The Supervisory Assemblage

The Supervisory Assemblage:
A Singular Doctoral Experience

By

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FOREWORD

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This is an inspirational and challenging book. It is a book that has emerged out of diligence, persistence and an acute and intensive approach to authorship. Acknowledging that this book emerges out of the work originally engaged in whilst working for and successfully completing a doctoral thesis necessitates the addition of detailed accolades. In doing so it is important to highlight the book's originality, its refusal to adhere to theoretical and practice based antecedents, despite calls for conformity during its early production, and for the exciting and challenging possibilities it offers to doctoral supervisory practice for those who are willing to take up its radicalism, its innovation and its unerring scholarship. It is a book that will astonish and surprise, particularly for those who might enter its pages expecting to find a handbook for doctoral supervisors and a linear narrative of the doctoral experience. What it offers for those who inquire thus and who persist in exploring its multiple endogamies and exogamies, and its continual and complex matrices of folding, is a rhetorically rich and powerfully evocative piece of writing. In one sense it *is* a handbook because it is a piece of writing to be picked up and used and, in many respects, that is where the comparison ends. Its use will not necessitate developmental models of supervisory practice or provide handy tips for the potentially wayward doctoral candidate. Its use will offer complexity and raise questions; with Barad (2007) it will encourage diffraction and lead to entanglements and with Bergson it will always suggest the potential for a creative evolution in the practices of inquiry with which the doctoral researcher engages.

To say that this is a well-conceived thought provoking and extremely well written book is both truthful and successful in avoiding accusations of hyperbole. In writing this book Liz has grasped the opportunities involved in engaging in a fully theorised, intensely practical and critically committed study of the experience of the doctoral candidate within a 21st century university in substantial and substantive ways. In the spirit of the Deleuzian theory and practice that it so carefully and eloquently espouses

this is a book to be used. In employing a simple but highly significant phrase used by Deleuze and Guattari it is clear that this is a book that needs to be 'plugged in'. In the first instance, as its title suggests, there is so much in this book that can be plugged into the 'supervisory assemblage' and so much that it contains that can be used to enliven and vitalise the 'doctoral experience'. Secondly, there is so much to be gained in using this book in relation to others; other books, other spaces, other assemblages and so on. Equally, plugging in this book also helps it to come alive. It is a book that in employing a Deleuzian philosophy of always creating concepts makes it part of an assemblage in which concept, affect and percept are always in play and in which conceptualisation and territorialisation are always part of its processual vibrancy. As Deleuze and Guattari say, 'But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work' (1988, 4). When reading early chapter drafts of this book, when it was in its nascent thesis form, I achieved scholarly pleasure in no short measure from plugging Liz's writing into my existing conceptualisations of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's work and of thinking about what she was having to say, thinking about how her application of a 'logic of sense' (Deleuze 2004) was vitalising and adding complexity to the ways in which her emergent writing, her *becoming writer*, was coming to life.

There were times when our discussions about the becoming thesis, becoming book, led us into uncharted waters; when trying to use a compass held little benefit and when writing into the not yet known became the motive force, the leitmotif for the supervisory practices with which we were engaged. In these lively exchanges Liz showed courage, conviction and a growing scholarly acumen in persisting with her thoughts of taking these ideas forward and in having a vision of what the final thesis/book might emerge into. A good example of this is the way in which she convincingly employs Deleuze and Guattari's use of the plateau rather than the chapter in order to give fluidity, flux and transversality to the rhizomatic presentation of the book in terms of focus, content and style. So, as with its influencing antecedents, this is a book that can be read in many different ways. It is a book that can be organised by those who read it and, in using it, contribute to it as a book, as an assemblage. The way in which Liz has worked to create this book therefore has echoes with Deleuze and Guattari when they say:

> There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made. Therefore a book also has no object. As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies

> without organs. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. (1988: 4)

In writing a book of this always differentiating kind, in the pumping energies of its arteries and within the intensity of all its complex vicissitudes, Liz has also provided the person who uses this book with a methodologically significant text, one which effectively combines Deleuzian concepts with writing as a method of inquiry and in so doing offers a posthuman engagement between facets of materiality and the languages and discourses that would attempt to represent it. In this respect Liz has written a book, qua 'body without organs', in which the agentic possibilities for the reader, and the emergence of its user, are not bounded by the subject domain of its title and in which the potential for taking new lines of flight and multiple forms of becoming offer a richly rewarding reading experience. I am really looking forward to reading it again.

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PREFACE

In this doctoral thesis, I apply Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's ontology of becoming to my own learning, thinking and writing. The adopted method of nomadic inquiry is derived from the philosophising of Deleuze, whose concepts function as pedagogic values that I mobilise throughout my writing and perform rather than merely explain to problematise common perceptions of the thesis, supervision and doctoral experience. Deleuze resists models that inhibit context-specific creativity, yet I can readily identify the defining features of my own supervision: resolutely student-centred, facilitative of free experimentation, supportive of my becoming as an academic subject and the writing through which this was achieved. Non-teleological nomadic writing does not preclude strategic intent. So the thesis records the process of my learning but also functions as a resource for post-doctoral writing. It was conceived as a *body without organs*, that is, as a surface of inscription for affective learning processes arising in a supervisory assemblage where rigid distinctions between self and other proved unsustainable. Contra characterisation of doctoral research as a solitary scholarly activity, the heterogeneity and relationality of learning emerges through my writing and in the areas to which I am drawn in my theoretical engagement. I consider former academic experiences and characterise my current supervisory assemblage as *rhizomatic*, a complex relational space where connections are continually made but not fixed in the knowledge-seeking process. Such connections are not wholly undetermined but reveal processes of stratification and destratification. I seek to show that the creative potential of the *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage* lies in the tensions thereby generated. I also lay bare sedimented resistances that arise as I mobilise the concept of theoretical assemblage and connect with writers like Butler and Cixous. This thesis defies the ascetic ideal pervading normative accounts of doctoral experience, academic textual production and theoretical engagement. It embodies my desire to embrace an ontology of becoming and its pedagogic corollaries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is surely an impossible task to identify every reason for undertaking doctoral research. Or to name everyone who has inspired and supported me and enriched my thinking about pedagogic, philosophical, theoretical and autobiographical matters throughout my doctoral research. In Deleuzian terms, it was completing a professional accreditation course in teaching and learning in higher education at the University of Plymouth that functioned as an intensity or switch point in my academic life, and which culminated in my enrolment at the same institution's Faculty of Education. I had been encouraged to view critical reflection on practice and self-reflexivity as an integral and important facet of teaching. And this led me to think critically about my own learning in varied educational settings and to engage with the literature on doctoral pedagogy and the doctoral experience.

