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cjdseditor@uwaterloo.ca

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**Escaping “The Organism, Signifiante, and Subjectification”
in the *Recounting Huronia* Project**

David Fancy
Brock University

Abstract

Describing creative activity undertaken by researchers and co-researcher survivors in the context of the *Recounting Huronia* project, this paper extends existing literature on Deleuze & Guattari and disability arts by exploring how artistic activity provides opportunities for escape from the constraints of what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as the three central strategies by which restrictive systems capture bodies, namely the stratifications of “the organism, signifiante, and subjectification.” Examined in this paper are the specific ways in which one survivor’s involvement in storybook making, poetry, and performance lead to the bundle “percepts” and “affects” in such a way as to generate what Deleuze and Guattari (1994) describe as artistic “monuments.” Far from being constituted by fixities, such monuments provide key pathways for potentially liberatory disarticulations of the restrictive organism, for experimentation in the face of limiting signifiante, and new individuations beyond institutionally coded subjectifications.

Keywords

Deleuze & Guattari, artistic method, fabulation, institutionalization

**Escaping “The Organism, Significance, and Subjectification”
in the *Recounting Huronia* Project**

David Fancy
Brock University

This paper sets out to investigate how artistic experiences undertaken in the context of the *Recounting Huronia* project—in which I participated as a researcher using arts-based modalities in collaboration with intellectually disabled (ID) co-researchers from 2013-16—have operated and have impacted the project’s co-researcher participants. The co-researchers in question are all survivors of an extensive range of institutional abuses as former residents of the Huronia Regional Centre (HRC) in Orillia Ontario, Canada.¹ Implicit in the title of the project is that certain types of re-telling by the survivors of their own experiences of institutionalized abuse can afford opportunities for resituating perspectives on their own (often difficult) time in institutional care, thereby increasing the potential for agency and shared solidarity in the face of the enduring traumas resulting from such experiences. Indeed, it is the contention of this paper that while re-narrativization has been key to the project’s anticipated pathways of efficacy—the way the project has sought to create contexts for intervention, support, and self/group care—potentially beneficial effects also involve additional forms of artistic “recounting” that complement and extend beyond reconstitutions of humanist subjectivity that are normally associated with the work of re-narrativization. A complex array of intersecting artistic experiences including autoethnography, poetry, image manipulation, storytelling, movement, and performance have contributed to the overall impacts of the *Recounting Huronia* project. I will be basing the considerations herein largely on evidentiary terrain of ongoing conversations and workshop experiences that I have had with one of the survivor co-researchers, Barry Smith.

¹ See Rossiter & Clarkson (2013) for an account of the history of the Huronia Regional Centre.

The question of “evidence,” of what is considered compelling “proof” of the effects of artistic experience, is a complex one straddling as it necessarily does a significant range of mutually constitutive assumptions around identity, reception of experience, the influence of cultural and material contexts, and so forth. It is with a view to countering normative and reductively empirical methodological perspectives that would attempt to assert that only that which can be adjudicated by an “objective” and externally mandated norm—often those consciously or unconsciously adopted and promoted by ableist and scientific discourses (Williams & Robinson, 2014)—can count as evidence that I draw on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1994). In the first instance, my use of their conceptual apparatus aims to complement existing literature on Deleuze and Guattari and disability (Bayliss, 2009; Goodley, Hughes, & Davies, 2012; Koppers, 2009) by articulating how a specific series of modes of “capture” to which survivors can be understood to have been and continue to be subjected—namely those of the “organism, significance, and subjectification” that I elaborate upon below—can be beneficially countered by precise dynamics that Deleuze and Guattari also understood to be operating in artistic practice and one’s participation in it. Integral to the exploration of such processes is the assumption that even though the re-narrativization of experience may not result in creative expressions that are “factually” or demonstrably accurate *vis-à-vis* survivors’ experiences, this does not make them any less true or authentic with regard to how they communicate the nature of survivors’ experience, or how these are taken up by non-survivor audiences and co-participants.

