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Gilles Deleuze: Social Work from the position of the Encounter

Heather Lynch

Gilles Deleuze was a continental philosopher (born, Paris 1925, died, Paris 1995) whose radical work has influenced a wide range of disciplines across social science, humanities, material science, technology and applied disciplines such as education, architecture, art and design. Many in social work will have an affinity with the way that his difficult early experience informed his values and activism. His childhood was defined by the traumatic loss of his brother Georges; a fighter for the French resistance during WW2 who died whilst being transported to a German concentration camp. Deleuze's parents idolised his older brother and left him feeling overlooked. As a result he rejected family life and his parents right wing political views and developed an affinity with the growing strength of the working class. His earliest work poses questions of widely held views on religion, gender and capitalism. As a student he defined his own path, exploring unfashionable scholarship and troubling accepted norms. He rejected elitism based on economic structures, cultural hierarchies and intellectual practices which limit imagination and freedom (Dosse, 2010).ⁱ This radical position defined the catalogue of work which he would go on to produce alone and with his collaborator Felix Guattari. He published volumes on philosophers Bergson, Nietzsche, Kant and Hume; artists, Proust, Artaud and Bacon each of whom provided the inspiration for his distinctive thought. More than any, he used the work of the 17th century rationalist philosopher Baruch Spinoza whom he described as the 'Christ of philosophers'. His most widely influential work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983, 1987) was co-authored with Felix Guattari. Its two volumes overturn the dominant voices of Marx and Freud offering a different perspective on resistance to inequality; one which is based in creative affirmation. His intention to disrupt habits of thought is conveyed by the unusual terminology he used to express his ideas - the lexicon of 'war machines', 'bodies without organs', 'nomads', 'assemblages', 'rhizomes' and 'planes of immanence'.

Drawing on Spinoza, Deleuze poses the question 'what can a body do?' (Deleuze, 1990, 226) In this he is probing the potentiality of every organism or entity, not defining it by a limiting identity but by seeking to understand its possibilities yet to be realised. This might be considered a radical position on non-judgement, a value held in high regard by social work practitioners. His process-based philosophy considers life as dynamic and constantly in the making. It therefore focuses on flow and inevitable change. This relates to social work's aspiration toward the possibility of progress even for those in the most challenging circumstances. For Deleuze philosophy is a creative endeavour and it is perhaps for this reason that Deleuzo-Guattarian thought has had such huge traction in the practice-based disciplines of art, design, architecture (Radman and Sohn, 2017) and education (Allan, 2004; Semetsky, 2013). However it is by the same token surprising that his work has had such negligible influence in the social work literature. This chapter will allude to some of the

reasons why Deleuze has been largely ignored in social work whilst establishing his potential relevance. Following an introduction to some of the central themes which weave through his work, the body of the chapter will outline the relevance of his resistance to 'the dogmatic image of thought' through discussion of two case studies involving Robert and Norma, two people diagnosed with disabling conditions. The final section indicates how such an approach is useful for a radical social work pedagogy.

Key concepts

Deleuzian concepts are often neologisms which work by seeking to provoke new ways to think. His ideas are challenging as he forces the reader to understand the world differently and not to lapse into the laziness of habitual thought which he sees as simply reproducing its own logic. Deleuze rails against foundational Western philosophy which follows enlightenment philosopher Dèscartes. Dèscartes' 'cogito' famously declares 'I think therefore I am'. This claim creates two powerful assumptions. First it separates mind and matter in a move that privileges mind; second it produces anthropocentrismⁱⁱ as human reason is prioritised over other ways of knowing. Deleuze rejects these assumptions, for him there is no separation between mind and matter. The mind *is* matter and is affected by physical interactions with environment which include objects and animals as much as humans. Within Deleuzian philosophy human life is not placed above other forms of life but is interwoven within an integrated ecology where human and non-human factors influence each other creating tiny and sometimes significant changes. It is these forces and unique interactions in place and time that Deleuze focuses on. His interest is in process, how subjects come to presence and dissolve, this is a focus on 'difference and becoming'. Deleuze does not see difference as 'the other' but as how 'bodies' become different to themselves as a result of interaction with other bodies. A body could be a human/animal body, an organism, an institution of micro or macro scale. Each body is itself constituted by bodies operating in relation to each other. You might think of the human body as made up of different facets, organs, blood, lungs which interact with each other, affecting each other but also affected by the factors such as air we breathe and the surrounding temperature. This complex view of interacting dynamic relationships affords an understanding of life as always in flux. This abstraction of the various factors which influence within in any context draws attention to the specificity and unique interaction within any situation. Deleuze states that assumptions and pre-given understanding limit our ability to connect with the real of the here and now. This is a pertinent point for social work, which Gray and Webb (2013) have brought out when they question social work's over reliance on models, arguing that these limit rather than connect with the specificity of experiences and events.

