The ontological plurality of digital voice: a schizoanalysis of Rate My Professors and Rate My Teachers

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The ontological plurality of digital voice:
A schizoanalysis of *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers*

Eve Mayes

Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia

Abstract

Online evaluations (like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers)* have been celebrated as forming wider publics and modes of accountability beyond the institution, and critiqued as reinforcing consumeristic pedagogical relations. This chapter takes up the websites *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* as empirical entry points to a conceptual discussion, after Félix Guattari, of the ontological plurality of digital voice, and its associated refrains and universes of reference. I turn attention from analysis of the *effects* of these digitized student evaluations to the *moment of their formation* – for example, when a student's finger clicks on a particular star rating. Refusing to separate human bodies from objects, environment and affects, inside from outside, 'real' from 'digital', I consider how emerging modes of online student evaluations of teaching shift individual and collective relations to 'expression' and subjectivity. This chapter also explores the transversal possibilities of de-subjectification offered in when the digital is understood as *intercesseur:* intersection/ intercession.

Keywords

Student evaluations of teaching, student voice, Rate My Professors, Guattari, schizoanalysis

Student evaluations of teaching

Student evaluations of teaching (SET) in tertiary institutions have been used formatively to assess pedagogical progress, and summatively, as part of educators' performance review (Coladarci & Kornfield, 2007, p. 1). These evaluations have evolved from formal in-class evaluations on printed paper to online evaluations still administered and analyzed by the institution. In recent years, online evaluations of tertiary educators and school teachers have shifted territories – beyond the institution, to sites like *Rate my Professors*, owned by MTV, "a subgroup of the multinational media group Viacom" (Yoon, 2015, p. 112). In sites like *Rate My Professors* (http://www.ratemyprofessors.com), students can "rate" individual educators, their "level of difficulty", and, as an optional rating, "hot" or "um, no" in reference to "appearance". In the Australian version of *Rate My Teachers*, students select up to five stars in relation to the prompts: "easy", "helpful", "exam difficulty," "clarity," "textbook use," "knowledgeable" and an overall recommendation (from "nope" to "totally"). An open-ended text box invites students: "In your own words please describe your experience with [name of educator]". This "online rating phenomenon" has become a "globalized trend" (Villalta-Cerdas, McKeny, Gatlin, & Sandi-Urena, 2015, p. 182).

The extent to which students participate in sites like *Rate My Professors, Rate My Teachers,* and other comparable sites, and the extent to which ratings on this site inform students' decisions about courses is debatable. Student statements about tertiary educators articulated on digital platforms may have, arguably, shifted from these particular websites to other online territories – for example, public Twitter feeds and private Facebook pages designed for particular university and course cohorts. It is not my purpose here to map these various de- and re-territorializations, nor to write about the most current manifestation of (what I will term) *digital voice* about tertiary teaching[1]. Rather, *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* are employed as empirical entry points to a conceptual discussion, after Félix Guattari, of the ontological plurality of digital voice. Sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* are analyzed as mutations of the disciplinary mechanisms of the corporate university in the control society (Deleuze, 1992). I consider, too, other transversal approaches to institutional analysis.

Online evaluations (like *Rate My Professors)* have been asserted to strengthen the "participatory agency" of student evaluation in a wider public beyond the university (Yoon, 2015, p. 110). Declarations of a "return to the freedom and flow of the Greek agora" (Hearn, 2010, p. 421) suggest that more pedagogical ethical practices can be engendered through transparent, open evaluation (Arvidsson & Piertesen, 2013). However, concerns have been raised about student evaluations of teaching, both in their conventional institutional administration, and in the mutations of these evaluations to websites beyond the control of the institution.

A trajectory of literature on university-administered Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET) with technicist concerns works with statistical analyses, mapping the relationships between evaluation indices, and recommending ways to enhance evaluation validity and reliability and minimize bias (Marsh & Roche, 1997; Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2017). The content and construct validity of university-administered SET are called into question for the effects of variables including gender, physical attractiveness, grading leniency, and workload on student ratings (e.g. Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). Coladarci and Kornfield's assessment exemplifies the logics of such technicist approaches to SET: "when instruments are properly constructed and the resulting data thoughtfully considered, SET can be an important source of information for both improving teaching and informing personnel decisions" (2007, pp. 1-2).

