

New Lines of Flight?

Negotiating Religions and Cultures in Gendered Educational Spaces

John I'Anson and Alison Jasper

Institute of Education and Department of
Religious Studies
University of Stirling

Introduction

In the final chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994:203-4) draw upon an image from D.H. Lawrence (1961/1928) that both affords insight into how poetry is produced, and the ways in which uncertainty is kept at bay, whether in philosophy, science, or the arts:

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People are constantly putting up an umbrella that shelters them and on the underside of which they draw a firmament and write their conventions and opinions. But poets, artists make a slit in the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent—Wordsworth's spring or Cezanne's apple, the silhouettes of Macbeth or Ahab. Then come the crowd of imitators who repair the umbrella with something vaguely resembling the vision, and the crowd of commentators who patch over the rent with opinions...

Our paper is concerned with: (i) the kinds of firmaments that are constructed in religious studies: how certainty in regard to difference is produced and what the effects of this are; (ii) an ethical problematic of hospitality to difference: in which we inquire into what the implications of such hospitality might be as regards making sense of difference—whether this be characterised in cultural, religious or gender terms; and (iii) the effects of becoming open to difference: is it possible to characterise the performative dynamics of this openness? And, if so, what forms might these take?

This is part of a larger research project which is concerned with a problematic of knowledge practices in religious studies within educational spaces. This research engages both the performative (Denzin, 2003) and spatial (Peters, 1996) turns within the social sciences and draws upon Boltanski and Thevonet's (1991) work on multiple regimes of justification and critique. We implicate the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1987; 1994), amongst others, in order to try and think differently about knowledge practices in relation to cultural difference. There is an empirical dimension to this project, where a focus is research currently being undertaken at a large, multi-ethnic secondary school on the outskirts of Glasgow, funded by the Scottish Arts Council. This aims to explore the limits of sense-making within the constraints of school spaces. However, the project's larger aims have more ambitious implications, initially for educational spaces at both higher and primary levels but also for an analysis from a variety of different performative spaces.

The project connects with issues relating to women in the experience of learning and research at various levels, through its implicit and explicit references to feminist and gender theory, its programmatic

concern with gender in relation both to the personnel of the research project and the themes it aims to address, and its underlying assumption that gender is a determining factor in any performative space, including the class or lecture room.

I. Defining the problematics

Any genealogy of religious studies over the last forty years needs to take some account of the highly influential approach associated with Ninian Smart. He exercised world-wide influence upon the framing and practice of religious studies. Indeed, according to Cunningham (2001: 321), he was:

...the single most important figure in the development of the subject in British education, and a strong influence more widely in Australia, North America and New Zealand.

Whilst most of Smart's work was written for higher education contexts (Masefield and Weibe, 1995) he also wrote specifically for the school sector (Smart, 1966, 1968) and therefore exercised considerable influence over the future direction of religious studies within the UK context (Barnes, 2000). So to what did Smart put his signature? From the 1960s, he was associated with the construction of approaches to religious studies that sought—in terms of the problematics faced at that time—to create a space for the study of religion that distanced itself both from implicitly theological or confessional, and explicitly reductionist positions.

The approach to teaching religious studies that Smart sought made the assumption that the UK was no longer a Christian society and that religious studies was taking place within an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural context. Rather than becoming informed about one religion and assuming commitment to this, it was argued that young people needed to be equipped for living in communities that now included many different cultural grammars. His argument with approaches characterised as reductionist—that tended to redescribe terms used within religious traditions—was that to dismiss another culture's concepts from the outset was to overlook the need for a

patient description of the phenomenon in all its complexity. Whether or not the putative referents of religious discourse exist, people act as if they do: they are therefore consequential and can be regarded as religious 'facts' (Smart, 1973). The new approach, therefore, argued for what might be characterised as a 'third way', which neither assumed the truth or untruth of the phenomena under consideration, but nevertheless recognised their significance. A form of 'methodological neutrality' was advocated wherein the person studying religion was to 'bracket off' their own standpoint and assumptions leading to the possibility of disinterested enquiry. This approach preserved a space for religion and the study of religion in its own right, and decisively slowed down the speed at which religious phenomena might otherwise have been reinterpreted by other disciplines such as sociology and psychology (Lee, 1998).