However, without doubt the decentring of the individualised rational human is challenging for social work. Social work developed from the modernist tradition with an interest in human relations (Lorenz, 2012), human wellbeing and the potential of human reason to

change the circumstances of people and communities. It is perhaps for this reason Deleuzian thought has not proved as influential as it has across other theoretical and applied disciplines. This is a loss. I will go on to outline some of Deleuze's key concepts demonstrating how these can be used in social work settings. Two case studies which summarise the experience of different individuals diagnosed with disabling conditions demonstrate how some of Deleuze's central concepts support the development of meaningful interactions which not only have relevance on the micro level of one-to-one encounters but also challenge prevalent discourses. Through this discussion I aim to establish that Deleuze radical posthuman thought offers something original and significant for social work practice.

The 'dogmatic image of thought'

Deleuze describes habitual understanding as the 'dogmatic image of thought' (Deleuze, 1995). This calls into question everyday categories which are used to understand and communicate. Deleuzian scholar Daniel Smith (2012) describes this as 'the oppression of common sense', and this is similar to the way Gray and Webb (2013) talk about the way social workers need to think outside of 'common sense'. Deleuze rails against common sense thought and argues that it generalises and produces a disconnection from the real and unfolding forces active in any discrete situation (Snir, 2018). For Deleuze common sense enshrines what he calls 'dogmatic, orthodox or moral image' (1994, 131). These are the representations of identities and objects which provide a shorthand for sensemaking. We therefore have ready formed images for categories such as man, woman, sun, apple and so on which each come with a range of inbuilt assumptions that transcend their specific context. While such shorthand may speed our ability to read situations quickly in doing so it overlooks and obscures the particulars or - in Deleuzian terms – singularities of any situation. This matters for social work as a practice grounded in ethics which centres values of being non-judgmental and anti-oppressive (Thompson, 2012; Dominelli, 2002). Above all within a context of equalities social workers set out to recognise and value people who are disadvantaged as a result of a differences such as disability, ethnicity, age, gender etc. Thinking with Deleuze through Robert and Norma's experience illuminates the ways in which the categories that we use to promote understanding are themselves oppressive.

Comprehension which is pre-given in the form a thought formed outside of the context to which it is applied is oppressive as it fails to account for the real and differentiated forces active within any situation. According to Daniel Smith the 'error of the dogmatic image of thought is not to deny diversity, but to tend to comprehend it only in terms of generalities or genera.' (Smith, 2012). The key point which is being made here is that generality hides or obfuscates difference. In the dogmatic image of thought it is the '*same* self that breathes, sleeps, walks eats; and objectively the same object that is seen remembered and imagined' (Smith, 2012, ch5). This tethers thought to existing forms of identity and representation. For Deleuze concepts are not objects but events. This means that ideas are generated through

process rather than through thought, and this relates to the earlier point I made about the push in social work education toward reliance on pre-existing models and methods.