I was determined that this thesis would actually perform the pedagogic principles to which I had come to subscribe, but became rapidly aware of tensions in my thinking which I attributed to the diversity evidenced in my academic and professional background. These tensions resulted in what I considered to be an uncharacteristic lack of focus on my part throughout the earlier stage of the doctoral process. I therefore owe especial thanks to my Director of Studies, Professor Linda la Velle, for her patience and ability to negotiate two contradictory imperatives, those of providing the guidance that optimises the likelihood of timely and successful completion whilst simultaneously fostering what is often referred to as independent scholarship. I should also acknowledge here that my commitment to such scholarship led me to be somewhat dismissive of suggestions that the pastoral aspect of the supervisory role mattered. Ironically, it was precisely this aspect of supervision that became extremely important to me following an unanticipated relocation overseas, and as I neared completion.

The concept of independent scholarship is hardly unproblematic however. I find it highly seductive and powerfully emotive. Yet it fails to convey the complex relational and affective dimensions of learning, and it certainly seemed to contradict my growing conviction that learning is a collaborative process. Within the doctoral pedagogy literature, critiques of collaborative models of supervision, or indeed any model that foregrounds relationship, are readily available. These models focus upon power differentials that

purportedly militate against any meaningful reciprocity in the learning process, and were cited in my earlier doctoral writing and discussed during supervision meetings. Neither these, nor metaphoric counter-models designed to emphasise reciprocity, seemed particularly relevant to my own experience of supervision and doctoral study. Consequently, I came to question the value of developing models. Not only because of their potentially normative function, but primarily because I could not make sense of my own experience through them. The questions which then drove my reading and thinking were very simple ones: how *are* my supervisors involved in my learning and what is this thing that I am calling my doctoral experience?

This is not to suggest that I intended a phenomenological study since I had already registered my reservations about this perspective when writing about ethical research practice for my supervisors. I attended many workshops and seminars around this time and developed an interest in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. This was fortuitous since my own faculty includes Dr Ken Gale who has published extensively on the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari to pedagogic practice within higher education, and engaged in collaborative projects with Dr Jonathon Wyatt and others. My sense that I would find the answers to the pressing questions that, at this stage, I was struggling to articulate was largely intuitive. I consider myself very fortunate that Dr Gale consented to join my supervisory team and offer my profound thanks for the guidance that he has consistently provided. I would also like to thank the third member of my supervisory team Dr Phil Bayliss for his insightful questioning, and his observation that I was failing to theorise concepts, like authenticity, despite my readiness to deploy them in my writing. My Deleuzian turn has also permitted a re-conceptualisation of collaborative learning that does indeed capture my doctoral experience and mode of learning. Those who are familiar with the collaborative writing of Deleuze and Felix Guattari will understand why I prefer to think of collaborative learning at doctoral level as machinic learning within a supervisory assemblage where rhizomatic connections are multiplied and affective intensities form a necessary part of that process.

For those who are not familiar with these concepts, I am pointing to the non-linear development of my thinking, how supervisory questioning and discussion influences the direction(s) of that thinking, and to the numerous other influences that condition the doctoral experience. With the latter in mind, I also wish to thank: Dr Kip Jones, whose seminars helped me to understand how the writing of my thesis might perform the doctoral process rather than merely display its outcome; Helen Knowler, for

inviting me to participate in projects that perform shared pedagogic values; tutors on the University of Plymouth's professional accreditation course in teaching and learning in higher education, for their thought-provoking introduction to pedagogic theory and the complexities of pedagogic practice; Dr Zoë Fitzgerald-Pool, for introducing me to collaborative audio-visual performance; and Robin, whose request over three decades ago, that I write bravely of my experiences, was never forgotten. Finally, I would like to thank Richard, my husband, for understanding my determination to complete and for his unwavering support of this ambition, and my viva examiners Professors Jane Speedy and Joanna Haynes, for their interest and advice.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) distinguishes the direction of contemporary research across a diverse range of disciplines (Reggio 2007, 145), and it is certainly the case that my most recent doctoral experience would not have been the same without him. I have come to think of the supervisory relationship in Deleuzian terms, or more accurately, through concepts or figures provided by both Deleuze and by Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1930-1992) in their collaborative writings. The latter conceive texts as productive of affects in the reader and inviting multiple readings rather than as self-transparent vehicles of authorial intent. Following Deleuze and Guattari (2004), both the text and the supervisory relationship can be viewed as assemblages. Assemblage is the first of many neologisms that will be encountered in this study given the productive nature of their collaboration. I shall therefore offer a preliminary outline of the concepts adopted in the study title for orientation purposes.

