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Intimacy as Inquiry: Collaborative Reading and Writing With Deleuze and Guattari

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Abstract

This article performs the becoming intimacy of a reading (and, later, writing) group who met once a month for 2 years to discuss Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Through this collaborative piece, we explore the question of intimacy as both a form of activism and a mode of inquiry. We ask, "Where is activism as we subvert the hierarchy of academia by meeting as an assemblage of differing perspectives and positions in the university?" Furthermore, we ask, "What does the intimacy that occurred, that is occurring, do for both inquiry and activism?." This article contains two sets of writing from our monthly meetings that we offered as performative conference texts. We contend that it is affect that brings our theorizing to life, and transfers it meaningfully between each other. We are affected by Deleuze and Guattari, by *A Thousand Plateaus*, and by how we form linkages with our lives to these bodies. Intimacy is what sustains and gives life to our collective inquiry, without which our affect might be more constrained. The complexity of the becoming of "intimacy as inquiry" becomes twofold, as it is not only a becoming of intimacy, love, and care for those in our assemblage but also a reterritorialization of the act of inquiry. Through the act of disrupting power structures in the group of "We 5," the act of writing and presenting this work in an academic context pushes against the striated spaces that exist in the academy, that course through the milieu we occupy, and provides the means and necessity for reterritorializing the epistemic space. "Epistemic intimacy," then, becomes a manifestation of engaging with the inquiry process and embodies an active resistance to the business transaction that the act of inquiry has become in the neoliberal development of the academy.

Keywords

Deleuze & Guattari, intimacy, inquiry, activism, collaborative inquiry

Introduction

It is odd to write now, in early 2019, of the beginning of our Deleuze and Guattari reading (that became writing) group when the final writings we each did were of us ending in October 2018. In this article, we speak of our reading *A Thousand Plateaus* (ATP), which both confounded and enlivened us, and we offer our writing about our reading together. We present our group and its shifting affect(s): its humor, intellectual grappling, its anger, its energies—and its sense of loss, as we mourn a group that has now disbanded, its various members going elsewhere or with other commitments. Jonathan reflects on this by writing the following:

17 September 2018

We are mourning today. Even the music is mournful as we begin to write—Morrissey, who else could have been the one to sing for us? Endings abound. Jess and Dave have submitted their theses. In November, Jess and Dave will have their vivas. Soon after, Jess will return to Canada. Holt speaks of endings

*elsewhere in his life, of how team mates are leaving, and others in the team leave because these team mates leave. Jess in our team is leaving. Ryan is clear he could not continue without her. I want to acknowledge this ending. . . . So we write into this loss as *The Cure* plays—is it *The Cure*? Maybe not—and before we talk about our journal article, this journal article, which is both a symbol of and a potential defence against this loss of us.*

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*The alphabetical order of authors indicates our shared and equal contribution. As Moreira and Diversi (2012) write, there is a politics to name order. We considered alternatives, including losing our names and becoming a collective noun (as the "Bristol Collaborative Writing Group," 2012, chose to do) but decided against that. We follow the alphabetical convention, though with some reluctance.

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The Beginnings From Disrupting the Milieu: A Refrain

Our Deleuze & Guattari group started out of a lack—a need to dive deeper into what Jess had been learning in a mandatory qualitative research class, which Jonathan was teaching. If Jess is honest, she was annoyed her class provided such tantalizing pieces by thinkers like Laurel Richardson and St. Pierre, yet never plunged deeper into the philosophy behind these thinkers, which she likened to her fellow student's resistance to discussing philosophy. Jess felt stuck; in the early days of her training, she would eagerly bring up philosophies discussed in a key text in their research course (Flyvbjerg, 2001), only to have classmates say they did not understand, or hated the philosophy part of their training. While she stopped bringing up philosophy, she also wondered why have these readings in the first place?

Yet, there was something with the St. Pierre reading, and Deleuze and Guattari's use of the "signifier" that struck Jess, and felt different to what she had read before. As she wrote in October 2016, regarding her class,

I am dissatisfied with how St. Pierre (1997) uses Deleuze & Guattari in her article—what does it mean that, "writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 415)? And how can I risk asking about this in class without others feeling bored or left out of the discussion? I hate being a bloody team player!

Therefore, when Jonathan asked whether there were any questions in the class, Jess raised her hand and disrupted the class milieu. She took a breath and asked, "[W]hat does St. Pierre mean by this passage? Doesn't writing always become a signifier—I'm thinking of Derrida's use of signifier here? I've never heard that it could be otherwise." Jonathan did his best to answer the question—one that seemed new and exciting to Jess—but also realizing the class's reluctance to engage philosophically, he asked that they continue the conversation after class.

Although, at the time, Jess would have just likened her actions to "being a dick" or "feeling fed up," really what Jess did at that moment can be seen in Deleuzoguattarian terms as creating a *refrain*—a moment of risk and potential deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004) of what the class was meant for. In the act of deterritorializing the class space, the refrain, a rhythmic line of flight that creates an assemblage to another territory (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004, Plateau 11), created a *reterritorializing*: When they met together, and Jess shared her pent up frustrations, Jonathan told Jess that he too wished he had a space to chat more about Deleuze and Guattari. Together they—Jess, a doctoral student, and Jonathan, a member of faculty—realized that a solution could come through

creating a space outside of the class to explore Deleuze and Guattari. Thus, granting a space for both to explore, the idea of a Deleuze & Guattari reading group emerged.