Identity categories are frequently used in social work assessment. We attribute difference based on gender, ethnicity, colour, age, disability and an assortment of medical diagnosis. While these may have a general function of helping us to recognise patterns in populations, these are crude. If we build a profile of an individual in their context based on such generalities then we may miss entirely all that is active in their present. We may also be tempted to emphasise one facet of their presentation as this is what is foremost in our given models of thinking. This risks losing sight of their complex multifaceted experience which does not stand still but changes within and across contexts in relation to different human and material influences. Deleuze forces us to engage with such complexity, even though this can be disorientating. Such uncertainty is the basis of active thought. The case studies of Robert and Norma provide an opportunity to explore what this means in the context of disability and institutional care.

Using Deleuze in Social Work Practice

Robert

Robert was in his early 60's when I knew him. He had an autism and non-specific learning disability diagnosis. He had spent most of his life in a mental health institution for people with a learning disability. He was moved from this institution into a community setting as a result of changes in Scottish legislation. The Community Care (Scotland) Act 1999 echoed the calls of disability activists that people who have a disability should not be shut out of society and pathologized but recognised for their value and included in mainstream life. He lived in a group home with two other people who had also recently left institutional care and was supported by a team of carers whose role was to provide care and facilitate his inclusion in community life.

Notwithstanding the clear affirmative action which this change in legislation and distribution of funding took the staff supporting Robert stated that realising 'inclusion' was extremely challenging. An ongoing issue was how to help him to integrate and fully participate in 'the community'. This shift in policy toward inclusion casts the nebulous and idealised status of community into sharp focus. Who and where was the community to which Robert should now belong? Support staff saw it as their role to find or create a network of people through which Robert could start to build a life outside of the institution. The challenges were that Robert's general disinterest in contact with other people and very limited verbal communication made this difficult. It certainly seemed that staff were trying to coach him into socialising with others but were often frustrated that Robert resisted this. They were

therefore pleased to find an arts initiative which offered workshops for people with a learning disability diagnosis.

In contrast with his limited interest in human connection, Robert communicated with materials, paint, pastels, charcoal like they were old friends. He crafted and moulded the paint coaxing it into desired shapes and contours. He sculpted with masking tape, teasing each length in minute details. His main artistic preoccupation was with the sun. He produced hundreds of studies of the sun at different times of year, positions in the sky and weather conditions. Robert would work attentively for time spans of 4-6 hours absorbed in the minutia of each coloured seam of light, attentive to the changes in the clouds. Robert rarely communicated verbally or sought the company of others while in the studio. Robert's social work staff were pleased that his time was occupied in an activity which he clearly enjoyed but found evidence of a lack of creativity in his consuming interest in the sun. They claimed that this confirmed his autism, as a lack of creativity and pre-occupation with a singular subject are components of the autistic profile. These tensions in Robert's experience were not dissimilar to many of the people with whom I worked.

Norma

Norma, was a woman with a diagnosis of profound and complex learning disability, whom I worked with on a project which aimed to support the resettlement of people living in long term institutional care. Now aged 66, she had lived in the institution, according to records, since early childhood and had no family contact. She was one of the many children who lived out their lives in such institutions (SCLD, 2014). While she was fully dependant on social care staff to ensure that her basic needs were met she did not communicate verbally and showed no interest in contact with other people. She folded herself into her wheel chair in a pose which seemed to limit as much as possible the amount of contact she had with the world beyond her skin. She wrapped herself in her own arms in a posture which resisted all forms of connection. Her pending move to a house in a community setting challenged to social work staff who wanted to include her as much as possible in this process, yet struggled to find channels of communication.