The assemblage is a constellation of forces or entities that varies in its spatio-temporal scale and in its effects. It should not be thought of as a static structural unity or as a self-reproducing functional whole because it lacks an organisational or structuring principle, and this is precisely what permits disparate elements to be drawn into the body of any particular assemblage and the variability of its effects. Nevertheless, assemblages imply varying degrees of spatial and temporal identity, and therefore in Deleuzian terms, they spatially and temporally territorialise. Conversely, they deterritorialise when they break down and lose that identity. The concept of assemblage is linked to an ontology of becoming in Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.). Our becoming within an assemblage is the movement through which we are constituted as subjects and becoming therefore refers to a continual process of individuation. Accordingly, the doctoral student may be viewed as a singularity generated through the play of forces within the supervisory assemblage rather than as a pre-existent unitary subject who participates in that assemblage and remains fundamentally unchanged by the doctoral experience. The concept of multiplicity is also relevant in this context as it indicates that the qualities of parties to the supervisory assemblage are not fixed, and that there must always be something unattributable or vague about what has happened, and what will happen, within any supervision as it is precisely this vagueness or

multiplicity that allows the new to emerge. It is about the play of free differences within a whole conceived as open and complex-*differenciation* rather than categorical difference; hence it is a constructivist logic that is proposed. Any sense of continuity derives from the fact that singularities are iterable or repeatable, but it is important to note that attempts to define them will concomitantly change the nature of the open-ended system in which they manifest (Rajchman 2000, 58). Deleuzian singularities are consequently better thought of as impersonal or sub-individual points that exist prior to fixed predicates; hence the logic of sensation preferred by Deleuze (2005) and the possibility of unforeseen lines of flight that are lines of creative becoming (Deleuze & Guattari ibid.). It is a logic that is evocative of the Bergsonian emphasis on qualitative, not quantitative, multiplicity as creative evolution, and as Rajchman states, the continuation of a multiplicity means entry into a zone that invents through the power of difference and not one that is logically pre-determined (ibid., 59).

If the assemblage is conceived as an open and complex system, then it is not possible to identify any obvious start or end point as in a linear succession. Instead, we should expect a system whose continuity lies in its starting over from different and unpredictable points. I have sought to reflect this principle in my writing here. And it will also become clearer what I mean by experience since, following Deleuze and Guattari (2009), I am not implying a phenomenological version of lived experience that presupposes the body as a bounded and already-existent object of that experience, and a subject-object opposition. In this first volume of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, a theory is outlined as to how we come to experience ourselves as embodied (or otherwise), and this involves the interruption of flows and the body-without-organs. The latter is implicated in all individuating processes where it operates as a limit, or the unattainable point at which all the flows which constitute the world would flow freely. The following quotation where Deleuze and Guattari are describing the book as an assemblage brings together the concepts mentioned so far and suggests how this study might be construed as a body-without-organs:

> “there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity-but we don't know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of the substantive.

> One side of a machinic assemblage faces the strata, which doubtless make it a kind of organism, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a *body without organs*, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to circulate, and attributing to itself subjects that it leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity" (2004, 4)

Like many other Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts, the body-without-organs is deployed differently across texts. In presenting my study in these terms, it is the version above which functions as an ethical and life-affirmative political imperative to experiment that I particularly value from a pedagogic and personal perspective. What Deleuze and Guattari are doing here is dismantling the concept of the body as a unified entity, as an organism, and rejecting the notion of a hierarchical organisation of organs or parts. The body, accordingly, is viewed as an intensive physical reality that is continually affected by other bodies in a fluid relational space that is also impersonal; affect moves across and between bodies in affective relations that defy any characterisation of subjectivity as exclusively about consciousness or the mind of a self-contained Cartesian subject. The body-without-organs can be thought of as a non-stratified or non-organised process directed towards endless becoming and a defiance of ossified concepts and organising frames that define, judge and therefore limit, productive desire and thinking.

The body-without-organs also reveals the paradoxical nature of freedom or autonomy in that complete escape from organising principles or stratifying fields such as subjectification and signification is simply not possible. There must always be some reference to systems of stratification or we risk either obliteration or an imposed reterritorialisation; hence the ever persistent tension between smooth and striated space. My writing here should therefore be construed as a surface of inscription where the flows that were freed within a specific supervisory assemblage, and often inhibited by my own sedimented assumptions about academic writing, are laid bare and negotiated. I show or perform these tensions in an experimental writing practice that eschews a strictly linear style of argumentation and unadulterated theoretical exposition. There is an element of linear succession for readers who desire one as the plateaus were written in the order in which they appear here, but there is equally a layering process that allows them to be read out of sequence. The conclusions were produced retrospectively as they would be in any traditional logical exposition; but so too was this introduction and the italicised paragraphs that open each plateau. I initially resisted supervisory requests for their inclusion. However inappropriate this reaction at the

time, I had immersed myself in a sustained intensive temporal flow of reading, learning and writing; and through that process, my text had acquired a sacrosanct status. It was witness to my efforts and felt inviolable. I am particularly grateful in retrospect that my introduction did not win supervisory approval immediately. Its production, and subsequent refinement, meant that I had to acknowledge a hitherto lack of attention to strategic dissemination. Just as I had dreamed of a proliferation of citational support for script-defying (MacLure 2006) postgraduate writing, a writing that spoke of free experimentation and thinking differently, my supervisors had imagined a day when I would contribute to such support by lending readers who were unfamiliar with my sources a helping hand. I can now readily articulate those features of a post-identitarian doctoral pedagogy that were so enabling and affirmative for me. This was not always the case. I am therefore even more grateful that my need to write first and ask questions later-much later, was understood and supported. I did not quite know where I was going until I had been supported in getting there. Such deviations from conventional research and supervisory practice inevitably demand an inventiveness that a more logical linear organisation of the doctoral process can preclude.

I follow Deleuze and Guattari (2004) here in thinking of plateaus rather than chapters in order to indicate the affective dimension of the writing process, and how each piece of writing operates as a site of intensification within this particular supervisory assemblage where supervisory questioning and discussion inevitably generated a body-without-organs that I would scurry across and invest a considerable amount of desire in, as I sought to grasp and refine my understanding of Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari. As the latter suggest, the body-without-organs cannot be taken for granted but must be created. To do so requires a doctoral pedagogy that is a delicate balancing act of meeting institutional imperatives and related systems of stratification whilst simultaneously ensuring a body-without-organs that sustains a dynamic relational and affective learning process. I write to learn, and learning, like any life-experimentation, is both a biological and political process. It is the affective that matters. Experimentation is investigative, and here in this book, through my writing, I am attempting to learn more about how the supervisory assemblage functions, and indeed how I function as a component within it. I strive to know more about its structures, flows and connections-"what it does and what is done with it" (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 180).