Like university-administered Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET), sites like *Rate My Professors* have also been subject to studies of their validity and bias. A common concern raised is the

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[1] While it is beyond the scope of this chapter, further work is needed that maps the reach of these sites, and how they conspire with data mining industries.

influence of attractiveness ("hotness"), grading lenience, gender, race and sexuality on student evaluations, with a range of studies exploring their effects on the 'validity' of rating results (e.g. Clayson, 2014; Davison & Price, 2009; Freng & Webber, 2009; Legg & Wilson, 2012; Subtirelu, 2015). It is argued that reading previous reviews shapes students' subsequent perceptions of educators (Lewandowski, Higgins, & Nardone, 2012), and that these evaluations impact on educators' "self-efficacy" (Boswell, 2016). Those defending the validity of sites like *Rate My Professors* note the close correlation of these ratings with university-administered SET (e.g. Kindred & Mohammed, 2005).

Critical scholars have approached university-administered SET and sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* with an eye to what these evaluations produce, and the shifts in institutional culture that these evaluations suggest. They have raised concerns about how summative student evaluations, and sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* have reconstituted pedagogical relations and undermined democratic education. Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) analyze documents relating to student evaluation of teaching and learning in ten Australian universities for their implied conditions of speaking, listening, skills, attitudes and dispositions, systems, and organizational culture. They conclude that these documents reconstitute students as "clients as opposed to being learners" and as "consumers of an educational product" (pp. 93, 94). By extension, sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* could be deemed even more problematic, profiting from advertising alongside student ratings. Gonzales and Núñez (2014) describe the institutional drive to become a "world class" university in a "competitive transnational market", including the display of positive student evaluation statistics, as indications of the emergence of the "ranking regime" (p. 2), and raise concerns about how these practices (re)shape the work of those who work for these institutions. Ritter (2008) argues that, of more importance than the "measurable accuracy" of *Rate My Professors,* is how the website "reflects the increasingly convergent interests of consumer culture and academic culture, shaping the ways that pedagogy is valued and assessed by students within the public domain" (p. 259). These contemporary critiques can be brought into productive conversation with Deleuze's *Postscript on the Society of Control* (1992), to explore the transmutation of the (corporate) university from an enclosed site of monitoring and linear progression through time-space, to a state of "perpetual metastability" (p. 5). In societies of control, individuals are opposed "against one another" (p. 5); the "operation of markets" becomes "the instrument of social control" (p. 6); the corporation (university) emphasizes "supposedly necessary reforms" (p. 4), "perpetual training" and "continuous control" (p. 5).

Such critical approaches do not assume that there might be a more 'reliable', 'valid' or 'unbiased' mode of evaluating tertiary teaching and learning; rather, they examine the subjectivities and regimes that are *generated* alongside the formation of student evaluations of teaching. Ritter

(2008) describes the cultural phenomena of online evaluations as a "public, polyvocal enterprise encompassing ideologies that are often internally competing" (p. 260). Students are argued to be reconstituted as "data sources" for "high performance learning organization"; "student voice" becomes a way to foreground individual choice, and reinforces broader patterns of consumer citizenship (Fielding, 2011, pp. 10-11). These critiques have directly contrasted "marketi[zed]" and "commodif[ied] versions of 'student voice'" (in these modes of SET) with "genuine attempts to create and embed democratic processes" and relationships through the radical reconfiguration of human bodies in institutions (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015, p. 93).

This chapter's analysis of *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* extends this critical work, but turns attention from the *effects* of these digitized student evaluations to the *moment of their formation* – for example, when the student's finger clicks on a particular star rating. Working with Guattari's schizoanalysis, I examine the ontology of *digital voice* – how it forms and its existential vectors. I seek to unwind an implicit assumption in much previous work on SET that there are atomized subjects (student, and teacher, for example), separated from objects (a paper survey, or a digital survey completed on an electronic device). I also critically question the assumptions that evaluations composed by students either correspond with a 'reality' of the pedagogical relation or not, and that SET encounters formed apart from human relations are necessarily less democratic than the face-to-face encounter.

