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Deleuze and intimacy: of ontologies, politics and the untamed

Introduction to the special issue

Fiona Murray and Jonathan Wyatt

Abstract

This article traces the intersecting lines and stories of this special issue on Deleuze and intimacy. It offers a take on how it found its way onto these pages after nearly two years and through two conference symposia, and outlines how the contributions – variously and differently – make a case for intimacy, through Deleuze, as an approach to, a subject of, and/or a necessary and vital affective force in and beyond research.

Keywords: Deleuze, intimacy, becoming, affect, desire

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Deleuze and intimacy: of ontologies, politics and the untamed

Introduction to the special issue

Fiona Murray and Jonathan Wyatt

Intimacy within (and beyond) academic spaces murmurs between us and cannot be separated from the work we do. It may be found in the turning of our phrase we realise is not our own, or in the unperceived warmth left behind on the seat of a co-author. It is perhaps what is held in the most alive moments of our work but is often filed under 'personal' perhaps because it renders us vulnerable, needy, relational.

Intimacy for Deleuze, as Hannah Stark (2012, p. 99) writes concerning Deleuze and love, "may appear to be at odds with both his anti-humanism and his refusal to regard the human subject as either stable or coherent". Deleuze and Guattari write, in their opening to *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* [the first volume] together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 3). In which case, surely intimacy is conceptually impossible. You can't be intimate with a crowd, can you? When it comes to Deleuze and intimacy, as Janell Watson (2004, p. 83) might put it, "What ... could possibly be of interest...?"

Does intimacy, though, have to be thought of (only) as personal? In the first piece in this special issue, Ryan, David, Jess, Holt and Jonathan generously step into and share the intimacy of their own reading (and writing) group and speculate on how their becoming-intimate subverts the hierarchies found in academia and more broadly how 'epistemic intimacy' sustains and embodies an active resistance to the neo-liberalism of the academy. It becomes apparent in their article that there is a force to intimacy beyond the personal, a force that is productive, producing, creative and moving.

We often don't (won't) talk about what intimacy does; and while, arguably, neither did Deleuze and his co-authors, and while qualitative scholars who work with Deleuze do not often connect either him or his concepts with intimacy (though see Tuck, 2010), this is only the case if we take intimacy to be understood in the humanist sense commonly assumed in Western discourses: interpersonal closeness, coupledness, domesticity, and their accompanying ontological and political assumptions and implications.

If we understand the Deleuzian subject not as the Enlightenment autonomous, self-knowing, bounded, agentic, individual but the dynamic, embryonic, larval subject – in process, a "rough draft" (Deleuze, 2004, p. 97), a subject with a capacity for difference impossible for the humanist subject (Stark, 2012), then conceptualising the work of Deleuze and his collaborators in relation to intimacy takes a different turn.

No longer is the concern about interpersonal closeness, but the active, ever-shifting process of relating. Intimacy becomes a deterritorialising possibility, a quality, a gesture – a 'fold' (Stivale, 2000, after Deleuze, 1993) – found in the losing of the self (Watson, 2004). The larval subject is "the site of rather than the source of thoughts... [T]he recognisable subject

is replaced by those processes of individuation in which difference is unfolded” (Stark, 2012, p. 102).

Ken Gale follows this turn as he holds a rescued fledgling in his open palm to feel the pulse of a poetic worlding that thinks with connection rather than context. He has less interest in capturing the meaning of intimacy than experimenting in what ‘intimating’ as an affective relational force can do.

Gale’s paper thinks with Deleuze about how intimacy – and love, friendship and eros – becomes an encounter with otherness, not an experience of closeness (of one kind or another) with an individual, unitary Other (Sholtz and Carr, 2018; see also Stark, 2012). Intimacy becomes an encounter that happens, that generates difference, that generates life, that is “radically singular and happen[s] at myriad levels of affective and intensive engagement with desire” (Sholtz and Carr, 2018, p. 455). For Deleuze, philosophy itself becomes an act of friendship (Stivale, 2000).

Through a set of playful and powerful refrains, Kimberly Powell’s musical piece focusses on encounters with difference; a multi-species intimacy or a human-dog or even Kimberly-Luna intimacy; a friendship entangled with difference and where certainty and uncertainty occupy the same space.

Powell’s paper portrays an intimacy that acts, that does; an intimacy of the shifting ontological moment. It is an intimacy that defies, that (literally) pushes and pulls, that resists the sedimenting forces that would impose political, social, ethical, and creative limits (Sholtz & Carr, 2018, p. 460). “It is the possibility of a revolutionary love” (ibid, p. 460). Within this framing of intimacy, with intimacy now a “radical relationality” (Stark, 2012, p. 100) or, better perhaps, a radical *relating*, attending to Deleuze and intimacy becomes, for qualitative inquiry, inviting, replete with possibility, even urgent.

Michael Lechuga speaks to this urgency in an unflinching, political, performative, ironic look, though mestiza consciousness and Deleuze’s nomad thought, at the ‘intimate terrorism’ enacted on scholars of colour in the US academy, who live in and with the sense of ‘never-quite-being’.