Without glimmer of reciprocal communication assessments of Norma were largely technical accounts based on observation and reports from nursing staff. These observational accounts have a value, but without comprehension of Norma's interests, likes and dislikes it was impossible to plan for her future in any meaningful way. My task was to engage with her and find an opening that would allow her some involvement in this resettlement process. On first meeting she showed no interest in me, my words my presence in the room, my array of coloured and textured material, my sounds and rhythms. I felt irrelevant, superfluous, invisible in the space. Her occasional groans and rocking actions appeared in no way

connected to my attempts to arouse her interest. This persisted for a number of sessions. One windy day a leaf blew through the doorway. Norma's head lifted, I was conscious of her attention drawn to this subtle rustling motion. I sat beside her and gave the leaf my attention. We were together in those moments, connected through the motion of the leaf. This became the basis of our developing relationship. I sought other objects which might be gently wafted across the table and floor so that we could enjoy the sensory subtlety of their movement together. I learned to echo Norma's attention and learned about her interests in these shared encounters. This experience provided a form of orientation to being with Norma, that may not have met the requirements of deciding which colours to paint her kitchen but it provided the possibility of understanding through connection, not just observation.

Encountering difference

The resettlement programmes in long term institutions in Scotland which took place in the late 90's and early 2000's were underpinned by the consultation report *Same As You* (Scottish Government, 2000). This report was published when the closure of long-term institutions for people who have a learning disability was well underway. Keeping people who have a learning disability cut off from wider society had been viewed as archaic by many for decades at this time. 'Care in the community' was a UK government policy which was taking time to have real effect within the field of learning disability. A central aim of *Same as You* was to 'help them (people who have a learning disability) lead lives which are as normal as possible' (Scottish Government, 2000, 4). Furthermore associated legislation, the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 states that any actions taken on behalf of a person must benefit them. Few argue that these intentions were not worthy and a vast improvement on an institutional model of care which segregated and limited the lives of those living such places. However I felt that my work with Robert and Norma, people who experienced this transition, exposes some of the problems of enacting these intentions. Deleuzian concepts provide a means of scrutinising common-sense terms such as 'normal', 'community' and the micro politics of decisions around what 'benefit' means.

The oppression generated by categories of identity and representation was evident in my encounters with Robert and Norma in different ways. Robert's autism diagnosis created a lens through which his behaviour and expression was understood by the staff who supported him. While this diagnosis has benefits in bringing a health rather than 'problem' view of his behaviour which did not conform to norms, this also obstructed a meaningful understanding of Robert's particular interests. His disinterest in human interaction was perceived by staff as a lack of communication skills and his interest in the sun as an unhealthy obsession which exemplified a lack of creativity. This view obscures other possible ways to understand his interest and therefore generated problems and solutions which were remote from Robert's experience. The primary focus of staff was how he could be encouraged to interact more

with people and to show an interest in subject matter which was not the sun. Engaging with Robert beyond this pre-given frame generated a very different understanding which led to deeper connection with the problems which motivated Robert.

Kuppers (2015) states that Deleuzian thought counters the common-sense proposition that people with autism are not enough in the world by arguing that 'some of the specific aesthetics and somatics of autism place people deeply into the world' (410) much more so than those with a neurotypicalⁱⁱⁱⁱ view. Deleuze's rejection of dominant norms of thought therefore enabled me to connect with Robert's actual engagement unfiltered by notions of the pre-given normal by which his interest was generally assessed. Robert's adept handling of materials demonstrated his remarkable ability to respond to and interact with substances. He sculpted complex layers of paint in response to changing light which demonstrated his ability to connect with minute environmental changes and express these on paper and canvas. Far from a deficiency of communication his ability to ally with and respond to environment was accomplished. He immersed himself in the detail of minute environmental shifts which grounded him in the world as it unfolded. Attention to this involved decentring human relationships and respecting the sensory, material connections which Robert valued.

Erin Manning is a Deleuzian scholar who has worked extensively with people who have an autism diagnosis, and she uses Deleuze to disrupt dominant ways of understanding people diagnosed with this condition. In her work Manning, (2016) further develops the affordances of sensory awareness drawing on the Deleuzian concept of 'affect'. For Deleuze to be alive is the capacity to affect and be affected. All forms of life brush, sometimes collide into each other, shaping their capacity for action in ways which expand or limit. Deleuzian affect does not pertain to emotion but the clashing and colluding of forces in the unfolding of life. All bodies have capacity to affect and to be affected. Manning notes that the perception of the people who participate in her work does not rush to resolution as a particular subject or object but instead lingers in the affective flow of sensory relations. Robert's attention to the sun was a shared intensity without intention. He was drawn to the sun in a way that allowed him to hold to every change of light. He had no interest in the production of art as artefact to be consumed by others and his volumes of artwork were effectively a bi-product of his interaction with sunlight. He radiated the sunlight through the movement of his hand-brushes. This understanding shifts attention toward what Robert valued in his interaction with light away from a view which might emphasise the paintings themselves as artefacts. In doing so it enabled me to engage with Robert's values, interests and indeed the non-human communication issues which he perceived as problems to be overcome.