Secondly, a central aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s overall project will be suggested to be relevant here: specifically, the non-hierarchical types of political commitments and formations that can issue from the immanentist and non-binarizing engagements with ontology that their

work evidences. These types of relationalities can have potentially significant implications for the broader efficacies of arts-based projects such as *Recounting Huronia* in the ways in which they are situated in the overall ecologies of disability advocacy and pursuit of both progressive as well as redressive legislative agendas. In his writing on Deleuze and disability, Philip Bayliss (2009) addresses some of the unintended consequences that projects (artistic or not) that link agency, autonomy, and collective social visibility of identity groups may have. When articulating a social theory of disability in contradistinction to an essentializing medical one that would simply reduce an individual to their disability, the risks of essentializing the individual still remain, simply in a different form. Bayliss notes that the thinking underlying social theories of disability “is located in an Enlightenment (Humanist) perspective, which sees the human subject as autonomous and capable of perfection through changing social structures, especially through a rights agenda and social inclusion” (p. 281). As such, the strategic “rendering visible” of the traumas into wider social spaces of those such as Huronia survivors, even if pursued by well-intentioned allies with a view to changing social structures, can simply serve to re-inscribe paternalist narratives of care around the disabled population, and at the same time reduce disabled people to their disability and their affiliate traumas. How can arts-based projects and the theorizing around them negotiate these competing and differently constraining essentialisms?

In her writing on disability and the arts, Petra Kupperts (2009) writes about how the work of Deleuze and Guattari can be relevant to questions of disability, particularly the way in which the complex relationalities achievable via a rhizomatic understanding of the world—consisting of generative transversal forms of connection that happen outside of regulated/policed bodies and spaces—permit the opening of smooth, unstriated spaces (in concepts, discourses, bodies) that are unencumbered by restrictive and fixed articulations of notions of disability that inhibit the

disabled person’s agency. Drawing examples from the natural world, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make a case that the rhizome, consisting of many interconnected root systems without a discernable begin, end, or anchoring centre, offers up more opportunity than the ‘arborescent’ tree with all of its roots and branches anchored by a lone central trunk. They argue that rhizomatic descriptions of phenomena provide more accurate engagements with a world determined by connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity rather than by originary and foundational moorings which all causes and meanings issue forth from and lead back to. Koppers (2009) counterposes the rhizomatic model of disability—with all of its attendant possibilities for new alliances, self and collective conceptions of identity—with the arborescent social and medical models for which disability is simply an extrinsic or intrinsic matter respectively. She suggests that the rhizomatic model is one:

in which the extrinsic and intrinsic mix and merge, as they do in my own physical and psychical being when I am in pain, and cannot walk up the stairs, and wish for a painkiller, and take pride in my difference (what other choice do I have?), and feel unable to speak of the nature of my discomfort, cannot find the words, but find comfort in the company of others whose pain might be different, but who somehow feel *sympatico* (pp. 225-226).

In other words, the rhizomatic model provides the opportunity for strategic identifications with the inescapable implications of the *lived experience of disability*, which the otherwise progressive extrinsic social model, premised on the notion that disability is imposed on a body by the world that thus becomes inaccessible to that body, does not leave much room for. Clearly, the rhizomatic model proposed by Koppers (2009) also resists the discursive and material straitjacketing of the medical model that would presume to determine, with finality, the

pathologizing realities of identified aberrations intrinsic to individual bodies. She continues by affirming that:

the rhizomatic model of disability produces an abundance of meanings that do not juxtapose pain and pleasure or pride and shame, but allow for an immanent transformation, a coming into being of a state of life in this world, one that is constantly shifting and productive of new subject/individual positions (p. 226).

In her argument, Kuppens uses poetry to explore “the affective registers of disability metaphors” (p. 227) with a view to proposing ones involving both extrinsic and intrinsic qualities. It is clear that the potential for “new subject/individual positions” (p. 227) cultivated in the rhizomatic model speaks to the political potentials of such a model given that new identities have the capability to negotiate spaces within and beyond restrictions imposed by various arborescent understandings of disability.

Departing now from the initial schema which Kuppens establishes, and drawing further on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) thought in order to clearly articulate the kinds of discursive and material constraints which artistic expression needs to counter, it is important to note that the Huronia Regional Centre (HRC) experience—as existing scholarship on institutionalization and the other contributions to this issue ably demonstrate—was not premised on anything resembling a rhizomatic notion of disability, but instead actively pathologized and abused those given over to its care. The specific types of capture—or “stratification” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms (1987, pp. 502-503)—that exposed bodies to the kinds of taxonomization central to discourses justifying the warehousing of ID individuals at locations like HRC were the three strata they identify as central to the capture of all bodies within restrictive systems, namely those of “the organism, significance, and subjectification” (p. 159). Although not speaking specifically about

disability, Deleuze and Guattari explain how, in normative and restrictive socialities, unless our bodies are understood to have an externally predicated and taxonomized coherence involving the same consistent and repeatable components as other “mainstream” bodies, we have a problem: “You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you’re just depraved” (p. 159). Given that the minds and bodies of ID populations do not always necessarily match up with discursively and socially mandated coherences that allegedly organize more normative bodies, depravity is projected onto ID bodies, and all manner of minoritizing and abusive behavior is bound to ensue for those who have become vulnerable to those projections, as the case of HRC demonstrates. These kinds of socially mandated cruelties persist until such time as the restrictive taxonomizations are disassembled, as is what has been gradually occurring over the course of the long drive for de-institutionalization and the closing of sites such as HRC in Ontario.