This urgency has become ever more apparent during the writing and collection of these papers in this special issue that has been in process for eighteen months or more, the idea arising during the northern hemisphere late summer and early autumn of 2017. We think it arose with/in/through Jonathan, but neither – none – of us is quite sure, nor exactly when and how. (We think Deleuze would like this doubt, this destabilising of the subject: the sense of the idea, and the writing and performing that has ensued, arriving in us, catching one, another, others, up in its surge.)

Fiona Murray’s paper is riddled with such doubt as she becomes destabilised, finding herself at the crossroads between responding to the call home to the more familiar notion of intimacy as Oedipal or familial or to take the road towards impersonal love found in the losing of self. Although, obviously the losing of self, is the losing of a crowd.

A pause to note: We realise we should, throughout, have been talking of, and should now be talking of, Deleuze *and*. Always *and*: Deleuze and Guattari, Deleuze and Parnet, Deleuze and others. Deleuze and us. It was, and never is, (the crowd of) Deleuze alone.

The original prompt for this issue in mid-2017 was the call for abstracts for the 2nd European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry in Leuven in February 2018. Jonathan, reading *A Thousand Plateaus* with four others, talked with his co-readers (and soon-to-be co-authors) about presenting a paper at the conference. They talked about their sense of the intimacy in and of their reading group. They discussed inviting others to join them in a symposium. Jonathan suggested they approach Kimberley Powell, Ken Gale, Fiona Murray and Teija Löytönen.

Our symposium abstract – Becoming-intimate, becoming intimate, with Deleuze: nomadic inquiries – articulated an intention to explore, and trouble, ‘intimacy’ with/and Deleuze. We noted, in recognition our writings were yet to unfold in and between us in our various locations over the following months, how it would be cold in Leuven in February. We said we hoped to bring the five conference papers into conversation with each other there/then; into, perhaps, a kind of intimacy. We hoped they would speak with each other and with the audience. We spoke of how intimacy, as Berlant (1998) writes, is suggestive of both eloquence and brevity, the full and the spare, the joyful and the troubled, the private and the public. The political. Maybe intimacy with Deleuze, our abstract said, is also about desire; or how desire might be a place to begin, at least. As Eve Tuck writes, in her sad, beautiful paper, *Breaking up with Deleuze* (Tuck, 2010), desire is at the heart of Deleuze’s collaboration with Guattari; desire as “an exponentially growing assemblage” (p. 639). Desire for them, she writes, is also about longing,

“about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future; it is integral to our humanness. It is not only about the painful elements of social and psychic realities, but also the textured acumen and hope.” (p. 644)

The abstract goes on to describe how we wanted also to extend Tuck’s statement to consider how desire – and intimacy – is integral to the post-human, to the more-than-human, to the materiality of our encounters. We said we would see where these papers took us as we wrote over the coming months in our nomadic writing inquiries, as we become more and/or less intimate with Deleuze.

We presented our symposium on the Friday morning of the conference, its final session. It was indeed cold. Conversations with and about intimacy and Deleuze were had.

We subsequently proposed this special issue, Michael Lechuga joined, and we took further papers-in-progress to ECQI in Edinburgh in February 2019 (where it was not cold, which was both surprising and disturbing). In line with the theme of the conference (‘Qualitative Inquiry as Activism’) our symposium proposal there added thoughts concerning how intimacy has been institutionalised, domesticated, called to order (Moten and Harney, 2013); how it has been imposed on and between unwilling bodies, yet at the same time, denied to devoted others. Yet how intimacy is, and needs to be, lawless; it’s a durable force that will not readily be suppressed. Throughout history and disturbingly still today – now – families are being severed from each other at borders and imprisoned. Human beings, in the ache of longing for loved ones, are detained near other similarly persecuted and tortured souls. It is possible to imagine, perhaps, even there, the moments where new forms or gestures of intimacies emerge: intimacy as unyielding and uncontrollable surplus; an intimacy that cannot be arrested or appropriated. In these moments there may be both longing and hope and an intimacy that can be neither stamped out nor refused. Intimacy’s remainder exceeds a meaning-making of experience and survives as, perhaps, “modernity’s

insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk” (Moten & Harney, 2013, p. 98). Intimacy calls us to pay attention, to not turn away. Moten and Harney ask us to get close, to get intimate and to listen: "Can't you hear [us] whisper one another's touch?" (ibid., p. 97)

Over these eighteen months, in these presentations and performances in different times and places, through their iterations and re-framings, and now somewhat settled here in this collection, we placed/place Deleuze and intimacy in relation to each other in order to (re)conceptualise an ontological understanding of intimacy through Deleuze as an approach to, a subject of, and/or a necessary and vital affective force in, research – and beyond.

The pages of this special issue ends with Teija Löytönen’s poignant reimagining of collective academic spaces as intimate spaces where what takes place is the speculative figuring of academia’s incipient future. These spaces involve an untamed intimacy as event that forces us to think-feel-write.

Our collective hope is that intimacy’s unyielding and uncontrollable surplus can be felt through and between (and, again, beyond) these pages.

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