Smart's project was, therefore, concerned above all with creating a space for the sympathetic hearing of difference. As such, it was a profoundly ethical project characterised by hospitality to the other—which it is clear he instantiated both personally and professionally. This concern with the other also extended to his writings, a number of which were deliberately written in an accessible style so that a wide audience might be addressed (e.g. Smart, 1964; 1969; 1989). Within the context of its time, Smart's account was deterritorialising in its attempt to work beyond the then obtaining theological-extrareligious binary. He sought to create a space in which new approaches to the subject might be developed that differed from those currently available. Furthermore, his advocacy of multi-disciplinary approaches went beyond textually based studies and brought within the frame of analysis 'non-religious' approaches such as Marxism.

Territorialising religious studies

However, since the time of Smart, the specific terms in which he articulated his response to this ethical imperative of hospitality to difference have been territorialised by the state to produce, in the UK, what we have called the official account of religious studies or OARS (e.g., SCAA, 1994; SOED, 1992). This approach has become, in Bloomer's (1997) terms, the prescribed approach to religious studies. OARS has

become a territory with fixed attributes: ‘a strongpoint, a fortress, which has achieved the double satisfactions of clarity and self-identity’ (Law, 1999:10). This has enabled religious studies to take its place alongside other curricular modes according to a map that continues, albeit with different legitimations, from Isocrates to Hirst (Muir, 1998; Mackenzie, 1998).

The achievement of such a stabilisation and hegemony with regard to meaning and approach is all the more remarkable when this is contrasted with the situation in a number of universities today, where the nature of religion, culture, and knowledge practices appropriate to its study continue to be hotly contested (Fitzgerald, 2000; I’Anson, 2004). In these contexts, many of the assumptions that underpin OARS have become subject to critique as no longer appropriate to a contemporary gendered and post-colonial milieu.

Critique of OARS: problematising smooth overviews

So what precisely is wrong with OARS? A major source of difficulty stems from its rhetoric of neutrality, which derives from a selective appropriation of some aspects of phenomenology. In particular, this assumes the possibility of a singular, innocent rationality which can process all the phenomena it observes and bracket its own subjectivity sufficiently to present an objective account. Such innocence has become subject to sustained critique both theoretically (Wyschogrod, 1998; Baumann, 1989) and as regards the political deployment of knowledge within situations of colonial encounter (Chidester, 1996a, b; 2003). Furthermore, the construction of a field of enquiry through appeal to phenomenology is vulnerable to far-reaching critique on a number of other grounds (Flood, 1999). Foucault (1974), for example, denounced phenomenology’s irredeemable naivety, whilst Deleuze (1994) objected to its Kantian emphasis on rational judgement over and above experimentation. A new set of problematics interrogate would-be stagings of the real, asking questions such as: ‘whose account of religion and rationality is being privileged here?’ and ‘what are the effects of this in constituting a field of translation for cultural difference?’ (Chakrabarty, 2000). This is to question the extent to which the mobilisation of concepts such as ritual, myth and doctrine, constructs a

plane of sense-making that is characteristically Western, thereby obscuring from view the particular idioms, expressions and concepts through which a people know themselves and make sense of their surroundings (Long, 1986). In other words, the assemblage of concepts used for the exploration of cultural difference within OARS is insufficiently diasporic (Simon, 1995); far from being neutral, contemporary critiques point to ways in which such approaches reinscribe assumptions that inform what Derrida (1982:213) called a 'white mythology':

...the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his reason, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason.

Within OARS, we contend, accounts of cultural difference are constructed within a particular episteme that neither challenges the assumption of a universal (rational) subject (Simon, 1995) nor the practice of constructing difference upon the prior construction of sameness.