With regard to the restrictive stratification of significance, Deleuze and Guattari (1987?) note that “You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you’re just a deviant” (p. 159). This is an insight also clearly borne out in the HRC circumstance where the “other-than-mainstream” signifying and interpretive pathways of those living with ID led to so-called normative bodies consigning these “othered” bodies to deviant status. Pathologization and corrective measures necessarily ensue from such projections. With regard to the third prong of stratification, that of subjectification, the constrained and localizable identities of ID people institutionalized at sites such as Huronia are predicated on a fixed, essential, and immutable subjectivity whose parameters are organized by the categorizations of social forces considering themselves to be normative: “You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of enunciation recoiled into the subject of the statement—otherwise you’re just a tramp” (p. 159). In other

words, if you are outside normative subjectification, you cannot enunciate language yourself; instead, you are spoken about. Language fixes and localizes you, and by extension you cannot be understood to be in movement, discursively or physically, as the use of quasi-imprisonment, silencing devices, and immobilizing constraints at HRC provides extensive evidence of.

In the face of such stratifications, one must ask what is the source of the energies and forces permitting the “disarticulation” necessary in order to resist capture in the organism, permitting the “experimentation” necessary to move beyond enforced planes of significance, and stimulating the various types of “nomadism” (be these geographic, affective, social, or otherwise) necessary to exceed enforced and bound subjectivities? Again, I will extend beyond Koppers’s (2009) introduction of the rhizomatic model to look at the liberatory valences inherent in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) thinking from their final collaborative volume *What is Philosophy?*, and then present specific dynamics of the artistic event before engaging these in an analysis of three creative projects undertaken in the context of the *Recounting Huronia* project.

The work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1994) presents an interesting challenge to the articulation of what constitutes artistic activity given that the ontological model of the cosmos they propose suggests that all phenomena are always already creative. Their collaborative writing is heavily marked by Deleuze’s own writing in earlier solo texts such as *Difference and Repetition* (1994) and *Expressionism in Philosophy* (1990) in which Deleuze draws on a range of thinkers including Spinoza and Nietzsche in order to posit “the real” as a process of ongoing creation and change. In this processual universe, the interweaving of two key dynamics—that of the actual real and the virtual real—continuously generate difference as a positive and affirmative force ensuring continuous differentiation in the universe. The actual real, comprised of the present state of affairs of bodies with their mixtures and qualities, is always already run-

through with the virtual real, consisting of incorporeal events and potentialities. The mutually generative dynamic between the virtual and actual reals leaves infinite amounts of potential for different future manifestations over the course of the unfolding of the actual real. The political implications of this ontological model for the discussion of the circumstances around HRC are significant. While Deleuze and Guattari’s writing, for example, recognizes the various types of restraint and stratification that I have spoken to above, their generative model that posits potentiality for differentiation and the negotiation of new realities even within the constraints of the most oppressive of “actual reals” is a model that is necessarily intensely affirmative and potentially liberatory.

While the Deleuzian ontological model by its nature presumes potential creativity and formation of the new across all phenomena—something not necessarily inherent to constructivist models such as Butler’s or Foucault’s generally positing bodies as passive materials subject to institutional and discursive forces (Cheah, 1996)—Deleuze argues along with Guattari that *artistic* activity has additional durational qualities above and beyond the (always already) *creative* nature of ontology that causes art to have specific dynamics and effects on bodies engaging in it. In *What is Philosophy?* (1994), Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking around art-making stresses the non-representational aspect of creative practice when they note that “We paint, sculpt, compose, and write with sensations. We paint, sculpt, compose, and write sensations” (p. 166). As such, the goal of artistic practice is not understood to be to arrive at an “accurate” description that resembles the world “as it is,” since resemblance is only ever a by-product of engagement with what Deleuze and Guattari call “affects” and “percepts” (p. 167-69). They stress that verisimilitude has never been art’s goal. . Instead of seeking resemblance, artists seek to extract “percepts” from perception. Percepts are durational elements of sensation that

mark the artist’s relationship with a particular perception, elements that capture something unique in that artist’s relationship with the perception that can help illuminate the world for the person who then engages with the work of art.