Obsessive preoccupation with a particular interest is one of the three defining characteristics of autism, as is a lack of creativity (Van Wijngaarden-Cremers et al, 2014). Robert's care staff's overview of his considerable volume of work was the result of an obsessive preoccupation with the sun and an inability to extend beyond this. A typical comment from

care staff was 'all he does is the sun', 'he needs to expand his interest'. From this vantage point his extensive body of work was reduced to one image, the sun. This dogmatic image of autism as obsessive and uncreative obscured the creative attention in his encounters with sunlight and material. Robert did not see the sun as one static entity, but as a movement of light in a changing landscape. His attention followed the composition of gases in perpetual flux, changing times of year and day, weather and any number of factors which were acting together to generate the sun at any given moment. Deleuze concept of 'difference' helps to understand Robert's view. Deleuze (1994) does not collapse difference into identity, where entities perceived as static are defined in opposition to each other. Deleuze process philosophy challenges us to consider the perpetual flux of all that is, grasping the reality that what appears static is constantly changing. Difference, rather than dividing separate entities from each other points to how they differ from themselves. Robert's paintings evidence his ability to understand difference not as a category of identity but as a situated shift in the ongoing movement of life, the sun differs from itself, as it is affected by and affects all that it encounters in landscapes and movements in spacetime. Attention to these minute shifts alongside the interaction of different elements which produced difference in sunlight enabled Robert to produce a diverse collection of paintings which were in every respect a study of difference, not sameness.

Understanding the problems which concerned Robert created an opening for parity of engagement. Rather than encouraging him to abandon his problem of closer connection with the sun, in favour of normative expectations for human sociality, I could work towards consideration of his interests, by stepping into his affective realm. This did not mean less engagement but more. Moving into Robert's rhythm was slower and more focused on material, environmental relations than I was used to. It put me into a place of discomfort not knowing, following change rather than guiding or nudging it in a particular direction. I had a sense of this connection when he drew my attention to the minute changes that he was interested in and trying to express. Social practice in the UK is dominated by assessment and intervention formats which have a particular end-view in sight (Featherstone et al, 2011). These may well be accompanied rhetorically by social work values of person-centred practice. However, if assessment criteria and outcomes are configured outside the context of the encounter then it is unlikely that these can prioritise difference. Thinking with Deleuze generates a critical awareness of just what this requires.

Minor connections with Norma

Both the medical and social care systems in operation throughout Norma's resettlement process were embedded in regulatory frameworks, schedules and timeframes. A generic infrastructure aimed to make sure that the many people resettled^{iv} went through a clearly articulated process. The resettlement machinery required operational decision making which

in turn released funding, for community residence and support staff. Working to the externally set hospital closure time frame, patients came through the list and moved through this system from preparation to relocation. Legislative and policy attention to person centred values meant that professionals involved aimed to include the individuals subject to resettlement as much as possible. A major frustration of the team of clinical staff who worked with Norma was how to achieve this. They had a remit to involve her and yet it was clear that they did not know her or, more importantly, how to know her. The operational worlds of resettlement management and Norma's world seemed very far apart. These appeared as two different systems which clashed rather than enabled.