White mythologies: the politics of location and representation

Phenomenology's wager upon the meaning dimension alone (Zizek, 2005) ignores issues of power that operate independently of particular rationalisations (Asad, 1993; Said, 1985). Change what is bracketed and a different focus comes into view that enables one to attend to issues of power and political effects. Looked at from this perspective, the use of bracketing in the official account can be seen to reinforce the exclusion of the political from the understanding of religion and to allow religious studies to sit all too comfortably within the state's definitions of religion and subjectivity, without serious problematisation (Fitzgerald, 2003). Such critiques suggest that, rather than conceiving religion as a distinct category, as in the official accounts, we need instead to consider 'the mutual imbrication of religion, culture and power as categories' (King, 1999:1). Awareness of such imbrication implies that other voices than our own need to emerge in order to 'destabiliz[e] our practices of telling stories that belong to others' (Lather, 2002:6). This is to encounter difference as alterity, which,

according to Simon (1995:90), involves ‘a confrontation with the incommensurability of that which cannot be reduced to a version of oneself’. This is especially important in ‘contact zones’ such as the religious studies classroom, which constitute a significant way in which ‘disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination’ (Pratt, 1992:4). This raises crucial questions about how such texts are used to produce an understanding of the other in practice (Everington, 1996).

The move towards interdisciplinarity

If, however, communication, exchange and interchange between areas of enquiry are to characterise the study of religion, then the strategy of creating a stable object of enquiry can no longer be sustained. And if the construction of the bounded disciplinary field of ‘religious studies’, with its associated protocols of enquiry, is recognised as highly questionable, then we need to find new ways of formulating an appropriate project (Waardenburg, 1978). This would go beyond any project that could be described simply as multidisciplinary, since even this approach presumes a stable object of enquiry (Barthes, 1986). For, whereas multidisciplinary approaches take a given theme or subject and then explore how each of several disciplines approach this differently, interdisciplinary approaches take a very different tack in that a new object of enquiry is created ‘that belongs to no one’ (Bal, 2003: 7) i.e., it is not owned or controlled by any one disciplinary field. Another way of putting this is to say that the object is constituted in and through the interplay of diverse social and symbolic forces that need to be approached through *interstanding* (Taylor, 1995) since there is no one specific *underlying* discipline to which appeal can be made (as is implied by understanding). This is a strategy that carries a certain risk in so far as it involves reconceiving disciplinary identities:

...in a relational way—defined not by what they (try to) exclude but by the particularity of their position within a complex net of inter-relations. A consciousness not of one’s identity as the result of difference from, but as the product of one’s specificity in terms of multiple relations to (Massey, 1999:6).

We argue that the underlying ethical imperative of hospitality to difference demands re-imagining the project in some such terms.

Embodied interdisciplinarity

The body as a contested field of human experience is one illustration of the direction that a poststructuralist interdisciplinarity might take. Braidotti (1991, 1994b) argues that Deleuze's approach to the body is of considerable value to the project of feminist poststructuralism, in that the body is conceived rather as 'a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the material social conditions' (Braidotti, 1994b:161) rather than being reduced to either biological or sociological categories. With reference to the work of Deleuze, she defines the concept of body as:

...the complex interplay of highly constructed social and symbolic forces. The body is not an essence, let alone a biological substance. It is a play of forces, a surface of intensities: pure simulacra without originals (Braidotti, 1994b:163).

Other feminist accounts have likewise focussed upon the need for an interdisciplinary revaluation of the bodily roots of subjectivity and for a critique of viewpoints that instantiate the knowing subject in universal, neutral, and hence gender-free terms (Rich, 1993). As Braidotti (1994b:161) has put it:

Rethinking the body as our primary situation is the starting point for the epistemological side of the politics of location which aims at grounding the discourse produced by female feminists in a network of local, i.e., very specific conditions (sex, race, class).