For example, and using language here (because we are working with language in the context of this journal article), consider Micheal Morrel’s poem *Instructions for hugging the dwarf goodbye at the writer’s conference* (n.d.) in which he describes himself in the third person:

Yes, smaller than
expected, he's our concentrated formula,
use less and wash the same amount of loads.
Environmentally-friendly packaging.

New and Different look.

All of the possible perceptions the poet has in the moments at the end of the writer’s conference when his awkward new colleagues try to negotiate social rituals of departure are not expressed in the poem. Verisimilitude is not important for the poet. Attempts to be even marginally comprehensive would end in an over-determined, lengthy and taxonomic account of his perceptions of the moment that would not necessarily provide the reader with any particularly memorable or lasting sense of the importance of the experience for Morell. However, using his artistic capacity to extract and curate the lasting impression—the percept—of what for him was a key insight in those moments (perceptions) of awkwardly negotiated departure leaves the reader with a unique insight into the ways in which Morrel understands his new colleagues to be framing him according to socially circulating rhetorics of size, sustainability, ethical engagement, and of commodity. The conflation of his own size with the self-satisfied consumer discourses of reduced energy use in times of impending climate disaster ironically indicates the

ways in which equally self-satisfied liberal discourses of paternalist care “package” disability experiences into “friendly” containers that do not threaten to “disable” the supremacy and ableist logics on which this kind of paternalism are based. The humour in the self-description also serves to indicate Morrel’s compassion toward the challenges his colleagues are having negotiating their own internalized and most-likely un-self-aware discourses of ableist supremacy. At the same time, the self-parodying image of himself as a squirt of detergent foregrounds Morell’s own resilience and capacity for multiple responses in the face of insinuating and minoritizing discourses of “otherness,” responses that can be simultaneously critical and affirmative. If the percepts in this instance are the extracted moments of perception that become durational through their capacity to capture and sustain a certain insightful comparative insight of Morrel’s, then the affects are the extracted and durational moments of the “affections”—all those fleeting transitions of feeling and being that the perceptions stimulate. The affects are those shifting intensities in both Morrel and his readers instantiated by the insights stimulated by the percepts: those feelings of renewed awareness and contextualization given the frame of the fresh perspective on disability that the poem provokes and invites.

Such combinations of percepts and affects, even if they are experienced only momentarily in duration, have the capacity to endure in the form of the work of art that holds them. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) specify that:

What is preserved is not the material, which constitutes only the *de facto* condition, but insofar as the condition is satisfied (that is, that canvas, color or stone does not crumble into dust), it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself (p. 166).

They are quick to note that this preservation has the potential to release an experience of its own durationality any time that the bundle of percepts and affects of the work of art is encountered by an audience, reader, or auditor: “Even if the material lasts for only a few seconds it will give sensation to power to exist and be preserved in itself *in the eternity that coexists with this short duration*” (p. 166, emphasis in original).

This durational and generative potential of the work of art can continue to create complex interrelationships between experiencer and experienced even, and perhaps especially, if these are the same person, as I will suggest is the case below with Barry’s experience of his own creations. This reality is, once again, key to the political and social valence inherent in the creative activity in the context of disability or crip arts. The experiences with and in response to artistic activity can contribute to changed ideas and evolved perspectives as well as open up fresh possibilities for subjectivities and agency with and beyond the traumas resulting from the violence of discursive and material minoritization.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the resultant set of processes of the work of art as being less of an object and instead more of “a monument”: “but here the monument is not something commemorating a past, it is a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves and they provide the event with the compound that celebrates it” (pp. 167-68). Commenting on the complex relationship between memory and the events that we draw upon to generate percepts and affects contributive to works of art, Deleuze and Guattari remind us that the work of art-making is not a kind of commemoration of pasts in a way that would fix these pasts indelibly in a fashion that would presuppose that art’s function is to monumentalize or memorialize with any particular kind of fixity. Instead, they stress that “the monument’s action is not memory but fabulation” (p. 168). That is to say, artistic practice does not always do justice to

reductive literal truths of the situation: no one is juxtaposing a box of environmentally sustainable dishwasher tablets with Morrel at the writer’s conference, but the insights from his fabulatory act of staging such a juxtaposition in his writing stands as generative, insightful, and durational. Fabulation becomes a key modality in art’s work of liberating individuals captured by the striated triple-threat of organism, significance, and subjectification.

It needs to be noted that an integral aspect of our collective *Recounting Huronia* process was the recognition that a key reality for the survivor co-researchers in their experiences of institutionalization was likely to be trauma. As such, confronting the restrictions of organism, significance, and subjectification with a view to their displacement necessarily risked re-traumatization. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) take pains to advocate caution in the work of disarticulation, experimentation, and nomadism: “And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. You don’t do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive” (p. 160). The risks of too rapidly divesting ourselves of the way in which the world has shaped us, or even romantically assuming that this is indeed fully possible, can lead to implosion: “if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion, hallucination and psychic death” (p. 160).

