

# "This squiggly wiggly, not quite democratic thing": A Deleuzian frame for Boaters' political (dis)organisation on the waterways of London

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## Abstract

Itinerant boat dwellers in London (Boaters) utilise political strategies, emergent from their mobility as afforded by the water on which they live, that are "flat" in a Deleuzian sense. This makes them difficult to grasp from the perspective of the agencies of the state that attempt to interpellate the Boaters. When outsiders attempt to identify representatives empowered to speak on behalf of the community, they are presented with an ungraspable flat organisational surface. Here, the life history of a Boaters' political organisation, London Boaters, is drawn, demonstrating its rhizomatic form. It is argued here that Boaters' political organisations tend to emerge in response to specific external stimuli, refuse to adopt hierarchical forms or otherwise resist them, and then disperse before they can become captured by state-form hierarchies. Thus it is shown that Deleuzian ideas can be useful tools for examining the interplay between material conditions and political organisational forms.

**KEYWORDS:** boats, waterways, travelling communities, Deleuze, horizontal organisations

## Introduction

Deleuze and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*, originally published in 1980, has three mentions of canals, all clustered together near the beginning of the book (if a book that is meant to be read as a rhizome can be said to have a beginning). The first concerns Amsterdam's nature as a rhizomatic city. Deleuze writes of 'Amsterdam, a city entirely without roots, a rhizome-city with its stem-canal, where utility connects with the greatest folly in relation to a commercial war machine' (Deleuze & Guattari 2014: 17). The canals, he is saying, are unplanned in the sense of central cadastral planning, and came out of emergent processes and necessities.

The second mention is more interesting for scholars of the anthropology of water. Deleuze is writing of America as a 'special case' (Deleuze & Guattari 2014: 19). In doing so, he is describing the American system of bureaucracy as not of the broadly "western"

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type, with ‘its agrarian, cadastral origins; roots and fields; trees and their role as frontiers; the great census of William the Conqueror; feudalism’ (ibid.) and not of the ‘oriental’ type where (and Deleuze here supports aspects of Wittfogel’s (1957) maligned “hydraulic hypothesis”) ‘its bureaucracy is one of channels’ (Wittfogel 1957: 21). For Deleuze, America is somewhere between the two, ‘for it proceeds both by internal exterminations and liquidations (not only the Indians but also the farmers, etc.), and by successive waves of immigration from the outside’ (Deleuze & Guattari 2014: 20). This is the context in which Deleuze mentions canals for a second time; he writes ‘The American singer Patti Smith sings the bible of the American dentist: Don’t go for the root, follow the canal’. The idea is there are hierarchies, structures, trees in the American way of being, but there are also de-centred flowing channels. Canals are, here, very much the “other” of land with its boundaries, hedges and walls.

The third quote is a caution to all those who would take Deleuze to be describing two types of organisation when he writes of trees and rhizomes; rather, he is clear, we are dealing with a tendency towards typology and hierarchy and a corresponding counter-tendency to the unfixed and the undefinable; a type and an anti-type; and, of course, he reminds us, one can easily have aspects of the other within it. This he is very clear about when he writes:

... the important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel (Deleuze & Guattari 2014: 22)

However, all of this attention to canals necessitates taking seriously a Deleuzian metaphor, one of very many in a large volume that consciously does not have a logical order and flits around the disciplinary and pop-cultural map? Is there any value in using Deleuzian ideas of the “nomadic” or “rhizomatic” to describe the lives of boat-dwellers? I argue that, certainly in the case of my fieldwork, 13 months on the canals and rivers of London with boat-dwellers who call themselves “Boaters”, there is an absolutely good reason to do exactly this. The Boaters are a heterogenous community of boat-dwellers who live on steel narrowboats, fibreglass “cruisers” and riveted barges on the canals and rivers of London. Boaters are spread in a diffuse manner across the waterways and can flow around these de-centred spaces relatively at will, regardless of where they cut through hierarchical and orderly, more planned, spaces of the city. They can move from place to place as neighbourhoods become more or less dangerous to the boat and personal security (Bowles 2014), as areas come under increased or decreased levels of intervention from the authorities (Bowles 2017), or to suit their desires for sociality or solitude. Thus, in a fashion that echoes Deleuze’s first use of the word “canal”, Boaters are able to conceive of London as a “city without roots” as they are relatively free to navigate their boats through the otherwise firm socio-economic strata of the city.

This paper, however, primarily concerns Deleuze’s second mention of the canal.