I revisit an earlier doctoral experience in the mid-1990s from which I withdrew. Hence references to my recent doctoral experience are to the doctoral programme in a faculty of Education that I began in 2008, and to

my current supervisory team, or more accurately, to the team by which I have been supervised since 2009 following the withdrawal of one member and inclusion of another. The latter substitution inevitably altered the nature of the supervisory assemblage and it is consideration of the differences between these three experiences that affirms one proposition implicitly defended here-that supervisory assemblages vary in their capacity to generate and support experimentation and therefore learning.

This most recent doctoral experience is evocative of Deleuze's description of his teaching practice as participation in a "research laboratory" (1995, 139). The freedom to experiment, to unpack impasses in my thinking in novel ways, has enriched this most recent doctoral experience. It has enabled a level and breadth of theoretical engagement that would not have been possible had my latest supervisory team prioritised overt and rigid conformity to pre-scripted linear research narratives over the creative negotiation of institutional guidelines. It has been an extraordinary (ad)venture that has moved my learning on; taking that learning in unpredictable, yet highly productive, directions.

Where I initially feared that free experimentation might delay completion, however fierce my determination to exercise my nomadic tendencies, I know now that my completion was hastened by this freedom. Angst induced by epistocentrism (Deleuze ibid., 53) was displaced, and replaced with joy and excitement when I no longer felt obliged to position myself as *a knower*, but instead as someone who in Deleuzian terms was supported in their *not quite knowing* and their powerful desire to understand. The papers which were penned shortly before and following submission are testimony to the truth of Richardson's observation that fostering experimental writing can serve to enrich a student's thinking, enhance their subsequent academic writing and develop their capacity for informed criticality (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005). All of this speaks to a distinction between productive and mimetic pedagogies (MacLure 2006); and to Bourdieu's (1990, 54) insistence that the *habitus* should not be construed as mere rule following. It is far easier to write of contradictory imperatives than to embrace them as lived bodily realities and articulate the tensions that the doctoral experience might invoke between seemingly contradictory "partial identities" (Haraway 1991, 154). I imagine that the Deleuzian figure of the supervisory assemblage as research laboratory may assist other part-time postgraduate students who, like me, are mature enough to sometimes feel that they have too many backgrounds that vie for attention and a hard-won professional or personal persona that resists admissions of *not knowing*.

The pedagogic import of key figures found in Deleuze and his collaborative writing with Felix Guattari is outlined by Gale (2007). The term figure indicates that conceptualisation is conceived by Deleuze and Guattari (1994) as a dynamic and creative process which is situated within a logic of sense, event and multiplicity (Deleuze 2004a), and which therefore differs markedly from the predicative relations of a formal logic that strives to determine falsity or truth (ibid.). Gale refers to the "contingency and ambiguity" that characterises learning and pedagogic practice, and it is argued that figures derived from Deleuze, and Deleuze-Guattari, can support both inquiry into "incommensurate areas of thought" and an approach to practice that is "tentative and curious" (ibid., 473).

Contra Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that concepts are not "waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies" (1994, 5), this insistence on the tentative or exploratory nature of learning, and by implication of doctoral research practice, was precisely what I had been searching for and waiting to find during the earlier phase of my most recent doctoral experience. The promise of a philosophy that might be mobilised in support of a study that actually performed this representation of learning was affirmative and energising. And the prospect of reconciling incommensurate areas of thought through such a philosophy spoke to a longstanding intellectual dilemma that I had not resolved prior to enrolment as a doctoral student, and which was consequently discussed at length during initial supervision meetings. I once welcomed Bruner's (1986) identification of two apparently incommensurable modes of knowing, logico-scientific and narrative, given the diversity of my academic background. But I had become increasingly dissatisfied with the consequent uneasy co-existence of my varied academic interests which include sociology, animal behaviour and theories relating to trauma; hence the epistemological conundrum to which I refer throughout this book. So began my theoretical engagement with Deleuze, Deleuze-Guattari, and related others (e.g. Gale & Wyatt 2006, 2009; Braidotti 1994, 2005a, 2006, 2007; St. Pierre 1997a, 1997b, 2004; Colebrook 2002, Protevi 2001, 2009). And so ended a challenging period of prevarication (2008-2009) during which I replaced one research method with another and failed to commit wholeheartedly to any specific theoretical perspective.

Braidotti (2006) is correct to suggest that there is a difference between theoretical and methodological anarchy, and the radically immanent nomadism proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. And Deleuze (2004b) insists that even the nomadic must sometimes remain in the same place if they are to defend their position. Paradoxically however, my desire to heed this advice from Deleuze, and to show the exploratory process of inquiry and

learning advocated by Gale (ibid.), has taken my reading and thinking to places that I had not envisaged going. So although this study lays bare my engagement with Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari, that very engagement leads me to consider Nietzsche, Foucault, Butler, Cixous and others. Each can be located within a radical tendency in contemporary political thought that has profound implications for doctoral research practice. Deleuze (ibid., 253) credits Nietzsche with marking the "dawn of a counterculture" that is concerned with biopolitics and which initiates the "political orientalism" evidenced in Foucault's genealogy of technologies of self and Barthes' "political minimalism" (Luisetti, undated). The nomadology and new politics outlined in the politicised philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (2009, 2004) are derived from the second essay of Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals (1968a, 439-602) where a contraposition is posited between territorial States and nomads, i.e. between the bureaucratic machine and the nomadic war-machine.