Not incidentally, such risks are often played-up by controlling institutions to be more extreme than they actually are. Barry has regularly told me of the highly regulated eating and medical environment that existed at Huronia, where the predictable cadence of group meals, the enforced collective showering, and other bodily rituals were imposed with military precision, with threats of wrack and ruin being promised to those who did not acquiesce willingly. In Barry’s words, “we couldn’t do anything different. They had no flexibility. Every day was the

same as the next, and the next day after that was the same.” Similarly, the discourse around “craziness” at Huronia was an often used threat to remind Barry and his peers that any learning or inquiry that did not involve a form of knowledge acquisition immediately applicable to an efficacious negotiation of “normal people’s world” was destined to bring the owner of such curiosity “trouble”:

They didn’t like me poking around, asking questions. ‘Why are you doing this to us?’, I’d ask. They didn’t care. I was told to keep my mouth shut and my questions to myself. It was a ‘repeat after me’ situation.

Indeed, as opposed to a complete divestment or complete adoption of imposed normativities, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) advocate for a measured engagement with these normativities as a means of survival and gradual negotiation of increased freedom:

You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjection, if only to turn them against their own systems when circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality (p. 160).

“Mimic the strata” becomes Deleuze and Guattari’s mantra summarizing their advocated approach of caution, which is a sufficient adoption of normative and enforced lifeways to ensure survival, complemented by a careful engagement with forces that can move to their outside. This approach was as true for the survivors at the time of their domicile at HRC as it needed to be after when working with artistic practices that threatened on many occasions to lead to the resurgence of sedimented traumas.

Moving to specific projects then, how did artistic activity—with its bundling of percepts and affects leading to the generation of monuments—largely unavailable in any real sense to survivors during their time at HRC lead to increased potentials for disarticulation, experimentation and nomadism, and by extension, a reconstitution of one’s subjectivity and accompanying potentials for agency? Although, as I will demonstrate, each of these three areas of potential can be argued to be intensified during the creative activities undertaken, I will focus on one at a time via three separate sets of the kinds of artistic activities that Barry and the rest of the co-researchers undertook over the course of the *Recounting Huronia* project: journaling, poetry, and performance.

Journaling and Disarticulation

An important first project with the Huronia survivors that was undertaken during the spring and fall of 2015 workshops were the “story workbooks” where we collaborated with our co-researcher partners to develop a hand-made storybook full of images, text, and drawing that would express individual survivors’ experiences of Huronia. These expressions of experience were not viewed through the pursuit of literal memories, but rather via a carefully negotiated fabulation that integrated shards of memory, accounts of historical occurrences, and affective lenses and perspectives from the present. Barry’s book, like the other books, was constructed by fellow artist researcher nancy viva davis halifax with large square pieces of heavy brown-coloured card and held together with colourful ribbon run through metal eyelets. Texts were identified with white nametags on the cover page where survivors wrote their names. Barry was immediately sensitive to the resonances with previous booklets in which he had written during school at HRC: “It’s like school. We wrote in books in school.” His initial concern manifested in

the first two of three monthly creative sessions that we dedicated to the story workbooks for “writing between the lines so I don’t get in trouble” was gradually replaced by the opportunity to “write outside of the lines” and “in different colours.”

The first spread of two pages of Barry’s eventual journal features an image of one of the HRC buildings on the right-hand page, complemented by a drawing of a long—in Barry’s words “blood red”—tree trunk with stunted branches. The tree is labeled “PAST” and a series of words, percepts that capture Barry’s insight into the singularity of his experience, issue forth from the branches where the leaves would otherwise be, including “TRAPPED, IMPRISONED, UNEASINESS, SCARY, TENSE, JUMPY, UNCERTAIN, ANTICIPATION, NOBODY CARES, DENIAL, NOT LISTENING.” After some discussion, Barry asked me to provide an additional label to the page, namely “UN-USEFUL ENERGY.” The second and third pages include black and white as well as washed out sepia images of an enclosed space and a long basement hallway from the site. These images suggested, in Barry’s words, “the no way out of the situation” that expressed his feelings about the HRC experience as well as the site visit, which we discussed repeatedly when looking at the various images of the site that the research team had made available as raw materials for the exercise.