Who Else?

There was a groping into the surrounding landscape: Who might be interested in joining Jess and Jonathan? A tentative offering, leading to others: Jess approached Ryan, at that point a master's student, who had never heard of Deleuze & Guattari but said yes, and Ryan thought Holt, also a master's student, might be interested, which he was, not least because he was attracted to Jess. Jess was a year ahead of Ryan and Holt on the counseling program and also had a managerial role at the counseling agency they all worked at. Therefore, in asking them to be in the group created a dual role for Jess as a mentor for them, as well as flattening this role in terms of being a fellow member of the group. Likewise, Jonathan's involvement of being professor and fellow member also created dual roles—and yet flattened the power bestowed within these varying roles. This—Ryan, Holt, Jess, Jonathan—became the Deleuze and Guattari reading group. "It"—or "this," this *assemblage*, this so-much-more-than-a-group, and its forces, powers, desires, and differences—began to meet at a café, Checkpoint, near the university. It decided to meet every month and to read *ATP*. It decided not to read from beginning to end but in whatever sequence called. It began at the beginning.

After perhaps two, maybe three, meetings, Jonathan suggested inviting Dave, whose work he had encountered as a reviewer of Dave's first-year PhD progression paper. There was resistance, doubt, hope, curiosity, openness, trust—and Dave joined. The group became grass. It grew. It sprouted, but not through "right or wrong" personage, nor a top-down process of picking, but on the ground: disorganized and purposeful. The group is a rhizome: grass, the wasp, and orchid.

Each of us came to this group, this assemblage, through our own *haecceities* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004), our unique, multiple "this-ness": We each came with our own understandings of philosophy, and with memories of groups that have gone well or not so well in the past. We also each came to the text in our own way. Having spent a considerable amount of time in study of Deleuze and Guattari, Dave came to *ATP* with a level of knowing that astounded the group at times, bringing insights from his studies within an environmental educational background. Jonathan has written and presented on Deleuze and came from a position of privilege and prestige. Holt came to the text from his deep engagement with literature—often recognizing the literary references the rest of the of the group missed. Ryan brought his eye for the tiny nuances of what Deleuze and Guattari were saying, which enabled the group to grapple with the text more closely. Jess came to the text enchanted by aspects

of the relations made between the text and the group and how their work lived in the group; she sees the poetry in Deleuze and Guattari's words and would offer insight into how their theoretical concepts link with the ways society sees power and the body.

Our haecceities were all that and more. We created new haecceities, as we met each month at Checkpoint in our favored spot, a booth at the back with wooden benches and green velvet cushions. We met month after month, plateau after plateau, just talking at first. Only later, after perhaps a year, did we begin to write.¹ We wrote at our booth each time we met, for 10 min at the end, reading our writing aloud to each other, following the practices of other collaborative writing assemblages (e.g., Speedy et al., 2010). We leant in to hear each other over the music and chatter.

This is what happened, until it was time to end in the autumn of 2018. Holt writes,

17 September 2018

We came together today to plan our writing, and got to the ending. Finally. Speaking about it openly. I feel like I've thought about it a lot and I feel angry now that it's spoken. I didn't realize everyone felt so differently to me about continuing to pursue the group—to let it grow and change and become necessarily different, but to keep its value. To stay with the process of becoming intimate. "Epistemic intimacy" was the phrase Jess read out and I still feel that here. Perhaps it's part of the glamour of the academic—to share the journey towards knowledge with another or others. Ryan says he wouldn't continue, however many of us could continue. And Dave says he needs a break. Jess has to leave, so there's no way around that. Jonathan says little, and I'm not sure what he would like to happen—he might not be sure. Those are all fine conclusions I know, but I don't want to carry the torch in the darkness alone.

Our Velvet Green Booth

Our assemblage/group is formed of haecceities that come from/with each of us and are formed anew through our encounters. They come alive, and proliferate, when we meet. Our interests and energies collide and with each crash comes chaos to our well-built and rhythmically maintained milieus. Deleuze & Guattari talk about this chaos in terms of the refrain: "We have seen elsewhere how all kinds of milieus, each defined by a component, slide in relation to one another, over one another. Every milieu is vibratory" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 313). In our group, we were creating a milieu, but we were also composed of haecceities. This is the vibratory elements of milieus and we are built of many of them. "Rhythm is the milieu's answer to chaos" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 313). We found a rhythm to our chaotic coming together. Haecceities developed and changed. There was a sometimes awkward, sometimes smooth, sometimes both, positioning and repositioning: a deterritorializing and reterritorializing.

Jess writes,

March 2019

Is Checkpoint our territory? Is it where we find the territorialising of our milieus and rhythms?' There is truth to this: The velvet corner booth is a coveted place. It is where we tuck ourselves away and feel safe to laugh, tease, argue, and bemoan a complex reading that not one of us could "fully understand." There is a rhizomatic meeting of minds in this territory.

