ensemble is one of possibility that reverberates from that object. Third, I refer to the musical connotation of the term. For example, an orchestra is an ensemble of various instruments that produce music. In family history genealogy, the objects work together to produce an ancestor's life. No one object can stand alone. Other objects are needed to make sense of a life. And, as a new object is added to the collection, it effects a change not only in what is known about an ancestor's life but also a change to the possible.

My use of the term ensemble differs from Kress' (2010) use of the ensemble, a semiotic term denoting the result of assembled signs, because of his use of the descriptor "specific." Kress described a modal ensemble as one in which "each mode has a specific task and function. Such ensembles are based on designs, that is, on selections and arrangements of resources for making a specific message about a particular issue for a particular audience" (p. 28). Modes may be construed as objects; however, objects in their folding with subjects lose specificity. The fold makes nothing specific. While the ensemble may portray an assembled *message* about a life, the ensemble of life portrays possible *messages*, or connections animated by *a life*, as I described above. *A life* animates possibility and plurality. Life refers at once to the animating force of *a life* and the person's life. The ensemble of life, then, is a provisional grouping of objects about a person's life that vibrates with possible connections—*a life*.

The heterogeneous language of, with, and about the objects and photographs of those objects worked to produce the ensemble of life. Connections between participants' ancestors and my ancestors made the transcripts entangled spaces. The demonstrative pronouns marked each object with intensity, or *a life*, such that each object is available for multiple interpretations. The objects with which the participants described a person's life suggest that different chronologies operating in a coexistence of time are possible. The verbs transformed the objects into events that occur in a coexistence of time. The ensemble of life, then, is a product of grammar and objects from the object-interviews. It is a provisional group of objects that defies linearity and suggests that a person's life is open to new and different reinventions and connections—*a life*.

Significance to Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods are not static entities; they never have been. Interviews, and other methods, are continually redesigned as they are put to work by qualitative researchers. The design of the object-interview responds to St. Pierre's (2011) call to rethink qualitative methods grounded in the humanist subject. The object-interview shifts the qualitative interview away from the subject, because both objects and subjects create knowledge about family history genealogy. I used Deleuzian concepts—the fold, events, and *a life*—to accomplish my rethinking of both objects and subjects in the qualitative interview. These concepts released objects and subjects from discrete categories and static binaries so that objects and subjects became relational or entangled. Questions used in the object-interview sought to elucidate connections between objects and subjects, rather than make objects and subjects mean something with interpretive and phenomenological questions. The entangled space of the object-interview enabled me to create the ensemble of life, a different way to think about family history genealogists and their work with objects.

Questions about objects draw attention away from the subject-centered approaches of conventional qualitative methodology. These questions are "not [what] things are but what work they perform—questions, in fact, not about things themselves but about the subject-object relation in particular temporal spatial contexts" (Brown, 2004, p. 7). Questions about subject-object relationships create a confused and confounded state because qualitative research is grounded in a subject-centered humanism. These questions ask qualitative researchers to enter into such a state and be theoretically accountable for the objects that enliven, threaten, manipulate, and imagine their work and lives as well as the work and lives of their participants. Clearly, post-humanist theories, for example those of Barad (2007), Hekman (2010), Kress (2010), and Latour (2007), and poststructural theories are needed to make sense of an epistemology and ontology that are no longer subject-centered. Researchers interested in such epistemologies and ontologies must make theory their practice and practice their theory as they become mediators of objects, subjects, culture, society, discourse, and so on throughout their studies. The researcher as mediator is not apart from the trajectories of objects, subjects, culture, society, and discourse. She is always already in the middle of those trajectories and mediates them as she tries to make sense of them with theories that are not subject-centered. For me, I used the Deleuzian fold to help me become a mediator of subject-object relationships in my study. No doubt, other researchers will find other theories to help them work with the creative problems that subject-object relationships bring to the fore. As creative problems and theories work together in post qualitative research, research and theories might (and should) become indistinguishable as researchers become mediators of objects, subjects, culture, society, discourse, and so on.

In conclusion, I must admit that rethinking qualitative methods with poststructural theories and methodological fetishism created a confusing space for me to think and do qualitative inquiry. While I designed the object-interview in my dissertation proposal, I began the study with no idea of what might happen during the object-interviews. I had to let what happened in the object-interviews teach me about the method. Simply put, I had (and continue) to work through the confusing space I had created for myself. Confusing spaces enable different thinking—thinking that places researchers at what Deleuze (1994) called the borders that constantly transform knowledge and ignorance. Perhaps this is what post qualitative research is about—situating oneself at the border and in the folds of knowledge and ignorance, and working, writing, and thinking in the middle of theories, methods, and data. The object-interview opened a confusing and confounded space of objects and living and nonliving subjects that enabled me to create the ensemble of life, a concept that places me in the middle of knowledge and ignorance as I continue to explore it.

Researchers who are interested in rethinking qualitative methods with poststructural theories and methodological fetishism will undoubtedly create their own confused and confounded spaces that move between knowledge and ignorance. These spaces invite reinvention, connections, and possibilities for rethinking subject-centered qualitative inquiry and the knowledge about the complex lives people lead.

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