The third spread of pages features a close-up image of a lock from a closed door at the HRC, with an evolved image of the now brown tree trunk on the left page featuring the label “PRESENT,” and with green branches coming from the trunk accompanied by the statement “YES I CAN DO ALL THIS,” and featuring the words “FREEDOM, TRUTH, COURAGE, JUSTICE, SOCIAL CONNECTED, WANTED.” In conversation about the HRC site during the workshops, Barry returned regularly to the experience of having given a tour to younger ID folks during the site visit, and so added “AMAZING TOUR” and “LISTENED TO ME” to the

branches of this second tree. The secondary description of this page Barry requested was “USEFUL ENERGY.” The following spread of pages included the second moniker “ALL GOOD ENERGY!” and features Barry’s articulation of there being a momentum to his perspective on the page’s theme of “FUTURE ->,” specifically that “SOMETHING IS PUSHING ME,” with “SOCIAL,” “PROFESSIONAL,” and “FAMILY” being key elements of what Barry understands his future to hold, namely “MORE FREEDOM” via being a “JOURNALIST” and telling “STORIES.” Long arrows leave the text “WINDOWS TO THE FUTURE” on the other side of the page and flow into an image taken from inside a large empty and darkened HRC room and toward the windows in the image, one of which seems to be open, leading out into an interior courtyard featuring large brick surfaces on the opposite wall. The shifting of affections instantiated by the narrative of the storybook, the affects released by the “monument” of the artwork created, contributed to the direction the work undertook over the weeks of its creation.

The discussion of the HRC experience in the story workbook sessions, particularly at the end of the process when we had the opportunity to read the entire book a few times, was fed by Barry’s considerations of what his body was feeling in the present as he worked through the memories of his time there. The literal capture of his body in the institution from which he could not leave was complemented by an insinuating and long-lasting feeling of being circumscribed at a deep corporeal level with feelings of capture, anxiety, of violation, and of unsafety. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the discursive and material realities of institutional life, the “actual real” of living there, had and continues to this day to deeply constrain Barry’s potentials on an organismic level, suppressing his capacities for activating virtual potentials for imagining different futures beyond the recursive looping of recycled trauma and fear of “getting into

trouble.” In some small way, the poem opened up space not simply of “ownership” of a process of constitution of subjectivity, but specifically of a process that was not characterized only by redress on the level of recognition of past sufferings and of more complete citizenship—although the poem work can be understood to open on to these more empirically verifiable and legalistic recognitions—but of an experience of disarticulation. This power to be the one responsible for reconstituting one’s own subjectivity through a reconfiguration of one’s own sense of organismic constraint offered temporary but durational (in the sense of being “monumental”) potentials for living an experience of freedom outside of the compulsive and closed-loop rhythms of the previously traumatizing institutional experience.

Reflecting the hint of ambiguity about a hopeful future, given that the aspiration is located within an image of the site itself from which somewhat of an exit seems to be in evidence, after extensive discussion about where Barry felt his current state and future met he asked me to write “SUSPENDED ANIMATION” on the page. The self-generative or auto-poetic force of his own intensified sense of agency, fueled by ally-ships with those in the project organized along horizontal/equal rather than vertical/superior axes, manifested in the next and final page of Barry’s journal. It featured Barry’s tracing of his own hand in blue colour along with the text “HAND OF THE FUTURE, PUSHING ME FORWARD.” This statement reaffirms for Barry, in his words, the fact that he wants “to get out of suspended animation.” The hand, an externalized manifestation of his own response to the affects generated by the monument of his artwork, readies itself on the page to lead Barry forward in a productive disarticulation of the institutionally inflicted organismic constraints that have held him in unnecessarily fixed positions of non-becoming for far too long.

Poetry and Experimentation

Over the course of the project, Barry has spoken of the importance of “getting things right” so as to “be invisible” and “fly under the radar” in response to the seemingly perennial concern and threat of “getting into trouble” for any possible divergence from programmed experiences of his everyday life (concern that if he takes his insulin at the wrong time he will lose his autonomy to live by himself, fear that if he says the wrong thing to his landlord it will impact his living conditions, etc.). His concern around ostensibly “correct” ways of doing things became apparent in some real moments of anxiety and ultimately a “feeling of freedom” he experienced when doing a poetry exercise we undertook during workshops in the spring of 2015. Participants were provided sheets by project leaders Kate Rossiter and Nancy Viva Davis Halifax containing a series of prompts in the forms of statements that they then completed according to the suggested categories of object or activity that would be personal to them, but not necessarily be immediately logical. The prompt “Before Huronia I was _____” invited participants to list “an activity,” “a favourite food,” “a favourite place,” and “a favourite thing to do.” In Deleuze and Guattari’s language, what was being invited was essentially percepts—extracted intensities from lived perceptions of experience recalled via memory—that would contribute to the landscape of the poem.