Ryan writes,

20 September 2018

Deleuze and Guattari don't do endings. They do movement and change. But if a pack's members join different lines of flight, then surely that pack is ending? Though we plan to and will cross paths again, it is a significant change. My face is hot and I can feel the tears behind my eyes. Who else will understand this? Who else can I shout "a field of anuses!" at, who will laugh uncontrollably rather than stare in offended confusion.²

"Four minutes left" from Jess. It's getting hard to write and be in touch with this ending. I want to run from it but I won't, not if I can help it. We will still know each other, collaborate, stay in touch. But never like this.

How can there still be another minute left? I feel hollowed out and tired.

Thoughts were formed as we were finding our way with the text. Thoughts coming together, newly (in)formed through another's words. Our words, like our assemblage, grew like grass, sprouting new shoots and the group allows for these offshoots of conversation.

In this text, we grapple with many themes presented in ATP, exploring our own intimacy with each other, the text, and our process: intimacy as inquiry. And we explore a second question lingering in the air: As we quietly subvert the hierarchies of academia by meeting as an assemblage of differing perspectives, positions in the university, and our own haecceities, might we call this activism? How might the intimacy/intimacies that occurred act as both inquiry and activism?

What follows are two performative texts we presented at the European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ECQI) in 2018 and 2019. ECQI conveniently punctuated the life of our reading group and allowed us the opportunity to . . . to what? Experiment? Concretize for a fleeting moment before moving on? Act as a catalyst for thought? No doubt all of these and other things, as we practiced becoming academics differently. Echoing Tillman-Healy's (2003) invocation of friendship, these two texts, punctuated by a "middle," are our reaching toward intimacy as inquiry.

ECQI, February 2018: Becoming Intimate (Readers) With Deleuze & Guattari

Holt: We will traverse the landscape of intimacy today. Intimacy that has risen between us and Deleuze and Guattari within their text, *ATP* us and one another, and in our relationship with ourselves. Our frame: Once a month, at the same coffee shop and at the same table, we discuss a plateau that we agreed to read the previous month. Recently, speaking into the text, we would then spend time writing and reading to each other what we had written. What we present today are glimpses of these writings, highlighting the intimate nature of the work we did together.

Jess: Screens and pen to paper. The group, for the first time since we met over a year and a half ago, is quiet. I am comforted in this quiet. There is an intimacy to silence. Like we are an army. GENERAL FREUD—he stands no chance here.³ Today's refrain of quiet is a divergence from our usual cacophony of thoughts and overlaid voices. Of exuberance and furrowed brows. We are *serious* scholars. I stop typing. Deleuze is in the corner beside Ryan's bag. His arms are crossed: our proud, yet stern, father. I feel nervous under his glare. Guattari is seated beside me. There isn't much room for him beside me, but I don't doubt he likes the closeness—pervy old man. If they were at a party, I would keep away from both men, but for very different reasons. Yet, in their text I feel safe. This is my stabilizing ground. My plot of land so that I do not endlessly deterritorialize.

Dave: Heads are down. Fingers on keys and pens clasped. Deterritorialization floats among us, probably occurring in thoughts and guts. What's this song? I've moved on now. There's fear in not knowing what I'm writing about. I don't know where I'm writing to. Just writing. And I don't understand deterritorialization. I think I do, but then I read more and I've moved again, or it has. Our conversations always change my mind. Intimacy. I don't recall how many months we've met here as the experience is always the same. While positions change around the table, and people's lives happen, finding this space on a Friday is like keeping a plot of land from which to send my, our(?), thoughts.

Jonathan: We 5. I like the sound of that. The "we" of it, the more-than of what it infers. What it subtracts. The we of a Friday morning in our corner of our café in late October, black and white cups and saucers strewn over the rough wooden table, Jess and I on the padded green-cushioned bench, Ryan, Holt and Dave on wooden chairs, backs to the windows, the café's speakers serenading us from the wall above our heads.

Ryan: My mind is always more alive after our sessions. I can't stop seeing the theory everywhere I go, seeing striations and smoothness. Feeling comfort and fear. Pushing past and retreating to. A first academic conference, a first paper (maybe).

Jonathan: I like the strength of the number, 5. We have D&G with us too.⁴ In our books on the table, or on our machines, in our bodies. They're always here, and never quiet. Elusive, playful, withholding, generous, frustrating, effervescent.

Holt: I think we rest upon a smooth space that, I think, there is an underlying desire to striate. We wish to not just map and observe lines of flight, but I think there are times at which our conversations become energetic and popping, like the filament of a lightbulb as it shorts, that are due expressly because we wish to dictate the line of flight to the other. Can an assemblage work in such a way? Are we still a Rhizome? If there is no rightness, why do we talk? What is gained? It feels like something is. I feel we wander closer to something. But what or where is it?