Deleuze (ibid., 259) maintains that Nietzsche has created a counter-philosophy, a different type of discourse that is "first and foremost nomadic" and whose utterances would not be produced by a rational administrative machine but by a nomadic war-machine. Philosophies which support the former are dubbed the "bureaucrats of pure reason" (ibid.). Nietzsche depicts Christianity as a life-negating force that promotes "ascetic ideals" and that privileges reason and truth whilst concomitantly denigrating physiological conditions; individuals are consequently deprived of ethical self-responsibility (1968a, 594). The Nietzschean oriental *dispositif* (Deleuze 1992) of Foucault is evidenced in the preface to Anti-Oedipus (Deleuze & Guattari 2009) and elsewhere (e.g. 1990a, 57-58) when Foucault opposes the intensification of pleasure in an oriental *ars erotica* to a Western *scientia sexualis* that makes truth claims about sex. And there are echoes of Nietzsche's "art of life" (1968b, 58) when Cixous writes of the "art of keeping alive" (2007, 15), and in the polemical, performative and nomadic tendencies manifested in her writing. Nietzsche's affirmative counter-philosophy is articulated through conceptual characters that offer an alternative language of life-forces, a parodic deployment of the history of religion, and a counter-memory designed to dissociate the reader from reified Western frames (Luisetti ibid.). This device prefigures the performative tendency evidenced in Deleuze and Guattari (2004) and also their concept of conceptual personae (1994). The latter refers to the divergent modes of knowing and associated conceptualisations of subjectivity that have been posited throughout the history of philosophy. Divergent epistemologies raise distinctive ethical issues and in Gale (ibid., 474-475) ethical practice is linked to the evaluative, and therefore to the

fostering of awareness of the "inherent value orientation of language". Reflexivity becomes one dimension of ethical research that is sensitive to representational practices (ibid., 475).

Gale mobilises the figure of the fold (Deleuze 2006a) to challenge the rigid dualisms of subject-object in postpositivist research practice, and cites St. Pierre (1997a) who drew on the same figure in describing how the boundaries between herself as researcher and her research subjects were infinitely more blurred than methodological orthodoxy suggests. The fold is evocative of many of the key concepts developed by Deleuze-Guattari and captures a key aspect of their ontology of becoming. This ontology opposes the presupposed unity and stability of the liberal humanist subject. Relationship is not conceived in terms of a phenomenological binary of self and other, but rather, as involving an inevitable becoming-other through participation in a limitless number of assemblages. Folding relates to processes of individuation in Deleuze (ibid.) and implies synthesis and emergence of new qualities where "folding in" produces multiple layering and intensification (Gale ibid.).

The title of this study is intended to convey a similar process which can be summarised thus: singularity through relationality. And my current supervisory assemblage is conceived as a fluid constellation of forces and a polymorphous formation implying symbiotic relations. It is the site of my becoming a doctoral student and individuation as an academic subject in a process that is unique, yet unpredictable and changeable. I emphasise the singularity of the doctoral experience because one cannot know in advance quite what may emerge from a supervisory assemblage where, as I have already suggested, all parties must negotiate processes of stratification (e.g. pressures to conform to institutional imperatives and to sedimented assumptions as to what a doctorate is) and processes of destratification (lines of creative production that defy such imperatives and assumptions).

Before describing another key figure introduced by Gale (ibid., 477), the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 2004), I should expand on what Braidotti (2006) means by a "radically immanent nomadism". Deleuze (2004c) rejects the Kantian argument that reason should be contained within its own principle, i.e. be limited to what it can do in terms of good or common sense (Colebrook 2005a, 180). Sound distribution for Kant means that reason, art or feeling and morality each have a proper domain, whereas for Deleuze, nomadism permits the maximum extension of principles and powers, and there is no law outside of thinking that limits what can be thought (ibid., 37). Nomadic distribution contains its principle within itself; there are no external or transcendent criteria, hence we

should judge immanently, for example, valuing a text for what it does and the novel territory that it creates rather than its conformity to pre-existent forms or usefulness to other territories. Deleuze's univocity, whereby everything emanates from one substance, means that there cannot be a hierarchy of beings within which mind over matter or actuality over potentiality are privileged. Such subordination of selected differences to others is, as Colebrook (ibid., 181) points out, consistently related in Deleuze to the agrarian question-the political orientalism referred to earlier: the territorial State divides, distributes and hierarchises space according to some law, logic or voice (*logos*) that is outside or above what is distributed. In contrast to this sedentary and striated space which is what it is and then distributed, nomadic space is produced through its distribution and it is smooth in that it lacks intrinsic properties that then determine relations (ibid., 182). It is *nomos*.

Smooth space is produced through movement and involves the creation of concepts and styles of thought that open up new differences and paths for thinking (ibid.). It would be difficult to overstate just how powerfully this approach to thinking resonated with my own transdisciplinary tendencies, and the relief that I experienced at the prospect of finding some resolution to my epistemological conundrum through this concept of univocity. Nomadic thought precludes reductionism or determinism of any sort and develops a third space in which pervasive binaries are dismantled and the connections between their poles theorised. I was intrigued that so many of the philosophical concepts and figures mobilised by Deleuze and Guattari derive from biological and mathematical sources, and by the apparently divergent readings of their work. And I appreciated the fact that such readings are positively encouraged. Nomadic inquiry (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005, Gale and Wyatt 2009) promises a freedom that arborescent thought (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) by definition simply cannot. It is the freedom to make rhizomatic connections and pursue avenues of inquiry as they arise in the flow of thought.

The rhizome is a pivotal figure in Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming and explains their irreverence towards epistemology. Rhizomatic thinking functions as an open-ended and decentred productive configuration, a moving matrix, where affective connections generate intensities that in turn create bodies; and this is how the world operates too (Colman 2005). The body of my study is a case in point; connections are made throughout the writing process that create networked patterns of association which permit the identification of themes such as freedom, madness, narcissism, asceticism, corporeality. These themes are approached in rather different ways within each plateau as my grasp of Deleuzian and Deleuzo-

Guattarian philosophical concepts, figures and images increases. I endeavour to show the tentative and exploratory nature of my own engagement with their philosophy by laying bare the rhizomatic connections that were made between autobiographical events and theoretical issues during that process. As Colman (ibid., 233) suggests, rhizomatic writing lacks a stabilising function as there is no attempt to manufacture a whole from dispersed parts; rhizomatic writing should instead reveal the multiple ways in which any thought, activity, or concept can be approached, the multiple and varied ways of "entering a body, of assembling thought and action through the world".