Here I demonstrate how the Boater's rhizomatic form of political organisation contrasts with what Deleuze calls the "western" type of bureaucracy with "its agrarian, cadastral origins" in which hierarchically ordered representatives respond in an ordered fashion to other representatives; a pyramidal feudal-type system. Rather, Boaters' advocacy organisations spring up, mushroom-like, rhizomes from somewhere underground, to deal with particular threats, before falling apart before hierarchies can be cemented and powers grabbed. In doing so, I shall be drawing out this life history of the organisation London Boaters (LB), a group who use consensus decision-making methods and with whom I was most directly involved over the course of my fieldwork.

First, to introduce the Boaters and their politics, a vignette. When a key informant of mine, Adam, "represented" London Boaters at a meeting of the London Assembly (a local government structure in the city that was undertaking a review that effected London's boat-dwelling population in late 2013), he was asked if he was an official representative of the organisation known as London Boaters. He replied that London Boaters was a consensus-based, acephalous organisation that rejects representational democracy and, as such, he spoke only for himself as a London Boater, or more properly as a Boater of London. According to Adam, the assembled meeting found it difficult to grasp this concept, or "they had no idea what was going on", in his words. This is as they were embedded in the hierarchical representational structures of their institutions. The officials could not translate into their models of official representational democratic organisation the acephalous and amorphous quality of a "group" such as LB. Lacking a single group or individual with whom they can negotiate, representatives of Canal and River Trust, or CaRT, who have legal responsibility over the canals and rivers and are broadly LB's antagonist, or other official bodies usually find themselves having to interpellate individual Boaters in a time-consuming way, as highly mobile and geographically dispersed individuals.

In the paper that follows, I explain Adam's actions and their effects and that the flat structure that London Boaters operate with both undermines the political strategies of the Boaters' adversaries and also stops anyone from gaining political power within the boating community. I further ask whether Deleuze and Guattari's *thousand plateaus* provides a useful frame for describing the situation on the waterways, regardless of the fact that Deleuze and Guattari clearly found that canals provided them with a compelling metaphor, as we have seen. I conclude that the particular geography of the canals, facilitating the travel of the Boaters from any kind of political domination and not providing a legible base or centre, is conducive to this form of political process. Indeed we are speaking here about a laminar form of politics, inseparable from qualities of the waterways themselves. First, I add some context for the social world of the canals, before introducing the political organisation system under which the Boaters operate, sometimes affectionately described as the (dis)organisation.

## **Dramatis Personae**

The key players in the politics of the waterways are as follows. The Boaters themselves (also known as liveboards, liveboard Boaters, sometimes Bargee Travellers) are a population who make their homes on the 2,000 miles of waterways in the UK. The boats

on which they live are of many types and varieties, most popularly steel narrowboats that are no more than 7 feet wide, widebeams that are similar vessels but may be up to double the width, river cruisers made of fibreglass that would be commonly seen also as holiday vessels on the canals and rivers, and a number of barges that have been converted from their original commercial uses. The Boaters live for all or most of the year about their boats and see themselves as separate from rental holiday boat-users or boat owners who use their boats for holidays and leisure but not to live aboard. There is a permeable membrane around the community as some Boaters do not live permanently aboard their boats and some leisure boaters may spend quite a large part of their year on trips aboard. They are sometimes referred to as “liveaboards” in order to mark this separate status, but I use the term “Boaters” as it is the most common self-ascribed term in the community. Within the community, many Boaters have their own “home” mooring that they rent or have purchased and will tend to spend most of their time moored in this single location. Others either have a home mooring “on paper” only and travel around the system, or are “continuous cruisers” (which is not necessarily a term that Boaters themselves use), which means that they do not have a home mooring and are, therefore, due to the wording of the British Waterways Act 1995 (Bowles, in press), obliged to move to a new place at the most every 14 days and to travel permanently around the waterways.

London’s Boaters are a peculiar case when the UK waterways as a whole are taken into account. London has a large and clustered population of Boaters on a small system of waterways in the city, leading to frequent complaints from residents and holiday Boaters about London’s “overcrowding” and Boaters’ own complaints around their lacking sufficient facilities, such as taps for drinking water, spaces to empty their chemical toilets, and mooring rings for securing their boats. There is a perception amongst some holiday and leisure Boaters that London’s continuous cruisers do not move as far or as frequently as they should under the 1995 law governing their movements (see Bowles in press). On forums and in magazines for leisure boaters, London is frequently problematised as a space of overcrowding, overstaying, and as the home of a population who have been forced by house and rent prices in the city to move onto boats as a cheaper housing alternative (as one participant described it, ‘the overspill of a housing crisis’). London’ Boaters themselves, however, would tend to react to these accusations by affirming their love of the alternative lifestyle provided to them by boating and by describing London as a heart of a vibrant community of liveaboard Boaters who generally move within the legal constraints and bring aesthetic value and care to the waterways and the neighbourhoods through which they pass. London’s Boaters, although reliable statistical data is hard to come by to affirm or discount the prejudice, seem to be more diverse as a population than in other parts of the country, with more young people, Boaters from non-White backgrounds, and single female Boaters (with most single Boaters elsewhere being male) on London’s canals, although Laura Roberts (2019) makes the point that boating is still a majority White and male pursuit, the waterways travel through some of London’s more diverse neighbourhoods.