Jess: What the hell are we doing?! This is the first time in over 2 years of meeting that I am leaving more confused than enlightened by the text. A reading that initially felt clear has become convoluted. Smooth? What would a nomad think of us calling ourselves nomads? What would they think of D&G? I put myself in their shoes and realize they wouldn't care. It doesn't have anything to do with them. It is January—they need to eat!

Ryan: Becomings. We cannot become what we used to be. It is too late to become animal or primitive. We have to become something else, something new. Always moving forward, never moving back. Becoming intense. Moving forward is painful because something is always left behind. What do we leave behind? I am afraid of us growing stagnant, of us not moving on from where we are. Though anxious before arriving, after getting here it was like coming home.

Dave: There are multiple keys on my keyboard. Black squares. Little LEDs floating underneath. It wouldn't be a keyboard if it wasn't made up of keys. The keys themselves are multiplicities also. Plastic; made from oil. Oil; made from organic matter laid down in the strata millions of years ago. Life then, but also life now. Never as much as a whole. This group, Jonathan, Holt, Jess, Ryan, and I, is also never as much as whole. Always a multiplicity.

Jonathan: The music is loud and I say I might need it turned down but I don't ask and later we agree this might have been a sensible and strategic move given our conversations about the anus, anuses, packs of anuses, and fields of anuses. We're done talking now,

an hour on, and I feel a little overexcited. D&G have delighted us with, among other things, their provocative, angry, dismissive riffing off Freud's "The Wolf Man"—"Freud sees nothing and understands nothing." D&G make us laugh today. . . I feel here, in the midst, and not here, transported, in and by the pack, as we move toward an end for today, when we will turn from the edges we're occupying and take ourselves, our pack-selves, elsewhere, taking each other with us. Might this be what D&G would conceptualize as intimacy?

Jess: Castration! Castration!⁵ Probe-heads.⁶ Jonathan as our "petit croissant."⁷ These moments of joyous, cacophonous laughter as we share in moments of meeting. I hope they turn up the music. When the waitress comes with our Americanos, I hope she wishes she could be in our group. I should say Pack. A pack within multiplicitous meanings and assemblages. There is something at stake in this. I miss Holt. A group is not whole when one of the members is not in it. Wholeness? Is this allowed?

Jonathan: We meet, our pack, for "One or Several Wolves." Holt emails to say he's still in bed, jet-lagged, and won't make it, so we are our pack minus one, or one of us is here but differently, outside but inside, inside but outside.

Ryan: Lolz. There is a giddy energy, an uncertainty that is refreshing. I am anxious today about the conference, among other things. Still, I am glad to be going with these people, this group's consistencies, our table, one another, our ways of thinking and speaking for reassuring striations in an ever-changing and uncertain understanding of the text . . . of everything, really. When I think about Jess's brave sea voyagers, setting out with hope instead of navigation, I am reminded of us, of myself. With this group, I am putting one toe at a time outside the striations and testing my nomad legs.

Holt: Today I don't sit in the café, in our booth in the corner. I sit at a desk riddled with not a multiplicity of minds, but instead an assemblage of used tissues, empty glasses, and jobs to be done. It feels very organismic. I feel isolated. "The group has decided that you need to fucking write." At least there is some connection. . . I think this is the most lonely I've felt with an academic work. "Love Jess xx." It feels like empty rambling when you cannot speak it aloud, and sometimes it feels even emptier when you do. It becomes nothingness—wisps with never a mortal eye to guide, see, or mislead. They will fade into obscurity, unknown and hidden from the world, unspoken and unrelated to, and therefore never existing. I wish I made it to the café today.

Dave: The keys stare at me again. The T and the H. The most prominent keys visible as my hands cover the other letters. What comes to mind? T. Transcendence. Each key is a code, a signifier, an object to arrange in an order to make words. H. Haecceity. Each key is a thisness. Its own. Doing something different each time my multiplicity hooks up with its multiplicity. In this way, the keys are multiple. Like them, we talk with each other, think with each other, and others not present, and others yet to come. We come together and then dissipate. Leading multiple lives when not here, but multiple lives when sat at this table also. Is multiplicity ethical?

Jonathan: I've been thinking about intimacy. Walking here this morning and since we met. Here it feels there is intimacy as intensity, intimacy as fire. . . Not (or not only) the common understanding of intimacy as "human closeness," but intimacy as energy that animates, that fills us, this, with its life. That's what makes it possible to conceptualize D&G as part of this, and this place, this moment, this haecceity, as a propelling, desiring, intimacy.

Jess: For me, it happens in those moments of meeting that are not through us needing to be seen as Deleuzian scholars. But in Jonathan's hands clapped together on his forehead as he pretends to be a "probe-head." When I joke that he is my "petit croissant." When Dave laughs and admits he only read this morning. When Ryan starts the group off by saying—rather loudly—that he would like us to begin with "The Anus"—*A field of anuses!*⁸ This laughter is a rhizome. It goes where it flows. As each in the pack add to it. Laughter as the unknown. As us trying to be within a state machine. But as nomads. This feels different. Scary.

Ryan: We become the plateaus and they become us, inseparable and dynamic, always moving, always engaging. Falling into black holes, flying out on a line of flight, keeping a toe, a foot, or a whole person within some strata, striated, firmly grounded. Still, I wonder what we accomplish by this?