The figure of the rhizome is equally applicable to thinking about the supervisory assemblage. When functioning rhizomatically such an assemblage, by virtue of the contact of its components, will generate new affects, new thoughts and ways of thinking, and new bodies (ibid., 232); it becomes a site or *milieu* of transformation that entails a very different way of valuing academic production and theoretical praxis. It feels important to clarify here that, although Deleuze (2004b, 78) refers to the "private thinker", he is not implying a flow of thought that is reminiscent of the pre-given Cartesian *cogito* and that occurs in isolation from others or outside of the affective connections within an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 62). My own most recent doctoral experience is one of multiple and relational movements within a supervisory assemblage that has been highly productive of rhizomatic connections. I also write here in a rhizomatic manner about my aforementioned doctoral experience at a different institution in the 1990s that was far less supportive of thought that deviated from an arborescent model. The latter follows pre-determined routes and assumes an originary base from which all else follows.

Like Deleuze and Guattari (2009), I take Freudianism as an exemplar of the reductionism that arborescent thought necessarily engenders. Social Darwinism is also raised in this context and contrasted with the Darwin that I know from my study of animal behaviour, and on which both Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari draw. Anyone familiar with concepts like genetic mutation will understand the distinction that is being posited here. The popular Darwinism critiqued by Nietzsche assumes a reified version of an orderly and teleological descent and, therefore, laws that function as external criteria and that deny contingency. Just as Nietzsche demanded an effective history that acknowledged such contingency, Deleuze and Guattari (2004, 12) insist that the rhizome is an "antigenealogy". Nevertheless, Nietzsche writes of a synthesis of difference through the repetition of elements (Deleuze 1983, 46) and Deleuze and Guattari (2009,

38-40, 326-328) describe synthesis as an assemblage of variable relations produced by the movement, surfaces and relations of rhizomes that form bodies through the composition of chains of previously unattached links (Colman ibid., 233). Because the rhizome constitutes a non-homogeneous sequence, it can comprise causal, random and contingent links (ibid.). And as Deleuze suggests in his engagement with Hume (1991a), an association of ideas is produced and used where a body encounters socially, politically, or culturally determined forces.

In the nomadic inquiry presented in this study, I revisit papers that were of interest to me in the earlier phase of my second doctoral programme (2008-2009). But, as my writing progresses and I become immersed in the texts of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari, I begin to respond differently. As I show in my opening plateaus, these same papers were once used polemically to express my antipathy towards postpositivistic research at a time when I believed that doctorates which foregrounded theoretical engagement were no longer permitted within the neoliberal managerialist higher education regime. Such was the strength of this conviction that it had not occurred to me that I should check out this presupposition when enrolling on the programme in 2008. So contra Gale (ibid.), my own questioning of the methodology with which I began my doctoral experience did indeed prompt a polemical and "devoutly anti-positivistic" stance initially. I explore my ambivalence about postpositivism in a plateau that draws on feminist poststructural theory and writing. But I welcome Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) insistence that we go beyond such rigid counter-positioning and binary logics, and Deleuze and Guattari's constructivist take on contemporary science (1994). Nietzsche also explicitly distinguishes between modern experimental science and positivism.

The figure of the rhizome can also be taken to describe the mapping of my most recent doctoral experience in the writing here, and of the theoretical, epistemological, autobiographical, and pedagogic issues that arose for me, that *were* my doctoral experience. It is the networked and relational thought which was produced within this latest supervisory assemblage that I am mapping. This leads me to suggest that the *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage* is a particularly useful way of thinking about this specific supervision and doctoral experience. The concept of heterogenesis (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 20) is pertinent here. It refers to encounters that are productive of novelty: something new is created in between two terms which retain their heterogeneity. In this instance, there were four terms or persons involved, three of whom had comprised the original supervision assemblage (2008-2009) including myself. The divergent academic specialisms, excluding my own, which were represented (biological

science, educational philosophy, adult and offender education) formed a *milieu* in which the epistemological conundrum to which I have already referred could not be ignored. What ensued can be described as an encounter between the radical specificity of this supervisory *milieu* and the plane of immanence of thought (ibid., 93).

My writing should consequently be construed as an experimental actualisation of what it means to cross a threshold when thinking is no longer viewed as the natural activity of a self-contained individual thinker (Stengers 2005, 152). As the latter, who is a former student of Deleuze, implies: such an encounter is better conceived as one between lines rather than between persons who exchanged ideas and accumulated knowledge in order to achieve consensus. That is, it was precisely the epistemological and theoretical divergences within my current supervisory team, combined with a non-directive supervisory strategy of questioning and discussion as opposed to telling, that created an exploratory space in which I was free to make connections and engage with Deleuze's "neorealism" (Semetsky 2009, 443). The plateaus presented in this book might also be viewed as events, "junctures" or resting places (Morss 2000, 192) in a learning and conceptualisation process that is always provisional, "still in the making" (Peters 1999a, 7.4), and inextricably linked to the "physicality of affects" (Semetsky ibid.). Coming to understand this neorealist orientation, in which the objects of real experience can be either actual or virtual, has enabled me to retain my interest in writing as inquiry without reproducing the privileging of language, and concomitant denigration of science, evidenced in structuralism (Peters ibid., 1.4). I have been influenced by the blurring of genres in academic writing proposed by Laurel Richardson (1997), and inspired by her references to stories that demand to be told even when we do not know how (Bochner & Ellis 2002, 167).

Yet I find phrases like "we 'word the world' into existence" (Richardson 2001, 35) extremely problematic in their apparent support for a linguistic constructivism that is contradicted by the psycho-physiological realities of traumatic abuse (animal and human). Hence the recurring figure of the soothing breeze as a force that emanates from the natural world in all of its materiality, as a site of respite from the generalised laws of structural linguistics and also the now pervasive poststructuralist orthodoxy that assumes the discursive construction of events. I allude, and explicitly refer, to familial abuse in this study. Such references serve many purposes within my thinking and writing and function as a rhizo-structural thread between plateaus. They are productive of thinking rather than emotionally cathartic and designed to encourage multiple readings of the text. The poetic functions in a similar way throughout this book: as a

retreat from reductionism of any sort, as an emblem of the creativity and experimentalism involved in thinking against received truths in all disciplines (scientific and otherwise), and as a site of epistemological ambiguity given the very physical sense of rhythm that often drove my writing and seemingly endowed it with a life of its own.