The Boaters are a broadly understudied travelling population in the UK. Kaaris-to and Rhoden (2017) have conducted excellent work with leisure boaters in the north of

England that has some crucial insights on liveboard Boaters but does not focus on them. Laura Roberts (2019) writes about the experience of gender in the social world of London's Boaters but does not explicitly tackle Boater's politics. Scovazzi (2016) tackles the (contested) nomadic nature of London's Boaters, asking whether this particular form of mobility is chosen by Boaters or if it is more related to external forces, such as London's "housing crisis", and it is essential to note that, in this paper, I tend to talk about the types of mobility that are deliberately utilised by Boaters as agents and there is also mobility that Boaters are forced into and that they find problematic (see Bowles in press). Hannah Pitt (2018) has written from a leisure perspective about the canals as spaces of personal wellbeing. Another useful angle was adopted by Isobel Ward (2012) writing about the problematics of home-making on waterways where "home" is simultaneous both a single boat and also is dispersed along a waterway or series of waterways, again like Scovazzi, demonstrating some of the problematics of mobility that are not focussed on here. What these other interventions do not tend to do is to combine a phenomenological account of the emergent experience of being on the canals and rivers with an explicit note of the political implications of these experiences, as I attempt to do both in this paper and in Bowles (2016) and Bowles (2017). There is also not in the published literature a specific account of Boaters' political movements, as is attempted here as well as in a forthcoming paper (Bowles in press).

The Canal and River Trust (CaRT in abbreviation and pronounced "cart") are the authority that legally owns the majority of the waterways, that maintains them and guarantees navigation on them, and that is tasked with enforcing laws of conduct on the canals and rivers. They emerged in 2012 as a charitable trust when British Waterways, a quango (a quasi-governmental agency; an organisation linked to the government), was disbanded. CaRT make their money from Boaters' licences, from charitable contributions, from rent on their extensive property holdings, and increasingly from selling their holdings, including canal-side real estate, to developers and investors, creating a privatisation of the waterways that is increasing apace. Many of the Boaters' arguments with British Waterways, especially around the enforcement of the 1995 Act about what counts as legitimate movement from place to place, have continued into the CaRT era and this paper, along with another (Bowles in press) in which I describe CaRT using a participant's words as "the charity that make you homeless", have a backdrop of this longstanding dispute. Other actors will be introduced as the narrative here progresses, but first, it is essential to describe the objective of this paper, the political organisational forms that London's Boaters bring forth in order to combat CaRT and others that they see as their assailants and detractors.

## **Boaters' (dis)organisation**

Boat dwellers in London have a community that is kept together through the cultivation of interpersonal relationships of trust, giving, care and the exchange of skills and favours, rather than by concerted hegemonic action. As Scott (2014) describes, mobile populations can always resist hegemony to some degree by moving away from political situations, which they find unpalatable. Anthropologists working with many geographically dispersed peoples, including nomadic bands and slash-and-burn horticulturalists, have

provided ethnographic examples of this egalitarianism ensured through open boundaries (see Solway 2006; Lee 1979; Woodburn 1982) and Okely describes how the Traveller-Gypsies with whom she worked moved in order to escape interfamilial conflict and any emerging tensions within the social order (Okely 1983). It is not satisfactory, however, to simply state that the Boaters are egalitarian and resist domination by particular groups who may wish to exercise political control upon them or claim to represent them as a body, although, as I shall describe below, this is part of the story. Boaters *do* have advocacy groups, which arise and represent them to state agencies, the media, and residency groups in sedentary waterside neighbourhoods. In this paper, I present data gathered from my interactions with these groups and attempt to show how they differ from other organised advocacy groups that may be found in contemporary Britain. Here I describe the developmental cycle of Boaters' political organisations: their rise, their working processes, and their fall. Throughout it shall be shown that the Boaters' political formations are flexible, fluid and unset, in a state of being able to change with necessity. In Turner's (1990) terms, the "subjunctive mood" of culture, the mood of becoming, of the unfixed and the might-be, can be seen in the Boaters' political dealings when new groups spring up to deal with particular threats, in the way they act in creative and flexible ways, and then when they disappear when the threat diminishes.