Holt: Maybe we don't need to know limits or when one part starts and begins. Perhaps it is instead flavor—D&G are metaphysical chefs, revolutionizing the palettes of a literate world. You have no choice in what you order, and when the dish is completed, they bring it to you on whatever dish they like. You look down at the food before you, as they watch expectantly.

Dave: More typing and a new song, and a laugh from Jess. Am I being too serious? There are micro deterritorializations occurring here and now, smaller than climate change. A shared endeavor to explore in thought and jokes about D&G as we grapple with them.

Jess: As I type deterritorialize, it highlights red in my screen, reminding me that is an “other” on the screen, yet I can’t let go of it being an “arborescence”: General D&G. They are the State Machine in some ways—necessitating what can and cannot be said. If Deleuze and Guattari said it, then our use of their language intensifies our positions, however weakened by our own insecurities? Plateaus not chapters. Milieus not contexts. Rhizome, assemblage, becoming, multiplicity. I know the words well. I can recite them. But how also do they bind. In exclusion. In safe wording that we alone know. Does the waitress know? Why do I wish that she did? Where does this exclusion lead to? Does not the Rhizome resist these top-down processes? Our coffees have gone cold though. I need a refill.

A Middle

It may be clear from the preceding performance text that what excites, engages, and illuminates our understanding is most often affecting and being affected (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). It is the affect that brings our theorizing to life and transfers it meaningfully to each other. We are affected by Deleuze and Guattari, by *ATP*, and by how we form linkages with our lives to these bodies. This intensity and vulnerability is made tolerable by our intimacy. Intimacy is what sustains and gives life to our collective inquiry, without which our affect might be more constrained. Below are some of our reflections that show our individual frustrations with a seemingly impenetrable text, and then our affective, collective grappling that makes sense together where there was little or none before.

Jonathan: I was feeling defeated by this plateau, unable to get into it, to find the soul of/in it, and said so at the outset. I hated it, I said.

Dave: Too alien, after so long away from D&G. It felt like they were being hard on me.

Jess: It moves and I am startled. That is what happens when I read [*ATP*]. It is not a sweet animal. It is big, dangerous and I feel small around their writings . . . weakened by the State thought—by needing to fit in.

Jonathan: Then, we began to talk, all of us, in and out, one then another . . . Something switched, something leapt, a sudden shift. A conflict, a difference—no, a differenc-ing, a process of becoming different. A conflicting. An affective lift into doubt, passion, puzzle, more. In me, there was a coming alive to this.

Dave: I felt this, for one, affectively, bodily. My heart picked up pace with the discussion of ethics and immanence.

Holt: I was angry again today about the text and bloody immanence and transcendence, and what we’re trying to accomplish with these terms. Raising my voice, eventually becoming a long dull whine with plenty of sparks, like a power grinder cutting steel . . .

Ryan: What do D&G have to say about the lasting impact on individuals? On machine-assemblies that have incurred pain, trauma, shame, and isolation on individuals? It happens in an instant and the impact lingers forever and thusly impacts all future assemblages entered into.

Jonathan: . . . I left, earlier than the others, feeling alive, taking that into the rest of my day, knowing again how much it means to be in *ATP*-world together.

Jess: This group—its laughter, exclusivity, insights, profound contributions—has instilled an awe into this philosophical work. There is no way I would have ever felt this way if I had picked up *ATP* at a bookstore. I have come alive. I feel like parts of myself have been nurtured and challenged.

Holt: We eventually get to the chapter though, which was good, but I think my frustration stayed.

Ryan: Rage, fury, and passion. Does our discussion become more intimate as I become more combative? Or just more dangerous & destructive? Maybe dangerous intimacy threatens the state, or rather any current assemblage? Intimacy as a force of resistance and survival.

Dave: Here . . . full of openings for thought.

Holt: We go over time, and I’m left wanting more of the dry chapter between us, and wishing we got that drink.

Jonathan: This mattered. Dave points us to the Introduction to *ATP*: it’s a philosophy, but a philosophy does.

Affect is the force that drives our “intimacy as inquiry”—it is affect that allows this to function. Affect drives our “desiring-machine” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984), and the “emotion is a circuit, not an endpoint” (Harris & Holman Jones, 2018, p. 1). Affects shared this openly, this vulnerably, is rare within the confines of academia—particularly where hierarchical relationships are concerned. This makes our coming together a queer family, a sort of queer kin (Haraway, 2016)—queer in both our existence inside and outside our institution, or anti-conventional operations and also in that some of us are in fact queer in other ways. We are “[i]ntertwined in both affective and collectivist ways . . . activism today is a way of building community” (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 66). Holman Jones and Harris (2019, also Harris & Holman Jones, 2018) use the term “activist affect” to describe what happens when bodies intra-act in emotion-laden protest events—or even at the micro level of a queer

person entering a room. The transfer of affect and the shared affects become activist.