Schizoanalysis

Guattari's (and Deleuze's) schizoanalysis is concerned with dismantling the "'ontological iron curtain between being and things'" (Pierre Levy, cited by Guattari, 1995b, p. 8). Such an approach enables analysis of the multiplicitous forces at work in online SET sites in producing particular subjectivities, with implications for the pedagogical relation. Guattari rejects a view of subjectivity "in which each person is shut inside a monad and is then forced to construct a means of 'communication'" (Guattari, 1995b, p. 12) – frustrated students, for example, who must find a way to 'express' themselves to their tertiary educator. The individual is, instead:

> […] something like a 'terminal' for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data processing machines etc. Interiority establishes itself at the crossroads of multiple components, each relatively autonomous in relation to the other, and, if needs be, in open conflict. (Guattari, 2000, p. 758)

The *I*, then, that speaks and is addressed, or that is addressed and types a response, is an *event* existing each moment at the intersection of a range of processes (Guattari, 1995). What is produced in the moment of verbal (or typed) articulation are collective *agencements* of enunciation (Deleuze &

Guattari, 1980/ 1987, pp. 80-85) – arrangements that exceed the human 'expressive' agency of saying 'how I feel' and 'meaning what I say'. *Agencement*, the French word frequently translated as *assemblage*, is a noun and a verb; *agencements* are simultaneously "arrangement[s]" and the act of "arranging" of heterogeneous corporeal and incorporeal, actual and virtual, elements (translators' note 30, in Guattari, 2000, p. 82).

Entwined with this rejection of the atomized subject, Guattari (and Deleuze) contest the psychoanalytic conception of the Oedipal subject who intrinsically *lacks* – associated with their critique of followers of Freud and Lacan (see Bryant, 2006). According to a reductionistic mode of analysis, the student *lacks* skills, knowledge, pedagogical satisfaction, or writes a negative evaluation because of particular felt deficits in instruction. In turn, the educator must satisfy the desire of the Oedipal student subject who *lacks* skills, knowledge, and pedagogical satisfaction. For Guattari (and Deleuze), in contrast, desire precedes the social production of *lack*; desire is affirmative and productive, connecting flows and generating differences. Desire "is always assembled" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/ 1987, p. 229), investing in social relations and immanent conditions. This approach does not deny *lack* in pedagogical relations and educational institutions – *lack,* rather, is "created, planned and organized in and through social production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 28). A schizoanalytic approach examines the *agencements* that produce particular e/affects: how desire becomes re-constituted as *lack,* as well as the other lines of possibility simultaneously at work.

Schizoanalysis studies the machinic systems at work in the production of utterances (verbal or typed) and the subjectivities that these systems produce (Guattari, 1989/ 2013). Guattari's close attention to technological machines is useful for the study of *digital voice*. He moves beyond a "machine as anathema" approach that worries that "technology is leading us to a situation of inhumanity and of rupture with any kind of ethical project" (1995b, p. 8). The technological machine is connected "with other machinic systems which are not themselves technological"; there are also linguistic, social, economic, aesthetic, biological, music, logic, cosmic and eco-systemic 'machines' (Guattari, 1995b, p. 9). For Guattari, the atomized subject becomes a multiplicity in arrangement with these machinic systems. Guattari's interest in technological machines is not (only) in their representational content – for example, their transmission of a student's inner thoughts about an educator. The interest in machines is in their entangled relations with emerging modes of *subjectification*[2] – that is, processes of capturing and stratifying subjects.

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[2] I spell this word as *subjectification* after the spelling used in translations of Guattari and Deleuze and Guattari's work cited in this chapter. I acknowledge, however, a distinction between *subjectification:* "a thoroughly stratified or captured position", and *subjectivication:* "subjective operations which, although operating within social machines, use the processes of these social machines to form lines of escape from them" (Murphie, 2001, p. 1315). For Murphie, both concepts "involve one's implication in contemporary social

Attending to the machinic enables an analysis of the composition of *digital voice* – in its machinic processes of subjectification - beyond the atomized subject separate from computer, and beyond a normative pre-evaluation of the corrupting influence of the technological machine. Refusing to separate human bodies from objects, environment and affects, inside from outside, 'real' from 'digital', I explore how emerging modes of online student evaluations of teaching shift individual and collective relations to expression and subjectivity, and proliferate combinations of subjectivities in relation to education and the educator: *client-learner-consumer-student-friend*. These shifts may be connected to and may open up universes of reference (see below); they may engender subjectifications that are liberating and/ or potentially damaging.