I went with the flow(s). I pursued connections. And I relied upon my supervisors to assist me in operationalising what Deleuze and Guattari (2004, 177) dub the "art of dosages". If supervision within the *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage* is not for the feint-hearted, it is because there are no set rules, no models, no master copies to consult in the rhizomatic production of novelty or the production of the new *for the individuals concerned*. As Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.) insist however, the objective of experimentation is not annihilation of all that is stratifying or constraining, but rather a working through the *milieu* (i.e. context) that demands some degree of caution and strategic consolidation of the boundaries that have been pushed: consolidation as creation (Stengers ibid.).

This suggests that another type of evaluation is perpetually at play within the *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage*: a marginalist evaluation that seeks to determine limits or dictate pauses where supervisor(s) and student must each consider whether a specific deviation from accepted frames is a deviation too far that might jeopardise the entire project by inviting an imposition of stratification by external forces. Creative practices are not without risk for all concerned (Gale 2010, 307) but, when writing as a student, my sense of risk was two-fold: I experienced trepidation at the thought that my writing would be read as excessively transgressive of institutional norms. But equally, I worried that I was not being transgressive enough when I imagined a wider readership. From a feminist poststructuralist perspective it might be asked why there is only one textual irruption / disruption, in the final plateau, of what is otherwise a rather traditional academic exposition of the philosophical concepts proffered by Dead White Males? And those seeking an explicit detailed articulation of the import of Deleuze's philosophising for educational practice, particularly postgraduate supervision, might ask how such a personalised account of the doctoral experience is relevant to the supervision practice of others?

My response to the second question would be: I feel that my own teaching and supervisory practice has benefitted from attention to what actually happened when, as a mature doctoral student, I was required to perform apparently straightforward tasks ("survey the literature", "state your research question", "select a research method", "identify a theoretical perspective for analysis purposes", "display criticality", etc.). And my

response to the first question would be: I have actioned a feminist poststructuralist principle in laying bare how I responded during the earlier stages of a doctoral research process that is presented to students as linear or logically progressive. A qualitative pilot study which I undertook in 2008 resulted in writing for my supervisory team that expressed my dissatisfaction with the hypostasis of data, and therefore subjectivity, and my selected phenomenological postpositivist qualitative methodology. I subsequently experimented with transgressive modes of dissemination but was unable to situate this work within a theoretical field that I felt wholly committed to. I then revisited literature on doctoral pedagogy and student experience that focuses upon power differentials between supervisor and student. And I wrote of theoretical impasses.

Wellington (2010, 137) discusses the difficulty that postgraduate students can encounter in "getting started" when writing. My own difficulties however did not concern writing specifically but instead derived from unfinished business of an epistemological, theoretical, political and personal nature which needed to be addressed. Jensen (2007, 489) has asked how the knowledge-seeking practices of professionals as desire for "engagement and engrossment" in, and "enchantment", with a continual learning process might be sustained. The psychoanalytic conception of desire as lack found in Lacan is questioned, and Deleuze and Guattari's (2009) demand for a version of desire based on a more "life affirmative ideal" (cited in Jensen ibid., 493) is endorsed. Jensen (ibid.) cites Knorr Cetina (2003) in suggesting that:

> "the motivation to learn does not refer to an increased search for unified truth and unambiguous solutions, but rather to the unfolding of multiple references presented through epistemic cultures creating and warranting knowledge"

The epistemic culture provided by Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, provided me with a mode of inquiry that is an expression of "desiring-production", where multiplicity ensures "an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity" (Deleuze & Guattari 2009, 42). I was free to let my writing become "experimentation in contact with the Real" (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, 13) and unpack the impasses. And I was able to cite my own experience in a subsequent troubling of the hegemonic linear research model and assert that more flexibility, given the needs of individual students, is generally required; particularly in institutions that have a widening participation or inclusive agenda. Despite my enchantment with, and engrossment in, works by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari, I was frequently frustrated by the proliferation of neologisms in their writing and

an allusive style that demands extensive knowledge of the history of philosophy which I did not possess. Coming to understand their philosophising, and teasing out its pedagogic implications, became a self-sustaining affective and affirmative exercise which resonated with Gale's (2007, 476) insistence on the tentative and provisional nature of knowledge. And this experience has confirmed my suspicion that many of the purported difficulties with writing may be symptomatic of other issues. The plateaus of this book reflect such a learning process. And although I was constantly aware of the supervisory reception of my writing, I have also written for imaginary readers, including: the student who is intimidated by theory or who rejects its relevance in the perpetuation of a theory-practice binary, the student who allegedly fails to meet the needs of the knowledge economy in their choice of discipline or academic specialism, and the student who judges their skill set against governmentally-driven criteria and finds themselves lacking.

If some sections of this book require effort on the part of the reader, it is because I am making an important point about my own learning that I believe has a wider import. To select a theoretical perspective for analysis purposes is to trigger a potentially demanding and time-consuming process of problematisation (Deleuze 2004a, 67; 2004c, 99, 249), where a problem is a complicated series of relations between questions crossing over with one another yet resisting organisation into rank or order of importance. The questions included in such problems are two-fold expressions of affect or bodily and emotional transformation, and intellect or consistency-seeking, yet also creative thought (Williams 2005). Furthermore, this dual aspect means that a problem is determined not only by its questions but also by underlying tensions between ideas, affects and desires (ibid.). Williams highlights the tensions arising when our quizzing is inconclusive or when we struggle to articulate the problem as the coming together of related questions. I was reminded by this description of my quantitative research in animal behaviour (2003-2006) where formulating a testable hypothesis was a similarly affective process of problematisation accompanied by anxiety about the denial of multiplicity that clarity demands. I am showing here what unpacking these tensions, through a nomadic writing inquiry, entailed for me. And I intend the reading of this book to be as difficult at times as I initially found the intense style of Deleuze.