While we are not marching on city hall, we are resisting academic norms together, and coming together in queer and rhizomatic ways. Applied to inquiry, this might take us from me-search to “we-search” (Holman Jones & Harris, 2019, p. 7) and, in our case, to “we 5.” This affect and queer kin-making leaves echoes on each of us and on our audiences—the lasting impact and desire for more expressed in the reflections above demonstrate this. It is viewed by our audience (and by us) as being a beautiful experience that begs re-iteration and re-creation.

This beauty, the beauty of our vulnerability and shared affections becomes an act of activism (Madison, 2010; Madison, 2018), which might send out waves of change. Fear and pain might be overlaid by the sensations that witnessing such beauty can bring, and the reward of Intimacy as Inquiry is displayed and shared. Possibly, the practice will be spread, too.

ECQI, February 2019: Becoming Intimate-Activist Reader-Writers With Deleuze and Guattari

Dave: It’s a warm day in May. It’s predicted to be the warmest in May for some time. We are here, again. The last time for some time, with the summer stretching ahead of us, with all its virtuality. Laptops out, again. Holt typing on his phone. How does he do that? Today we have been rummaging around in language. Tying ourselves in knots on rope that Deleuze and Guattari have offered us.

Jonathan: We’ve been talking linguistics, the second two postulates. We’ve been in our familiar booth, at the back around the corner, and we’ve all five been here, though now Ryan has gone and we’re writing as a four. Ryan will be writing soon, from wherever he will be.

Ryan: Linguistics. Intimacy. Majority and minority. Fantasies and relationships. Content or expression? I am confused and impassioned by this plateau. Upon first reading it, I found very little interesting or engaging, and I missed the poetics that I usually find in D&G. But at the end, they rocked my world. They were revolutionary, fluid, and pushing for variation. I don’t think I really would have noticed if we hadn’t started pushing back against each other! I said something to Jonathan like “that’s absurd!” while discussing whether D&G wanted to get away from or dissolve majority language. We were passionate, loud, and we were able to take these risks and make challenges because it is us. We are a special assemblage that has come together to explore and challenge ourselves, each other, and D&G.

Jess: Intimacy through language. I wanted to write language and accidentally wrote Landon. That might be the first time I have brought my partner into this space. This writing. I am like the man saying that “I swear” in different contexts. Landon won’t stand for that today—at the mention of intimacy he wants to be seen. With us here even though he is not here—and no longer in this country. Our intimacy now continues across the ocean. Does this matter? Yes. It is the multiplicity of language and the many interweavings that a word brings us to. How can one write of intimacy within a group and not think of the many times intimacy brings us to others. And away. When intimacy is lost.

Jonathan: Reading, I found myself moving in and out of this plateau. I started reading on Saturday, then again yesterday in the sun in North Berwick outside at Steampunk, and again on the train back into Edinburgh. I finished in a rush late yesterday evening, skipping over the last few pages, unable to hold myself close to them. Earlier, I’d been captivated by sections, like those about minor and major language, and lost by others, like the passage about music and variation.

Ryan: We came from all over today. Holt is recently returned from his Honeymoon. I came in from Glasgow, Jess came from a fire alarm sleep disturbance. We are leaving to different places. I left early and am writing this later than the others, at a computer instead of while pleasantly perched on green velvet. There was laughter and challenging. Dave said this was our biggest falling out yet. I don’t know if it is or isn’t, but it was a big one and I’m glad he marked it. We disagreed and ended up being in binary camps of “dissolve majority language” and “there is no minority without a majority.” I don’t know where I stand in this anymore. But I do know that I am troubled by our falling back into a binary—an either or in which we choose from the sides that were available to us regardless of whether we were satisfied by the two options.

Holt: Linguistics.⁹ What a shit. I feel like this one I’ve come away from being more frustrated than anything. I feel more confused than how I arrived. I feel like I fought points today that I didn’t know whether I actually thought them or if I agree with them or what, and I felt like the group fought today. Not in a damaging way, but in an aggressive way.

Jonathan: So, today, here, my back to the green cushions, I found myself moving in and out again. Talking, we seemed to skip over themes, words, concepts, unable to settle, and I felt lost again—just for moments, like in talking about pragmatics—and wanting to find, I don’t know, our or my *heart*, today’s beat, pulse, rhythm. Then, a rush of energy as conflict

erupted: Can we talk of D&G seeing “major language” as being necessary? Or are they arguing for major language to be always-minoritizing? Can minor language exist without major? Around our table, the pull in one direction was—perhaps—with Ryan and another was with me, but it wasn’t as simple, as binary, as that. It was there between us all.

Holt: I got so defensive when Dave said, “I think this is the worst we’ve fallen out.” We didn’t fucking fall out. This is normal shit, this is discussion, this is argument. There is no fall out, no lasting damage. There is no crater. We can handle this, we can take the other to task, and we can demand answers if we feel like we have others to the contrary. But why mention it then Dave? And why is my head thumping? Maybe it has been too much for some? Maybe the languages have expressed pain and bruises and injuries, rather than creation. God created the word and the word is god. Maybe Old Testament god today.