Deleuze provides a language which supports understanding of the operations of systems and how they might be disrupted to create new connections. He differentiates the regulatory operations of the 'molar' with the transformative motion of the 'minor' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The planning process is a 'molar' order which articulates the path which leads between one molar point – the hospital - and another, its care regimes to the community. Molar milestones are stages within a process, which lead Norma to her new home. There was a sense of exasperation within the multi-professional group that this process was stuck due to an inability to get some meaningful input from her. My challenge was to find a means of connecting Norma to this process. The approach however could not be found in 'molar order' but in the 'disorder of the minor'. Deleuze's (1986) work on the author Franz Kafka explores the potential of what he calls 'minor language'; which he sees as words which disturb the dogma of the molar. It has three components. It does not speak definitively but instead, stutters and stammers. It is always political as it undoes molar architecture. It paves the way for a people to come so is always collective.

Stuttering is widely considered 'broken speech' (Eagle, 2013), it therefore operates in the register of 'abnormal'. It is an attempt to communicate which is immediately limited and partial. It operates from position of not knowing but experimenting with possibility. The motion of stuttering does not know where it might lead, unlike the molar which has its landing point in sight. My stuttering involved experimentation with gesture, sounds and sensations, variations on tapping, humming, moving and generating images which I undertook in an attempt to create dialogue with Norma. I felt foolish at times, clueless as to how or why these motions might have any relevance to her. The first sense of shared presence was indicated by her attentiveness to the action of blowing a leaf across the floor. She lifted her head and made some squeals, she became part of the event of the movement of the leaf and the sounds of the breath which blew. Manning refers to such action as the minor gesture:

'The minor gesture, allied to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the minor, is the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation. It

does this from within experience itself, activating a shift in tone, a difference in quality.’ (Manning, 2016)

This act which was found through a commitment to interaction in the moment became the basis through which we could relate. The intensity of the sensation was a connection which we extended through variations on this movement in different settings. This shared language, which was not known to either of us, was generated through experimentation and response. The minor syntax, of sound, breath and subtle movement allowed a mode of sharing experience if not the form of information sought by those planning Norma’s move. What was clear is not how this could be understood but that Norma, my breath and the leaf had become the apparatus of something new, which altered Norma’s, and my connection to the world and to each other. Our sessions with each other developed these sensory connections which allowed me to make the case that communication with Norma was indeed possible, but time, creativity and a commitment to entering creatively and humbly into a sensory realm were required. These experiential encounters did not complete the resettlement process checklist but did expose the problems of such an approach.

These problems lead to a second point, which is that, the minor is always political and leads to a disruption of the molar. This was the case on an individual professional level as my experience with Norma challenged my vocabulary as a practitioner. I was constantly placed in the position of novice seeking participation without prospect of mastery. It also challenged the multi-agency team responsible for Norma’s care to grapple with how they might learn from and adjust their understanding through consideration of her expression. The politics of ‘minor’ communication are rigorously explored in Petra Kuppers Tiresias project. Tiresias is a research project which involves people who identify as disabled coming together to experiment with forms of communication and expression which challenge ableist practices. Kuppers builds on Deleuzian ideas of the minor to promote productive connections which are not configured by the dominant communication norms. Kuppers states ‘I lead a session that undoes that unawareness’ (Kuppers, 2015, 405). These sessions make visible societal blindness to the oppression of normative communication practices. Verbal language is not central, touch and movement have a much greater role in communication. Some of the exercises involve a degree of physical contact which disrupts personal space, these sessions make you acutely aware of the invisible boundaries which you present. Standard expectations of communication, such as the SOLER model (Egan, 2018) taught regularly to social work students have no place in this environment. In this movement as with the movement of the leaf the register of representation is undone by the register of the real and in their place is a stuttering, participation in the event of encounter.

On the third point, this work calls into presence the possibility of a people to come as Kuppers (2016) asks how might discourse change if we entered into dialogue with the non-verbal? What might multi-agency meetings become with professionals prepared to dialogue

in minor language? This was a challenge to the multi-professional group working on Norma's resettlement which included social workers, psychiatrists, nurses, a physio and a speech therapist. Norma was often wheeled into the room while her case was discussed but the standard rhetoric of the professional meeting offered no meaningful mechanism to communicate with her. Meaningful inclusion of Norma in this meeting created a radical shift in professional communication practices and therefore precipitated discomfort.