Digital voice: A concept

Voice is what is spoken from collective *agencements* of enunciation – bodies, affects, discourses, environments, matter, objects, histories, visions – rather than the 'expression' of an individual human subject (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/ 1987, pp. 80-85). In *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* (1989/ 2013), Guattari uses the word *voix/ voie* for voice/ pathway – with the French allowing a "homophonic link between path and enunciation" (p. 3). To combine *voice* with *digital* – to form the concept of *digital voice* - is to productively entwine the 'subjective' and 'material' (which were never separated), and to conjoin the utterance with the path(s) of its formation. Guattari borrows from Pierre Levy the conception of the machinic as "interface", a 'hypertext'" (1995b, p. 8). The "word-processing machine", Guattari argues after Pierre Levy, "completely changes one's relationship to expression" – its "interfaces […] compose and singularize this new universe of reference: writing, the alphabet, printing, computing, the laser printer, Linotype, database, image bank, telecommunications" (Guattari, 1995b, p. 11).

Digital voice, then, is constituted in the interfaces of body, subjectivity, machine, website, among other elements - as curser is moved to a star rating, finger taps mousepad, score enters system, stars illuminate. To explore the constitution of *digital voice* is to explore its ambivalences; accelerations and mutations may not always be in the direction of emancipation nor devastation alone. Guattari and Deleuze's concept of the refrain becomes helpful in these explorations of the movements of star ratings, affects, histories, desires, and futures.

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machines" and both are "pragmatic" (Murphie, 2001, p. 1315). Both processes may be at work in manifestations of *digital voice.*

In thinking about *digital voice* as forming in star ratings on sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers,* I consider the refrains (*ritournelles*) that order entwined existential and digital territories. There are digital paths *I* habitually traverse each morning – through email accounts, social media sites, and their hyperlinked lines of drift – before I re-open a Word document from the previous day. These are "ways of doing things, the little gestures, […] the embodied patterns, that make up our existence" (Walkerdine, 2013, p. 760). These paths are ritualized, part of my existential (re)orientation to the world, to feeling 'held' again in it each morning. Through these territories (made and re-made each day), there are *refrains* – rhythms that temporarily create order from chaos (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/ 1987). Like the lullaby sung by the child when the child feels afraid, the refrain generates a temporary feeling of security (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/ 1987, p. 299). Refrains, for Deleuze and Guattari, are not only musical, but can be sensory, discursive, or semiotic, for instance, Proust's refrain of dipping a biscuit in tea and its associated comforting memories, a familiar word spoken, or the friendly face emerging that brings with it a sense of equilibrium (Guattari, 2000, p. 31). These refrains have an "existential function" (Guattari, 1995b, p. 10). Refrains develop "into territorial motifs and landscapes", even as alterations are introduced as refrains move (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/ 1987, p. 323).

It is not the case, however, that individuals devise their own refrains; Guattari argues that we become "'captured'" by [our] environment, […] by the refrains that go round and round in [our] heads" (Guattari, 2008, cited by Pindar & Sutton, 2008, p. 5). The star rating is a refrain that has emerged and moved with the proliferation of digitized evaluations – evaluations not only of educators, but also of Ebay buyers and sellers, hotels, AirBnb places, Uber drivers, Amazon products, and so on *("was this answer helpful?").* The refrain of the star rating affects the movements we make – *I* pause when booking accommodation online if I cannot find previous star ratings for the host or hotel. The star rating, alongside the price tag, constitute my feelings of security in my consumer choice of where to stay. The star rating is a refrain in my consumer subjectivity, built on the "founding myth of capitalist subjectivity": "'I am the master of myself and of the universe'" (Guattari, 1989/ 2013, p. 26). After (or during) an unpleasant experience of a service, the capacity to complete a star rating offers the promise of having done a public service for future potential consumers. The star rating as refrain offers to protect the potential consumer from potential disagreeable encounter, "intoxicat[ing]" and "anaesthetiz[ing]" with "a collective feeling of pseudo-eternity" (Guattari, 2000, p. 34).