Dave: What are the politics of a major language? Deleuze and Guattari say that there is always variation in a major language, that it is situated on a plane of immanence, even as it evokes transcendence. Is an immanent ethics not opposed to transcendence, but opposed to immanence’s habit of evoking transcendence? Transcendence as a ghost of itself? When the five of us talk, in our booth, there seems an openness to the virtual. Each of us has an open ear to the possibilities that one of the group may produce; in a comment, a look, a smile of agreement, or a half started and then abandoned interjection. Immanence seems to hold sway here. And yet, there is a major language operating, sneaking in solidity in the questions we pose, questions that, Deleuze and Guattari point out, are already answers.

Jess: We played with new forms of intimacy here today. We want to say that it is because we were intimate; therefore, we could emphatically disagree. But is that true? Was this marital discord within our group due to *safety*? Or was there a breach to the honeymoon phase that our group often feels like it is in? To meet only once a month (sometimes with longer stretches of time in between)—are we really allowed intimacy? Is disagreement due to intimacy or a breaking away to establish autonomy, safety? What is our intimacy? What are our boundaries? How many languages do we speak when we speak to each other? There are interweavings between us that feel like the repellent particles Barad¹⁰ talks about. We are intimate through our speech, yet there is never a true knowing—never a true touch. And yet even within these repellent elements of intra-actions arguments, of “no’s,” of that bitter feeling that one cannot make oneself fully known: There are electrical currents of becomings

between us. There are firings as we fight for words. We are like Barad’s lightning searching for their landing space and making themselves known as we search for words, look up quotes, and feel the energies in this space. This IS intimacy. And it is messy, searching, stammering, and finding our own language as minority within a refraction of the major language that we both feed off of, reject, and re-utilize.

Holt: I feel to do this project we sometimes have to tolerate destruction, of ideas and thoughts maybe. Or even sometimes a violent affectation of ideas. It didn’t feel hegemonic or overbearing or overwhelmingly eclipsing, but there are moments of wondering what can be done when I watch Ryan and Jon-o dig their heels in. Jess jumps in to defend Ryan, I toss my hat into the ring with Jonathan. And Dave simply watches, and I find myself worrying about him for some reason. Sometimes it’s easier to survive a fight when you are in it. Aggression can be easier when it’s reciprocated. I’m glad we can express those emotions too—I’m glad I can say, “No I think that’s wrong, I think you are wrong.” I don’t think I’ve wanted to say those things before, but I’m glad I was able to when I felt like it. But I still have a headache. I’m pissed I’m up so early. Maybe I’m pissed that I didn’t get what I wanted from the group this week, or I didn’t get enough after missing last week.

Jonathan: Ryan, as he left, apologized for shouting at me, and I said it was great, I’m pleased we could do that. I don’t remember the shouting, in any case. I remember the force, the passion; how much it mattered here, around our table. A moment of intimacy, Ryan said. Yes, I think. Yes.

Jess: Even as I write this I realize that only JW will get it because only he was at Barad’s lecture last week. I have just created an intimacy that excludes as it includes. Intimacy is necessarily selective. I am tying in my new love for a thinker with my fellow beloved thinkers, and yet can I fully express myself so that there is a new reterritorialization?

Ryan: I loved our intimate group fantasy discussion about the nature of the intimacy between D&G. I still like picturing Guattari as a soft and tender homosexual like myself. We each had projections of ourselves and our ideas of our group and group members that describe the authors. The seven of us, there at the table together trying so hard to understand the world and each other.

Jess: Žižek says that to love, to be intimate, comes with violence of exclusion. I have always found this both striking and oddly reassuring. We do not have to endlessly extend. There is a limit to love. Perhaps I am trying to figure my love for this group and our intimacy through sticking to a plot of land that means I

will not endlessly deterritorialize as I think of this topic? Or perhaps, I am sticking to my plot of land to keep myself separate from a group I will not see for another 2 months. Something feels at stake. Lost. Safeguarding the goodbye to intimacy. I have always hated goodbyes.

Holt: It feels like I got a punch to the forehead, and all my words and ideas have spilt out of my ears and I'm just left with some anger, dissatisfaction, and a hint of confusion why it has rubbed me the wrong way so much. I wonder if they knew it had rubbed me the wrong way. I sorta hope they do, even though I'm aware I didn't say it. I don't feel eloquent today. I feel drained and like much is being demanded of me. I'm going to stop writing now. I've done my bit.

Dave: So where are the politics? Trying to escape, along a line, in a process of becoming minor? But where to? Is there a destination? Or is it only about moving on and getting free? Troubling the stabilities in thought? Once again, after an hour of tea, coffee, and chat, I am left with many amorphous questions. Each of which already contains many answers.

“We 5”

The journey of the group, “We 5” as Jonathan has called us, in relation with Deleuze and Guattari, is one of occupying the inquiry milieu in an assemblage that is not of striation, hierarchy, or dictated trajectories. It is one of intimate creation and exploration—of feeling and manifesting our epistemic relationship together with the text. We develop understanding in contact with each other, relying on one another, but not bound by class or station or chain of command. We are aware hierarchies are present but there is no general of the group. Rather, the group exists in its revolutions and undulations in the spaces we share. In engaging with this movement, we give ourselves to a process that is beyond the scope of any of us as individuals—we enact Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming*.