This level of discomfort for some may allow them some insight into the sense of exclusion which many disabled people experience. Cockain's (2018) poignant narrative of walking with Paul, a man with a severe learning disability diagnosis, calls stark attention to the way Paul's everyday minor gestures present in the world create the possibility of different environments, different modes of interaction and different worlds. Manning states in her introduction that:

'The minor gesture is not the figure of the marginal, though the marginal may carry a special affinity for the minor and wish to compose with it. The minor gesture is the force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday, the lines both structural and fragmentary, that articulate how else experience can come to expression.' (Manning 2016)

The minor gesture is a challenge to dominant communication as it undoes normative dogmatic syntax, disrupting the comfort of the known as it calls the new into presence. Such an approach aligns with a social work commitment to egalitarian ethical approaches. It reveals just how challenging this is in practice particularly where professionals are expected to take the minor position of not knowing.

Deleuzian pedagogy

Deleuze makes concepts which do things; unlike conventional philosophers of logic who present a critique of other philosophers. Understanding concepts such as stuttering depends on enactment and experimentation. Deleuze has no interest in determining outcomes only in provoking actions which resist oppressive norms and generate difference. This is not a model based on the transfer of knowledge from one mind to another, what Deleuze would term 'arborescent' knowledge. He and Guattari state 'we are tired of trees' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 15), trees are hierarchical point to point structures. Deleuze favours the botanical metaphor of the rhizome as it foregrounds the creative potential of multiplicity. According to him it points to 'new connections, new pathways, new synapses produced not through any external determinism but through a becoming that carries the problems themselves along with it' (Deleuze, 1995, 149). Arborescence relies on binaries normal/abnormal; good/bad; right/wrong but rhizomic learning validates the inclusive generative potential of not knowing. Education scholar Julie Allan (2011, 156) states that 'rhizomic learning is always in process,

having to be constantly worked at by all concerned and never complete. This in-betweenness is an inclusive space in which everyone belongs and where movement occurs.’ Rhizomic learning calls on a practice constantly alert to the oppressive risks of arborescent thought which constrains. Deleuze and Guattari state:

‘That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and bad. You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still the danger that you will still encounter organisations that re-stratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject – anything you like from Oedipal resurgences to fascist concretions’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 9)

A rhizomic approach to learning honours the complexity and messiness of everyday life. Rather than attempting to impose order it works from *the position of the encounter*. Social work which intends to work with people from where they are, and support them to progress in their own direction have much to learn from such thought. Despite a rhetorical value of individual difference and empowerment, social work too often as in the situations described operates within a molar order. A focus on such pre-planned futures for service users can overlook where they are situated and what they value. Pedagogical spaces informed by Deleuzian thought create openings for the new, they also validate uncertainty and not knowing as vital components in a process of emancipatory resistance, to oppressive common sense.

Conclusion

Deleuze promotes, not knowing and therefore not just gives licence to but anticipates a connection with the uniqueness of each encounter. In this chapter I have discussed relations in the context of institutions and disability. However this orientation to how we connect with the worlds of others has much wider relevance. Deleuze does not simply state that each situation is unique he provides a language and a means of working through contingency. This is strengthening for social work practice which often succumbs to behavioural science which reduces unique, contingent experience to a checklist. He forces us to become immersed in the details, in sweeping aside all that would offer accessible explanations and to engage with the complexity of the real. This is surely the basis of ethically balanced relationships.

ⁱ François Dosse (2010) biography of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari provides a detailed account of the influence of Deleuze early life.

ⁱⁱ This means prioritising human life above other forms of life

ⁱⁱⁱ Neurotypical is a word widely used with autistic communities to describe people who are not diagnosed with autism – a resistance through counter othering.

^{iv} Over 2000 in the greater Glasgow area at the time

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