In a parallel move, Carrette (2000:6) challenges ways in which meaning has been taken to inhere in religious structures, when he suggests a fundamental relocation of meaning away from the appeal of transcendent categories towards a discourse focused more explicitly on the body as a contested field of human experience:

The alteration in traditional religious meaning is brought about by repositioning religion in the space of the body and the politics of

the subject. Religion, theology and spirituality are in consequence detached and dislocated from a transcendent order and become strategies which shape, control and dictate the patterns of human experience.

Interdisciplinarity in relation to the embodied location of human experience therefore disturbs the tendency to construct unproblematised accounts from disembodied locations.

OARS and governable spaces

Foregrounding the embodied location of knowledge practices also problematises accounts of religious studies that ignore the spaces within which those knowledge practices are performed. This points to another of the major weaknesses of OARS since it instantiates a disengaged and non-located understanding of religion that does not consider the effects of actual practices within specific governable spaces. A genealogy of school spaces, for example, reveals that these are not at all neutral but 'striated' in a number of significant respects. Hunter (1994; 1996) has argued that schools are hybrid organisations that amalgamate, on the one hand, bureaucratic governance—the state's concern for the population and worldly welfare of its citizens—with, on the other, the subject-forming techniques that were appropriated from Christianity.

Schools—and in different ways universities (e.g. Blake et al., 1998; Readings, 1996; Strathern, 2000)—are thus governable spaces that involve both domination and subjectification. Drawing upon Deleuze's (1988) reading of Foucault, Rose (1996: 171) has characterised subjectification as:

...the effects of the composition and recomposition of forces, practices, and relations that strive or operate to render human beings into diverse subject forms, capable of taking themselves as the subjects of their own and others' practices upon them.

A key aspect in the production of governable spaces has been the development of forms of abstraction through which an individual's performance might be measured and compared with that of others (Poovey, 1995). From our analysis it is apparent that the nature of abstraction

and stabilisation achieved through the terms of OARS fits well within the bounded space available in schools. Knowledge practices that involve abstraction and stabilisation (Law and Mol, 2002) could then be—unproblematically—harnessed to the demands for an examinable subject in which essentialised categories might form a central feature. These become the basis for the construction and performance of accountable selves. By the same token, given that subjectivity is bracketed by this account, there is no challenge posed to the official promotion of forms of liberal individualism. The knowledge practices assumed within the official account of religious studies produce an autonomous liberal individual subject that encounters objects over against it to which judgement is given. In other words, the rational, autonomous subject assumed and produced by official accounts is preserved (Usher and Edwards, 1994). Neither the subject matter of religion nor its subject effects are allowed to challenge post-enlightenment assumptions that inform school spaces: these central tenets are protected by the protocols and knowledge practices developed. Thus for example, in the Scottish *5-14 Religious and Moral Education Guidelines*, (SOED, 1992) the ‘personal search’ dimension, which might be expected to encourage young people to engage in an open-ended exploration, instead reinscribes the accepted range of conclusions by defining these in terms of rationally conceived and legitimated sets of beliefs. The questions are framed from the beginning, as are the expected outcomes, thereby producing closure and a certainty of outcome.

A gendered, postcolonial milieu requires new approaches to the study of religion within educational spaces. We argue the case for the construction of a discursive space that is sensitive to the politics of desire and location, that moves beyond essentialised categories and is open to the power of receptivity (Keller, 2002). This would critically change the knowledge practices associated with religious studies away from a rationalist hegemony, premised upon knowledge as possession, towards more open spaces of experimentation and encounter with difference. This, we argue, would be more in keeping with the deterritorialisation that characterised Smart’s approach and with the ethical problematic of hospitality to difference which his writings consistently addressed.

2. Addressing the new problematics

Thinking differently

How, then, might it be possible to think differently? As a theoretical basis for rethinking a response to the ethical problematic of hospitality to difference, we have found engagement with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (e.g. 1987, 1994) to be energising and fruitful. Suffused with irony and hope, it looks askance at all theories and philosophies that have everything or the summation of ultimate value as their target, or reduction to the same. Deleuze's philosophy of difference, as Bogue (2004: 109) has put this, sought instead to:

...wrest difference from its subordinate position as a deviation from the Same and to theorize it as a positive force from which the Same issues as a secondary effect.