The adopted strategy of allowing ambiguity, allusion and ambivalence to proliferate within the text was, in part, designed to facilitate multiple readings and to generate productive affects. This will always happen however regardless of authorial intent. So I also did so because guidance

manuals directed at doctoral students reduce such problematisation to a discrete stage in a linear process and neglect the sort of difficulty that may be encountered. It is for this reason that I decided to include the first three plateaus. I highlight affective responses to evocative autoethnography and poststructuralist self-writing in the first, rather than provide a theoretical exposition of differences and continuities between them. The latter precludes appeal to shared experience or empathetic identification and emphasises the radical specificity of individual experience. I introduce the concept of duality however and a logic of *and* not *or*, and the suggestion of a continuum that we necessarily move within. I get side-tracked by mentions of sexual violence in preparatory reading for this plateau but then realise that, far from diverting me from resolution of my epistemological conundrum, this apparent digression is a connection that will assist my own process of problematisation. Consideration of physiological conditions, and related theoretico-political and ethical issues, becomes a rhizo-structural thread through which I articulate and explore how the materialism-idealism dichotomy complicates my thinking. The therapeutic value of either form of self-writing, or otherwise, arises in this same reading and becomes the unfinished business that is pursued in the ensuing plateau.

Bleakley (2000, 13) has criticised "introspective personalism" and a language of therapeutic empowerment in educational settings. So it seemed important that I broached such issues and began to do so through Nietzsche's claim about the therapeutic value of philosophical thinking, the Spinozan relational ethics of Deleuze, and by critiquing a paper on Foucauldian *ethopoiesis* that uses a Freudian paradigm to discredit Foucault and invalidate his work. The same concept of duality is implicitly demonstrated here as my writing clearly evokes a phenomenological understanding of learning as the pursuit of missing pieces in an assumed whole (Jensen ibid., 492), a search for those pieces, even as I explore and enact alternative conceptualisations of that learning. I avoid tracing continuities and discontinuities between Foucault and Deleuze in any depth as my doctoral focus is engagement with the latter. But the notion that ethopoiesis encourages narcissism is taken up subsequently in my refutation of charges of self-indulgence in the event of deviation from the evidence-based culture of educational neoliberal managerialism. Academic freedom, as support for informed experimentation, emerges as another powerful rhizo-structural thread. I endorse the rejection of thinking by consensual evidence but concur with Stengers (ibid., 152) that this does not require mobilisation against a "common enemy" or subscription to alternative orthodoxies.

In future research, I am likely to pursue Stengers' (ibid.) interpretation of the presentation of philosophy, science and art into separate domains in Deleuze and Guattari (1994) as a call to resistance of such rigid distinctions. Stengers asks whether the baby is being thrown out with the bath water when an ethico-aesthetic paradigm is pitted against a scientific paradigm, and argues that objectivism hinders every domain:

> "The sciences are not a model. They are a very particular example of an original production of subjectivity occurring when a situation makes a fold, in other words, forces those it rallies to think, imagine, create. The question of experimentation is situated at the level of the meso." (2009)

Stengers' (ibid.) concept of mesopolitics will be pertinent to any future consideration of the *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage* because it specifically concerns practice. The meso shifts the focus away from the macro and micro levels of Deleuze and Guattari (2004). And it is Stengers' familiarity with the *milieu*-specific folding of "biological macro-molecules" that leads her to question these authors' distinctions of molar-molecular and macro-micro:

> "It's a molecule-milieu history which obliges us to think through the "middle", through the milieu (*par le milieu*), as Deleuze would say. I like to bring up the biological macromolecule because I am afraid that if we content ourselves with the opposition between the molecular and the molar we are almost inexorably led to maniacal modes of differentiation where the issue is always designating paths of salvation or perdition. The question of how to go from the mode of description demanded by water molecules to the molar mode of description, where it's a question of water that we can drink or swim in, is extremely complicated. It's an open problem, not an opposition" (ibid.)

In writing about former academic experiences, including withdrawal from a doctoral programme in the 1990s, and changes to my present supervisory team in 2009, I continue to pursue two rhizo-structural threads: that of my relationship to feminist theory and politics, and that of the rise of neoliberal managerialism. I follow Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.) in insisting on a macro-level collective assemblage of enunciation (feminism) whilst hanging on to molecular-level dissolution of gender identities. Stengers (ibid.) is correct however to suggest that oppositional generalities do not readily translate into pedagogic strategies for practice settings; hence, the mesopolitical is "everything that the macro does not allow to be said, and everything that the micro does not permit to be deduced". The *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage* is mesopolitical in

Stengers' terms because "the questions that must be asked are utterly specific": What is this student's potential? What is happening for this student? What happens when we ask this? Will this or that work? How do we define success or failure? Stengers (ibid.) argues for an "ethoecology, where the *ethos* of the molecule, that which it is capable of, cannot be dissociated from its *oikos*, from the milieu requiring this *ethos*". In the *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage*, all parties to that assemblage experiment since the meso "must create itself", create its own problems, create its own ethos, and engage in "meso invention" (ibid.). It is political to the extent that those who participate in it experiment with and experience its fabrication; fine tuning it and feeling its affects and effects (ibid.).

Contra Bleakley (ibid.), I would argue that this meso level creativity is indeed empowering precisely because such invention is student and milieu-specific (where the latter includes diverse supervisory specialisms); it is not about conformity to pre-existing guidelines but rather a working through that milieu. It is about the radical specificity of supervisory assemblages and their capacity for practical experimentation, for supporting experimentation, and for creating and sustaining a students' desire to seek and produce knowledge. The writing which is produced through this process of supported experimentation in the final plateau is indicative of the plane of immanence or proliferation as Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 41) define it. It is a plane in which thought reveals itself as an affective process, but also one that, following Stengers, is manifested in the experience that every conceptual solution is a creation that generates new unknowns in a moving landscape. The proposition that I defend, by enactment throughout this study, can be expressed thus: a *rhizomatic supervisory assemblage operates heterogenetically to support knowledge-seeking as an ongoing creative relational process.* A moving landscape achieved through a moving matrix.