Beyond the semiotics of the star, the questions asked on sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* serve as a grid that curtails the relations that are possible. In *Dialogues,* Deleuze and Parnet lampoon the imperative to "'explain oneself'" in the conventional interview, conversation or dialogue, where the interviewee must respond to questions that they have not invented (Deleuze &

Parnet, 2006/ 1977, p. 1). We might think, here, of the pre-formulated SET or *Rate My Professors* question to be answered by the student. The question becomes a "grille […] such that everything which does not pass through the grille cannot be materially understood" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006/ 1977, p. 20). The student, for example, is compelled to rate the educator's "exam difficulty" and "textbook use" – but the educator may not have set an exam, nor used a textbook, and "difficulty" may be the goal of the pedagogical exchange. Deleuze and Parnet find "particularly stupid" the question, "'What are you becoming?'" (or '*How has this course changed you?*') since, "as someone becomes, what he is becoming changes as much as he does himself" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006/ 1977, p. 2). The aim in the face of such questions, then, becomes to "get out" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006/ 1977, p. 1) – to avoid completing a student evaluation, or to avoid reading student evaluation responses.

We might, then, analyze how the star rating as a refrain, and the question as a grille, have become part of processes of ordering educational territories, and the universes of reference that accompany sites like *Rate My Professors* or *Rate My Teachers* as machinic systems. Guattari, in his essay, *On Machines,* describes the "*universes of reference"* that develop around a machinic system, by which he means "ontological heterogeneous universes, which are marked by historic turning points, a factor of irreversibility and singularity" (Guattari, 1995b, p. 9). *Rate My Professor* and *Rate My Teacher* are semiotically connected to institutional geographical and pedagogical territories, institutional evaluations, histories of pedagogical relations – that have formed in relation to particular associations between bodies, machines, subjects, worlds. Guattari notes the connections between shifts in learning language for children and shifts in the universes of reference of a word-processor:

> [C]hildren who are learning language from a word-processor are no longer within the same types of universes of references as before, neither from a cognitive point of view (of how there may be another organization of memory, or rather memories…), nor in the order of affective dimensions and social and ethical relationships. (1995b, p. 11)

Likewise, it might be argued that tertiary and secondary students engage with *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers* within different universes of reference to those previously associated with pedagogical evaluative practices. Below, I suggest some of the universes of reference associated with online SET machines.

Clicking on the name of my university on *Rate My Teachers*, I am asked: *"In your own words please describe* [University name]. *What do you want the world to know?"* It is promised that my digital utterance will be amplified – "the world" will come to "know" what this particular insitution is like. This could be described as a *universe of reputation,* as an extension to previous work on the "digital 'reputation' economy" (Hearn, 2010) and the "digital reputation society" (Yoon, 2015). The evaluator becomes, in the production of an evaluation, a "'prosumer' of data related to the reputation

of others", to be consumed by others (Yoon, 2015, p. 109). In the simultaneous production of a rank or list (for example, of educators at an educational institution), the student (and the educator) locates their self in this universe of reference. The educator (and student) is to study these lists according to the logics of the society of control: "the brashest rivalry [is] a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 5). To produce a rating, and read a rating, is to "simultaneously individuate and fit ourselves into the logic of the market; we find our 'selves' in the list" (Hearn, 2010, p. 429). In these universes of "academic consumerism" (Gregory, 2011, p. 169), these ratings and reports become folded in with self-constructed accounts of the entrepreneurial educator subject (who includes student evaluation data in their performance review). These ratings and reports become entwined with normative evaluations of future pay scales, and threaded into promotional statements used to market the educational institution as capable of satisfying the desire of the Oedipal student subject who *lacks* pedagogical satisfaction.