Deleuze and Guattari write that in considering the process of becoming,

It is no longer a question of instituting a serial organization of the imaginary, but instead a symbolic and structural order of understanding. It is no longer a question of graduating resemblances, ultimately arriving at an identification between Man and Animal at the heart of a mystical participating. It is a question of ordering differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 236)

“We 5,” as an entity, participate in upending, or at least disturbing, the structures that come from the heart of the

pedagogical traditions of the university, to incorporate not the linear arborescent progression of teachers to learners, but the spontaneous radical affectation of relating in different, changing ways. Our “mystical participation” is that of the relational, the affective—to embody and *become intimate* in the act of meeting, territorializing the space of knowledge generation to be relational, and ultimately acting as an intimate assemblage in the milieu of inquiry. Intimacy has acted as an agent of deterritorializing the academic space of working with Deleuze and Guattari while simultaneously bringing the constancy of their “plot of land,” our “correspondence of relations,” ensuring that we are not so destabilized or lost that we might not be able to engage with the process of seeking understanding.

From the beginning of our work together we had grappled with this becoming, though we might not have had the words from the outset of this project. An awareness of the means of the work as relational, between each other and Deleuze and Guattari, has been present since our first reading and writing together, together with a sense that we are deterritorializing the process of inquiry:

Jess: I need hope from Deleuze and Guattari. Have I ever been able to connect Deleuze and Guattari apart from my own need?

Dave: There's a form of fear in not knowing what I'm writing about. In two ways. I don't know where I'm writing to. Just writing. And I don't understand deterritorialization.

Holt: I find it fascinating that we still can't find certain concepts or locate them; there is no territory for deterritorialization as it were, not among us. . . . Instead, I find more interesting the process by which we try to convince one another of the territory in which deterritorialization exists. In other words, I wonder if this is an exercise in deterritorialization?

Jonathan: They're always here, and never quiet. Elusive, playful, withholding, generous, frustrating, effervescent as ever . . . we've been deterritorializing with them, working into “absolute,” “relative,” “negative,” deterritorializing, passing the “D” of their “Conclusion” between us, back and forth, in between.

Ryan: Everything is about assemblage for me. Our coming together, and our pulling apart. Our push and shove. I have witnessed . . . all of us become passionate, become animated, become adversary and ally . . . Through our dialogue and combined experience, I feel myself become intimate with our assembly as a way to begin becoming intimate with D&G.

We could feel the difference of being together and with *ATP*, and were constantly reaching to hold the process we were touching and engaging with. Given Ryan's early acknowledgment of this becoming, perhaps it is no surprise

that he was able to put a name to this process, “Intimacy as Inquiry.” It became clear this was what we were engaging with when we met together from our separate, individual journeys and brought our presences back, again and again, to the velvet green assemblage. Only then with us being together, in relation, in a space of affect, did our thoughts begin to fall into a form that was comprehensible in some manner.

The complexity of the becoming becomes twofold then, as presented in the writings in this article, as it is not only a becoming of intimacy, love, and care for those in our assemblage. It is also a reterritorialization of the act of inquiry, of the methods that are heralded as legitimate in the dogma of the academy and accepted as useful and reliable for the generation of knowledge. Through the act of dissolving power structures in the group of “We 5,” the very act of writing and presenting this work in an academic context means that we meet and push against the striated spaces that exist in the academy, that surround the milieu we occupy, and provide the means and necessity for reterritorializing the epistemic space. “Epistemic Intimacy,” then, becomes a manifestation of engaging with the inquiry process in intimacy, and embodies an active resistance to the business transaction the act of inquiry has become in the neoliberal academy. Our group stands as testament to the agency of the personal, complex, and emotionally intense as a potentially integral aspect of the methodologies for knowledge generation. Intimacy as Inquiry has something of magic and sorcery, a *becoming*, and in our practice, it troubles and stands against the unimplicated, apathetic, or sterile doing of the academic state. We, seated in the green velvet booth as if it were an open field, operate as nomads at the edges, and in our rhizomatic meeting and relating in epistemic intimacy invite others to join us and meet at the fringes: to think and inquire intimately, and to become intimate.

Authors' Note

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Notes

1. After we had committed to presenting a paper at the 2nd European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in 2017.
2. See below.
3. “General Freud”: Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004, p. 18).
4. We found in our café writings that Deleuze and Guattari became “D&G.” Our familiars.
5. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004, p. 42). We were reading and discussing Plateau 2, “1914: One or Several Wolves,” at the time.
6. An allusion to that time in Checkpoint where Jonathan sought to embody the concept of “probe-head” from Plateau 7.
7. Checkpoint offered excellent small croissants, which Jonathan was partial to.
8. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2004, p. 36). Again, we were reading Plateau 2.
9. We were reading Plateau 4, “November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics.”
10. Taken from Karen Barad’s Keynote Lecture at the Transdisciplinary Imaging conference hosted at the University of Edinburgh, April 19, 2018.

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