The first stanza of Barry’s resulting poem reads:

Before Huronia we chummed around with other kids in class

Before Huronia I was a birthday cake, went to my friend’s house, and played
games.

When we read this back aloud, Barry’s first question offered up with a laugh was “I know I’m sweet but how can I be a birthday cake?” I quipped that “Well, you said you were sweet, maybe

that’s a quality you share with a birthday cake.” He answered that “Well, I did have lots of friends before I went to Orillia, so maybe.”

We moved to the next phase of creation. The second stanza, not involving any specific categories of suggested response, ended up reading:

Before Huronia I was scared of getting into trouble
Before Huronia I loved to coax girls into the basement
and my home zoo full of all kinds of animals.

Barry was satisfied with this, remarking with a chuckle “Maybe the basement business was when my family gave me away.” After a silence we progressed with work on the third stanza that continued the exploration and exhumation of feelings and affects buried underneath and in the time before the HRC experience. It reads:

Before Huronia my teachers were always interesting to me
They were blue animals in the sky
And they used to call me ‘little Joe’
Which made me feel smooth.

Barry’s reaction to the full poem after we read it aloud was revelatory. The initial concern about the legitimacy of the comparison between himself and a birthday cake was replaced, when we finished reading the third stanza, with an embrace of the experimental comparativism that the prompts and suggested categories of response had invited. “I didn’t think of it that way before,” he said, “They were strange and loving to me at the same time. If I think about them now calling me ‘little Joe’ it does make me feel smooth. I think we all loved each other.” For Barry, the opportunity to reclaim and reconstitute a series of percepts on his own terms through an unpredictable series of linguistic counterpoints contributed to his expressed feelings at the time

of ownership both over the memories from which the percepts were drawn, as well as the process of creation itself. Out of all the work I have seen him do over the past three years, he was perhaps the most enthusiastic over this work, with the expanded possibilities of experimental language use and juxtaposition of imagery appearing to infuse him with a strong sense of affirmation and possibility with regards to a reconstituted sense of his own subjectivity: “I did it. I wrote that. That was me. That is me. I can be a birthday cake and like girls. I can have a zoo in my basement.” Seemingly suspending for a moment the risk of “getting into trouble”—his common refrain that even populates the beginning of the poem—Barry established a zone where “experimentation replaces interpretation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 284), specifically, interpretations of disability imposed discursively and materially from without, and as such aspects of his own subjectivity were momentarily reconstituted outside of a dominant narrative marked by formative experiences of constraint in the institutional context. Referring back to the experience of the poem when I showed him the photographs of the poem sheets a year later, the trace experience remained, speaking to the poem’s ‘monumental’ status as a bundle of gathered percepts and affects: “That was a days where everything could happen at once.” When I pressed further and asked him if he meant the day when he wrote the poem or the earlier days as a child before Huronia, he answered “All of those days.”

Performance and Nomadism

Although not primarily framed as specifically artistic but rather a research collection activity, the entire group of researchers and co-researcher survivors travelled to HRC for a two-day site-visit in October 2014 on the last weekend that the location was open and available to visitors. Staffed by anxious and inexperienced young employees from the Ontario Ministry of

Communications that we came to know as the “purple-shirts” because of the colour of their matching polo shirts, the site served as a powerful and triggering “*lieux de mémoire*” or “location of memory” for the survivors. The prohibitions and restrictions to our touring of the space, presented in a condescending discourse of “safety”—perversely ironic considering the profound lack of safety experienced by survivors when living there—served to replicate an important affective element of life there for the survivors: “The purple shirt people are no different than the nurses and people who kept an eye on me when I lived here,” Barry observed. “I didn’t know what it would be like to come back again. I figured somebody would be bossing me about and telling me I’m bad.” Nonetheless, the sheer size of the location provided opportunities to sneak into “restricted” areas such as the “pipe room”: a small cupboard with exposed heating pipe on one wall that bore witness of many fingernail scratch marks from the many times small persons were contained there in the dark for extended periods of time. Or again: a quick side turn away from the group in the basement led us to a room where Barry noted with understandable dissociated affect that this was “one room where they had sex with girls.” As Barry confirmed after a follow up question from me when we had reached back upstairs, “they” represented the staff. These performatively (if only briefly) enacted moments of nomadism allowed Barry to access locations seemingly understood by provincial staff to be “dangerous.” Of course, these locations were now understood by provincial staff to be “dangerous” because they possessed affective charges that could disrupt what the staff continuously referred to on their tours as “the history of the location,” denying the lived experiences of trauma necessarily experienced as an ongoing *present* by survivors.