A simultaneous dulling and activation is at work in such processes, that may be paralleled and distinguished from Guattari's discussion of the television. In *Chaosmosis,* Guattari describes the work of the television*:* when watching television, "I exist at the intersection", of "perceptual fascination" that almost hypnotises, captivated with the "narrative content" while laterally aware "of surrounding events (water boiling on the stove, a child's cry, the television…)", and occupied by "a world of phantasms" in "daydreams" (1995a, pp. 16-17). Guattari continues: "My feeling of personal identity is thus pulled in different directions" – the "refrain that fixes me in front of the screen" rules in this instance (1995a, p. 17). An online evaluation of teaching may seem, in contrast to the television, to enable the evaluator to actively construct their own narrative, to activate their own pedagogical daydreams, to articulate their own institutional fascinations. Yet, the vocabulary and signs for constructing an account of pedagogical relations are circumscribed to the categories and linguistic prompts of the website *("easy", "helpful", "textbook use"…*). These star ratings and linguistic categories become a refrain of tedious repetition – students may be invited to complete multiple student evaluations of teaching each semester, filling these in (amidst the cacophony of other star rating systems) automatically, without thought[3]. Guattari argues that "[c]apitalistic subjectivity" forms through the "controlling and neutralizing [of] the maximum number of existential refrains" (2000, p. 34). In SET, and sites like *Rate My Professors* and *Rate My Teachers,* the number of existential refrains (to describe the educator, the student, and their immanent relation) are circumscribed, curtailed to enable maximum efficiency in institutional analysis (for SET) and data mining (for sites like *Rate My Professors*). While decentred flows of power, where the student can discipline the educator, offer "a multiplication of the anthropological angles" on questions of pedagogical quality

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[3] Acknowledgement and thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this point.

and effectiveness, these may be accompanied by "a growth of particularisms and racisms" (Guattari, 1989/ 2013, p. 1). These machinic processes of subjectification may reinforce a seemingly inevitable cycle of hierarchies and antagonisms, and narrow what is understood to be teaching, learning, and pedagogy: what is formed in the interfaces between students, educators, matter, signs, worlds.

Transversal possibilities

Creative interventions, or "new weapons" (Deleuze, 1992, p. 4), are necessary in order to disrupt these refrains and their universes of reference. To consider alternative possibilities relating to pedagogical evaluation, this final section takes up Guattari's interest in transversal institutional experiments in clinical practice. In his political activism and clinical practice at the La Borde clinic (see Dosse, 2007/2010; Genosko, 2002, 2003), Guattari jumbled and re-worked conventional clinical hierarchies, "seek[ing] something that runs counter to the 'normal' order of things": transversal relations and "dissident vectors" where "other intensities […] form new existential configurations" (Guattari, 2000, p. 30). I extend this work to consider the openings potentialized by greater attention to pedagogical *agencements* beyond the humanistic student/educator relation alone.

Guattari's *transversality* exceeds both "pure verticality [reified hierarchies] or simple horizontality [flattened 'democracy']" (Genosko, 2009, p. 51), by introducing "specific and tangible" "variations in relationships that disrupt, rework but also productively inhabit hierarchies" (Ringrose, 2015, p. 399). The aim was to experiment with agencements, to see what might happen differently with a slight tweak, with an introduction of something new – towards new existential and institutional configurations. In experiments like "cook for a day", where a patient with psychosis was repositioned in another role (cook), shifts were effected not only in human relations, but also in relations of food matter, people, machines and space. Such creative productions of new relations were oriented towards the future (to what might be) rather than the past. Rather than returning to analyses of individual or collective past (Oedipal) causes of present problems, these interventions aimed to create forward movements – directed towards virtual futures where the new is fashioned.

Guattari's clinical creative experiments might be juxtaposed with contemporary pedagogical work that reworks pedagogical relations in educational institutions. Michael Fielding, a long-term advocate for "radical collegiality" in education (1999), has described work that seeks to reconfigure student/ educator relations as a "transformative 'transversal' approach" (2001, p. 124). Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill and Peter Felten (2014) have written about their recent interventions in tertiary settings that seek to "draw on students' insights not only through collecting their responses to our courses but also through working with them to study and design teaching and learning together"

(p. 1). They do not dismiss course rating processes, but rather frame them as a potential "starting point for expanding into a more collaborative, sustainable student-faculty partnership orientation towards assessment" of particular units or courses (p. 188). They describe a re-positioning of "both students and faculty as learners as well as teachers" (p. 7) as "radical – even counter-cultural" (p. 1), contrasting this work to the "student-as-consumer model that has become increasingly prevalent in higher education" (p. 7). These are "partnerships" that require students and educators to step "out of traditional roles" (p. 9) and to work processually (p. 195), for example, to co-design a unit or course, dialogue about the progress of a course, and collaboratively evaluate the course. We might compare this work to the La Borde interventions; the co-production of curriculum and relations is oriented forwards (to what might be) rather than only backwards (to the past semester). These interventions are, potentially, cautious combinations of capacities to open up curricula and pedagogy towards new refrains and universes of reference beyond the consumeristic student/ teacher binary. However, these interventions, in themselves, may not be sufficient; further experimentation is necessary.