Here, we unpack some of the implications of this provocation to move beyond approaching difference upon the prior construction of sameness, and consider some of the consequences of framing knowledge practices within religious studies differently.

In contrast to perspectives that privilege the static and bounded, Deleuze and Guattari articulate a dynamic view of becoming and interconnectedness where existences are a series of events with the continual possibility of transformation. "Everything" is characterised by heterogeneity and flux, by comings together and disconnectings' (Doel, 1996). According to Patton (2000:10) one of the distinctive aspects of Deleuze's philosophy of multiplicity is his privileging of the conjunction 'and' over the verb 'to be' in order 'to free the connective power of relationality from its subordination to attribution'. It is from these in-between spaces, created by the joining together of different things, that new becomings, events of beings, emerge.

The recognition of this, though disconcerting and disorienting in some ways, can also help us move with a new assurance and fluency. Here we explore how engagement with this in-between might be productive for knowledge practices in religious studies. We argue that Deleuze and Guattari provide conceptual resources for fashioning 'a field of possibilities that is not yet' (Lather, 1993:684) that enables the

exploration of different forms of sense-making. In contrast to perspectives that bracket off subjectivity and regard space as merely a neutral backdrop to our actions, Deleuze and Guattari provide a conceptual language that enables thinking implication and a criticality that extends to the terms of its own enunciation. This, in turn, affords readings of spatiality and embodied location in interdisciplinary ways. We argue that such a framing permits analysis of the ways in which diverse cultures are assembled, and how practices act back upon the subject to produce particular kinds of subjectivities, within particular locales.

Arborescent and rhizomatic spaces

Deleuze and Guattari help to open our eyes to constructions that are, in Foucault's (1983: xiv) words, 'becoming oppression and stagnancy' characterising these as 'arborescent', tree-like and fixed structures which create hierarchical and restrictive spaces. Gregory (1994: x) describes this as:

The classical tree of knowledge—systematic, hierarchical, grounded—so that its cultivators can scrutinize its fruit, fuss over its pruning and worry about its felling.

The arborescent might be seen as characteristic of the attention paid to 'the universality of the said and the geometrical order of interactions' in schools (Edgoose, 2001:126). This focuses on 'timetables, class space, and hierarchies' and 'fails to notice that education interactions are literally an interface—a face—to face'. Striations can be seen as created by the state's policing of school space through regimes of 'quality control' such as inspection (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998), and attempts to control the discourse of pedagogy through the apparently endless 'rolling out' of policy initiatives (Ball, 2003). Arborescent patterns of thought are oriented towards forms of abstraction and closure with binary thinking as characteristic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:5). This favours accounts of religions and cultures that abstract from the messiness of contingency and change in order to produce accounts that are systematic, rational, and certain, (Toulmin, 1990; Hartley, 2000). These processes, however, tend not to produce anything new or creative (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002: vii). An example of an

arborescent structure is the examination which turns both people and knowledge into something calculable (Foucault, 1991:184ff.). This approach to knowledge as possession mirrors the approach to knowledge in schools (Davis, 1998) in which the already said is privileged over the—as yet—unthought.

Deleuze and Guattari characterise an alternative approach in terms of rhizomes, such as strawberry plants or couch grass. Having no discernible centre or hierarchy, they are instead formed through multiple interconnections which can head off in different directions. Rhizomic patterns enable endless proliferation of new forms of knowledge, movement and change. Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 25) describe the rhizome as having

... no beginning or end. It is always in the middle between things, interbeing, intermezzo...the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and...and...and'.

Just as a rhizome spreads underground, by emitting roots wherever it is able and in this way negotiating obstacles, so the rhizomic philosophy Deleuze and Guattari propose, negotiates obstructions in the way of socially coded modes of thought and behaviour and undertakes a form of 'nomadic travel' by subverting set conventions (Braidotti, 1994a:5). Such a perspective moves decisively beyond knowledge as possession (Bal, 2003) with its fixed and arborescent closures. Heidegger's notion of someone learning to swim is a more appropriate analogy (Deleuze, 1994: 165), locating learning and teaching in the midst of things rather than above or beyond them. This approach to complexity or difference refuses to do so on the basis of an *a priori*—arborescent—commitment to the production of sameness, whether this be through a form of rationality or an appeal to transcendental concepts (Deleuze, 1990).