Such momentary resistances to the stratified spaces of the buildings of the former HRC, these temporary nomadisms, served as one pathway of corporeal research for what would later

become the survivors’ various interventions in a *Recounting Huronia Cabaret* presented at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre in Toronto in the spring of 2016. As Barry and I walked through the HRC buildings together for a number of hours over the two-day visit, he would regularly adopt specific physical postures—curated percepts expressing memories through the lens of the present—to incarnate the repetitive motions he had undertaken over long hours of floor cleaning, the defensive readiness position taken in the showers when the prospect of some kind of risk of physical intervention from staff loomed, the fixed and breathless stillness position of waiting in various hiding places, and so forth. These would all be materials for the physicalities that Barry shared in his performance intervention during the cabaret when he re-enacted aspects of extensive kinds of labour and humiliation at HRC. In particular, the repetitive work of floor cleaning would later find its way into the text Barry wrote for the *Cabaret* presentation:

There was a piece of wood with a blanket around it

It was attached to a handle

I had to wash the floor with it

On my hands and knees

I would get it wet with the water in the bucket

I would push it up like this

Then pull it back like this

We’d do this for hours

The floor was very clean

The performance work served as a collective opportunity for sharing the substance of creative explorations with a large group of survivor-allies and supporters. Choral movement work, storytelling, and scenes featuring encounters between survivors playing their younger

selves as well as HRC staff worked in tandem with recorded music and video projections developed for the occasion to create a wide range of affectively charged moments. Barry’s presentation, fraught with some serious anxieties for Barry about the act of presenting leading up to the event, recounted the work of cleaning of the floors. With myself and project researcher Rossiter acting as on and off stage interlocutors providing Barry with questions we had collectively decided on earlier in rehearsal that served to provide dialogue as Barry told his story, he enacted the cleaning onstage, and finished with:

My strength comes from helping other people

My heart is my strength

I tell this story so no-one else has to go through this again

My heart is my strength

As with so many of the previous creative projects, Barry’s artistic expression in the performance culminating the first phase of the *Recounting Huronia* project captured percepts and affects from his experience and embodied them corporeally and verbally, opening for himself and for the audience along with the other survivors’ performances a space for resisting organism, significance, and subjectification. Opening out onto new “reals” from having actualized these potentials though artistic activity is something that Barry very much wishes to continue to undertake.

Artistic activities such as the ones undertaken by Barry and the other co-researcher survivors all occurred in the wider province-wide terrain of the promotion by various genres of HRC allies of the experiences of survivors to a wide range of publics for the purposes of redressive action in the face of the lived injustices of the survivors. As such, and because of the wishes of the research team to include as many allies and ally groups in the ongoing workshop

series as possible, we were witness to a range of both supportive or unsupportive, affirmative or anxious, as well as encouraging or even aggressive responses to the artwork undertaken in the project by different types of ally groups. Such behaviours, which included generally minimizing statements about the creative work, back-channel attempts to either turn the survivors away from the creative projects or control their outcomes, and efforts to dominate proceedings at our monthly gatherings, were often undertaken by allies who understood themselves to be the most ‘progressive’ and the ‘most political’ in the overall ecology of allies. What seemed to be most frustrating to this cadre were the ways in which the results of the creative work did not always fit the narrative of extreme trauma that had been usefully mobilized for the purposes of political and judicial redress for the suffering of the Huronia survivors.

Indeed, in cases such as HRC, the “suffering capital” of the survivors—anchored in compulsively “true” and “real” accounts of survivor experiences—is frequently mobilized as a means of generating political circumstances of redress for past wrongs. In such milieus, the fabulist and generative approaches to creativity come to be viewed as inherently suspect given that resulting works of art often exceed the carefully curated narratives of suffering that serve the ally-state dyad’s ability to mete out carefully decanted amounts of money corresponding with various levels of scrupulously taxonomized suffering. The social capital of such genres of activist communities is often contingent in some way on the continued visibility of the suffering of the injured disability party, not to mention that this genre of activism allows the perpetuation of the supremacy inherent in the “hero activist” narrative. In short, the occasional negative responses from ostensible allies seemed rather blatantly marked by the kinds of paternalism and logics of supremacy that fueled institutionalization in the first place, drives that would appear to wish to re-inscribe organism, significance and subjectification back into the lives and bodies of

the survivors. That Barry and his colleagues wish to pursue their creative work in an ongoing fashion speaks to the extent to which it will continue to be necessary for them to negotiate the competing essentialist projections to which they are subjected from all quarters.

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