Collective (digital) assemblages of enunciation?

Interventions like La Borde's "cook for a day" and the interventions discussed by Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014) are arguably institutionally-initiated, engineered by teams of clinicians, counsellors, or educators, with the patient or student perhaps less aware initially of the institutional experiment that is about to transpire. In analyses of contemporary institutional evaluative interventions, there may also be an anthropocentric focus on student/ educator subjectivities and human relations – a logic that, if we meet face-to-face, the relation will necessarily be more life-affirming. A profound ecosophical shift is needed in order to shift contemporary consumeristic styles of thought: experimentation with and analysis of the interconnections of environmental (and digital) ecologies, social ecologies, and mental ecologies (Guattari, 1996, p. 264).

Established categories (such as 'evaluation', 'teaching' and 'learning') need to be displaced through reworking material, digital and social arrangements. Guattari writes:
> What I am precisely concerned with is a displacement of the analytic problematic, making it drift from systems of *statements* and preformed subjective *structures* toward *Assemblages of enunciation* able to forge new coordinates for reading and to 'bring into existence' new representations and propositions. (Guattari, 1989/ 2013, p. 17, emphasis his)

How might we move beyond questions of how to improve the technical validity of SET, or how to impede the mutations of sites like *Rate My Professors*? Further creative experimentation is needed institutionally, and beyond institutions, to displace the present analytic problematic. Further interrogation is needed of what environmental, digital, social and corporeal conditions enable and

generate the invention of "new coordinates" that "'bring into existence'" novel pedagogical relationalities and evaluative practices (Guattari, 1989/ 2013, p. 17). To suggest the potentiality of attending to moments of micropolitical, transversal movement, I turn to a contemporary example. In this example, we glimpse an affirmative re-constitution of pedagogical relations – even as this moment is quickly recaptured.

In a recent study where I invited tertiary educators to construct a narrative of "*something that you did as part of your tertiary teaching to explore, challenge, disrupt or experiment with the ideas of 'evaluation' and 'feedback'*" (see Mayes, under review), one educator ('Scott', a pseudonym) gave an account of using the video recording function on his university's online learning platform:

> I trialled with [students], initially not providing students a choice: "Right, you're going to receive audio feedback [on their assignment work]. Within that audio feedback somewhere, I will subsume your grade, so you have to listen to it." [….] I tried that and, you know, students seemed to respond well to that. […] [T]he first years all would say, "Oh, really enjoyed that". It was about how it was novel; it was different, it was about an engagement with me. […] The novelty of it was good, the fact that it was immediate, and I emailed it to them. So, they clicked on it, and they listen[ed] to it immediately. […]
>
> [T]his is just one person's comment: that, "I didn't get a very good grade but I like that you were supportive in your feedback" – there's an emotional, there's a tonal, you know, you can talk about, "look, I get a sense of what you're saying here but you know this is, I think you should articulate it this way" or "hey this is the section where you really need to develop your own...." There's a supportive voice through that, that perhaps isn't necessarily available or perceived in a written feedback, I don't know. […] That was the sense I got from that individual's verbal feedback [to me]. […] [J]ust looking at words – they could be written by anyone, but if they're hearing my voice and they've got that connection with me that there's a more of a supportive tone. That's the feeling I sort of got with that individual's comments that even though they hadn't done particularly well, they didn't feel like all hope is lost. […] It was "Oh okay [Scott] sort of understands - Okay, yeah I still feel supported through this stuff."

The digital video recording function serves as an *intercesseur* - a French word that is often translated as 'mediator', but that may be better translated as "intersection/ intercession" (Stivale, 2008, p. 41). It is not so much that Scott recording his verbal voice allows the 'tone' to be transmitted without alteration to the student, who can then more 'accurately' interpret Scott's intention. Rather, the pathway of formation – an utterance spoken in Scott's office and captured and transmuted with digital video recording apparatus, moving and played back by the student in another place and time –

produces what Scott names a "supportive voice." This *digital voice* is different from the initial utterance – with an emergent pathway of formation, transmutation, and reception.