A rhizomic approach may result in greater empowerment, with Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 261) pointing to the distinctiveness of all kinds of individualities with their ceaseless capacities to affect or be affected. This potentiality for change exists at both a micropolitical level—such as the day-to-day interactions between teachers and students—and at the macropolitical plane—such as policy communities—such that teachers and students have powers to both resist and challenge abstraction (Deleuze, 2004: 238). Day to day practice there-

fore matters and plays its part in bringing about changes and transformations since this is also where subjectivity is constituted and agency explored. How might we move from the one modality to the other?

The politics of desire

Deleuze and Guattari articulate a politics of desire that enables the movement from arborescent to rhizomic—or from the striated to the nomadic—to be described. Goodchild (1996: 6) hazards a synthesis of the three elements that he argues constitute a core within their work: knowledge, power and desire. It is the complexity of these interconnecting modalities, Goodchild suggests, that gives some kind of answer to the question of how things change or how transformation is brought about. The elements of knowledge, power and desire are not separable modalities: they all act and are acted upon. But it is what drives these multiple interfacing that Deleuze and Guattari call desire. Desire features as an aspect of the social unconscious or as a plane of imminent relations that are shaped by the actual relations and conventions that exist in society (Goodchild, 1996: 4). In this context, desire is an arrangement whereby what wants, needs or interests we may be conscious of here and now—in the very meetings and actions of life—are determined. The import of a politics of desire is to begin to recognise the possibilities of transforming the arrangement at least partly in the process of these meetings and actions. Again, there is here an implicit sense of optimism that making changes is something not entirely beyond our influence.

The politics of desire aims to break down the dichotomy between desire and interest, so that people can begin to desire, think, and act in their own interests and become interested in their own desires (Goodchild, 1996: 6).

So this is a politics in which creative change within social contexts becomes possible. The intention here is not to produce an effect that simply reflects some predetermined ideology or map, but one in which multiple levels of channels, fields, flows, powers and checks can be mobilised by an arrangement of desire that can awaken new interests and investments—rather than closing them off in patterns that have

been formed for us already (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 216). So how is such change initiated?

Encountering the nomadic war machine

What Deleuze and Guattari write is unsettling, or even shocking, because they propose an openness to new and often disturbing priorities. The model or image of the nomadic war machine is a case in point. It is a description of happenings that are precisely not governed by Eurocentric notions of reason or moral law or fixed at specific historical periods. They challenge the popular cliché that there is an evolutionary relationship between the state and war, that it generates war for its own conscious purposes. Referring back to Hobbes, they see war and the state as, in fact, in opposition, with forces towards war belonging to the social unconscious and acting against the crystallising of mechanisms or apparatus that go with social institutions like the state (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:357-361). Their developed notion of a nomadic war machine may thus be instantiated within cultural forms that could include educational, commercial and religious creations, which may very well not be normative but polymorphous and diffuse, existing in 'all flows and currents that only secondarily allow themselves to be appropriated by the State' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:360). As Patton (2000:114) points out, 'the fact that the war-machine is defined by its constitutive relation to smooth space implies a fundamental antipathy to the apparatus of capture and striated space'. In other words, a war machine might be regarded as a 'machine of metamorphosis' which does not simply repeat habitual patterns but instead affords the making of something that is quite different (Patton, 2000:110).

In regard to educational spaces, this might mean that we consider very different ways of constructing processes of learning as well as becoming willing to see hard won certainties bulldozed into the ground. But, at the same time, the work of Deleuze and Guattari is certainly not value neutral. Fascisms abound in many different contexts and may characterise the normal operation of many actions and practices of daily life—but they remain dangerous. Deleuze and Guattari express their horror at the suicidal impulse of Nazism and the destruc-

tion of millions of lives (1987: 231). And this itself raises issues. How are the two positions—radical openness and ethical engagement—to be reconciled?