Charles Stivale (2003, 2008) has eloquently described the pedagogical work forming between Claire Parnet, Deleuze's former student, and Deleuze, in the co-authored book *Dialogues II* and the documentary *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet [Gilles Deleuze's ABC Primer, with Claire Parnet]* (Boutang, 1996). According to Stivale, it is in the "interchange between teacher-student as well as the assemblage to which their exchange gives voice" that "hierarchical rapport" is "reverse[d] and scramble[d]" – "that is, of just who is teaching and learning" (Stivale, 2003, p. 33). Thought congeals between the two of them – Claire Parnet is an *intercesseur* to thought – in arrangement with a growing list of other *intercesseurs:* "AND Félix, AND Fanny, AND you [Deleuze], AND all of those whom we speak, AND me [Parnet]" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006/ 1977, p. 26).

To extend Stivale's discussion of pedagogical *intercesseurs,* working with Scott's account of the video recording of his voice, it is not only human bodies who serve as *intercesseurs* in the production of thought. The digital camera and microphone participate in the generation of a video recording of Scott's 'feedback.' The speakers or earphones, that play this recording when the student taps the ▶ icon, contribute to the co-production of pedagogical thought between Scott, the student and others – as an interface or extension. New refrains – classroom refrains repeated but shifted to another territory – may be in formation as *digital voice* moves along these pathways. Universes of reference are also at work: "historic turning points" circulating around the work of which Scott's (recorded) voice speaks – past classroom conversations mingle with Scott's (recorded) discussion of the student's work in its singularity (Guattari, 1995b).

Simultaneous subjectifications and de-subjectifications may be at work in these movements of *digital voice.* As the student 'sees' Scott's face on the video recording, the evaluator is re-humanized: the evaluator that the student sees at this digital interface is (understood to be) Scott – the educator whom the student has worked with for a semester (at least). Yet, this encounter is removed from the embodied pedagogical relation in the classroom – each is de-subjectified from the spatial and corporeal proximity of the face-to-face encounter. "[A] supportive voice" congeals between words and things, humans and machines, past and present and future. There are de-subjectifying movements "outside the two" that flow "in another direction" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006/ 1977, p. 5) from the hyper-visibility of the evaluated educator subject even as, paradoxically, Scott's face is hyper-visible in its digitally-mediated form.

The potentiality of this encounter, at the digital interface, should not be overstated. Indeed, there were correlative conservative movements at work in Scott's later attempt to continue experimenting with the potentiality of *digital voice.* Scott continued to give an account to me of his attempt to introduce this video-feedback processes with his second-year undergraduate students, giving them "a choice: whether they want a written or audio [feedback]." Unlike his first-year students, these second-year students "all wanted [feedback] written", not in video-recorded form. Scott's working theory was that these students "perhaps are already conditioned that 'at university this is the process, you do this, you receive it, this written feedback or this rubric or we access it online, and that's what I'm comfortable doing'", while the first-years "hadn't had that experience yet, [and so were] more open to it." The stabilizing refrain is compelling; we cling to what is familiar and safe. For Scott, these second-year students' responses made him wonder whether there is the need for "a bigger conversation that goes to our diet of assessment that we offer students and the diet of feedback [they receive]."

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered ways of thinking about the interfaces and intersections/ intercessions of the digital in pedagogical evaluative practices, and suggested possibilities for affirmative modes of transversal pedagogical practice. In the video recording of Scott's verbal feedback, there is a moment of radical potential – where something other than the antagonisms of evaluation (of both student and educator) seems to be in formation. Affirmative movements towards different pedagogical relations materialize – even as these are quickly redirected (and, indeed, such uses of video recording of educators' feedback may be soon be swiftly captured and mandated to educators by institutions).

To pluralize analysis of the intersections and intercessions of words and things renders the digital neither destructive, nor necessarily liberating. Whether or not the digital is anathema or emancipating (or both simultaneously) depends on what happens *in the moment where the utterance forms and where it moves.* Each component in the collective *agencement* of enunciation (thoughts, affects, machines, matter) dynamically participates in how and where this moment will turn. Therefore, experimentation is necessary with collective *agencements* of enunciation. What is formed in the moment when a pedagogical evaluation is formed must be understood in relation to its paths (*voix/ voie*) – the path(s) of its formation and what the evaluation *does* as it travels.

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