What Deleuze and Guattari do provide is tools for analysing the invisible structures that determine or limit what we do, how we make sense, and who we might become (Lorraine, 1999). For example, in *Anti-Oedipus* they target the reductionist assumptions of classical Freudian psychoanalysis. But their style is a reflection of what they have to offer—and equally—what they do not offer. The analysis is distinctive and risky because the structures they describe are not separable, dissectible, or observable apart from ourselves in process of becoming something else, some other combination of elements, a part of some other structure. So what this represents for students of religious studies is not a world of innocent neutralities but a trip into the vortex within which outside becomes inside and all presuppositions are thrown into question. Irony and humour with its fundamental reference to displacement, is perhaps the most appropriate response to adopt in challenging essentialised categories and fixed concepts.

So Deleuze and Guattari offer an ontology that is attuned to difference (May 2005), in which practitioners are necessarily implicated, but also one that enables a radical questioning and a potential openness to the other. One way of summarising the import of this in relation to the ethical problematic above, is to regard the space within which knowledge practices in religious studies take place as a performative space in which a series of critical questionings at different moments in the process of making sense are posed. The diagram below illustrates the dynamics of an intervention that disturbs closure.



Its dynamic is an orientation configured in terms of a number of motifs; each is concerned with our ability or willingness to relate to difference. Each moment generates a series of questions, for example:

- Disturbing closure:
 - What are the closures in this situation? (What is left out of the account?)
 - What are the effects of this, i.e. who benefits and whose freedoms are curtailed?
 - How might closure be resisted?
 - What happens if closure is resisted?
- Privileging difference:
 - What kinds of differences might be privileged here?
 - What happens if you privilege differences e.g. of gender, race?
- Changing ethical practice:
 - What happens if you routinely allow the privileging of difference and the disturbing of closure?
 - What practices would change and how?
 - What is most affected?
 - What relationships might develop?
 - What opportunities are there here for ‘talk-back’?

Different ways of exploring folds

Far from bracketing off questions of subjectivity, Deleuze’s approach is therefore concerned with the effects of encounter: the difference that participating in a particular fold with its knowledge practices makes. These differences produce becomings—that potentially enable learning that goes beyond mere repetition. This represents a considerable departure from the autonomous, bracketed-off subject that becomes calculable through possessing knowledge. This further suggests that new, multi-modal literacy practices are necessary (Kress, 2003) if the subject is to become reflexively aware of—and actively engaged in constructing—politically informed cartographies of desire. And this desire, as we have seen, is not constituted through lack, but is a positive, affirmative stance. As Schérer (2001: 468) has suggested:

Desire leads productively towards new associations, towards new symbioses with beings and things, towards different regimes. These passages towards the other are becomings...

Conclusion

Whilst the ethical problematic of making space for difference is compelling, OARS as a response has become increasingly implausible in the light of developments within philosophy and postcolonial and feminist studies in recent years. This has rendered a rhetorics of neutrality and its associated knowledge practices inappropriate.

We have argued that the radical subtlety of Deleuze and Guattari's work might be implicated in a contemporary response to this ethical problematic that provides means for thinking difference and implication. Their project is disturbing, provoking questions that, whilst interesting, reframe existing approaches and challenge new ways of thinking and becoming. This derives from their ontology, which is attuned to difference rather than upon an *a priori* appeal to sameness, and as such involves a critique of traditional Western ways of defining normativity and truth. To this extent their writings provide a means of opening up performative spaces for the encounter and engagement with non-western cultural logics.

Deleuze's approach can be seen to foreground knowledge, power and desire, and this potentially has far-reaching implication for practices of religious studies in educational spaces. As well as provoking new and interesting questions, such an approach provides tools for analysing diverse assemblages and the different modes of subjectification—with the promise of new becomings within educational spaces.

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