Recent mobilities literature (Cresswell 2010; Baerenholdt 2013) has refocused on the political dimensions of mobility. Cresswell (2010) describes how the politics of who can travel and who is prevented from doing so is entangled with other aspects of mobility (mobility being a condition that is too frequently taken as a utopian condition linked to unproblematised concepts of "progress" and "modernity") and is therefore inseparable from the phenomenological, temporal and other aspects of being mobile. Baerenholdt (2013) attempts to add Foucaultian concepts of power as being *productive* rather than *constrictive* into the discussion of mobility, coining the term "governmobility." For Baerenholdt, governmobility is a recognition that increasingly governance is created through the regulation of mobility; of who can move, and how, and when. The following paper implicitly takes such a governmobility approach, examining how Boaters use the mobility given to them by water as part of their suite of techniques in the creation of a rather mobile and flowing political form. The dispute between the Boaters and CaRT is, broadly, a dispute around the governance of mobility, in which the mobility of the Boater's resistant form and their ability to flow around settled logics is an important constituent part.

In drawing out this life history, I shall be referring predominantly to the organisation London Boaters (LB), a group who use consensus decision-making methods (see the later section of this paper entitled "Business of the society: How boating groups act") and with whom I was most directly involved over the course of my fieldwork. However, I shall also use the comparative example of Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters (CUB). I recognise that the "life history" of London Boaters may not be typical and that presenting this life history may not be a perfect way of describing how all Boaters wish to engage politically with outside organisations, but I hope to show that LB's history can demonstrate how many within the boating community wish to model their political interactions.

## **"Jellyfish" organisation: the amorphous and the leaderless**

*'Divide that ye be not ruled.'*, Ernest Gellner (Scott 2011: 209).

A common motivation for Boaters to choose a life afloat is the wish to remain to some degree hidden and "left alone" on the waterways (see Bowles 2017). Escaping into the margins of the state – onto the waterways where regulation and bureaucracy is experienced as a forceful imposition rather than a pervasive milieu – is, for many Boaters, a political choice of a different life as compared with that experienced by their sedentary friends and relatives. Adam, the character from the vignette with which I opened the paper, once stated to me that boating was 'a very English kind of anarchism, not like the eco-squats, more a case of bloody-mindedness: do as thou wilt...' I feel this quote summarises the desired relationship between the Boaters and the state as being primarily one of arm's length partial non-engagement.

It is further necessary to note that there is an apparent paradox in operation whereby, on one hand, Boaters' disputes with CaRT tend to focus on their relative *lack* of mobility, for example, staying for too long in a place or not moving far enough when they move. This dispute around their movement is framed by the aforementioned 1995 British Waterways Act, which states that they must move to a new "place" every 14 days, but which leaves enough room for CaRT and the Boaters to disagree on how much distance counts as a legitimate "move" of the boat or what counts as a legitimate reason to overstay in a place. At the same time, their mobility itself is troubling to a state that values a legible citizenry. Further, I write about this mobility as having an effect on Boaters' political organisation. To clarify, there is a general consensus amongst Boaters that the purpose of living on a boat is to move and to explore the waterways; this does not mean that some would not like to stay in a particular place for long periods of time, particularly when their boat needs mechanical work or over the winter when moving is dangerous, unpleasant, and time-consuming. Cresswell (2010: 23-24) describes how the rhythm of movement is an important site where political control and authority is negotiated; mobility is not an "on/off" concern but can be far more a fine-grained matter of how a pattern of movement is put into action. Disputes between Boaters and the authorities tend to occur over the Boaters staying around a city or on one particular waterway and not in relation to their not moving at all. Even by having the ability to move and then staying in one place for some weeks or months, Boaters can still avoid confrontation with others, band together with those they like, and then choose independence and solitude. However, mobility *in potentia* still has significant consequences for boat-dwellers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Here, it is important to note that it is not my intention to romanticize Boaters' non-engagement and non-conformity without acknowledging that many sedentary people, including sedentary residents in London, also wish to avoid state-forms, official representative groups and bureaucratic processes. I recognise that the Boaters' approach to politics is, as Scott (2011) recognises in his description of widespread and longstanding state resistance and evasion, not uncommon or unique to mobile groups. Indeed, many housed (sedentary) residents in London and the South East have a complicated relationship with the state and do not engage with councils, representative neighbourhood groups, local politics etc., preferring other, often non-hierarchical, networks and social formations. I do not deny this or claim some kind of special status for the Boaters; my intention here is merely to highlight the consequences of Boaters' mobility and to describe the pattern of how Boaters' groups form and act.

Such is the background to the Boaters' political representational choices, and the reader is encouraged to keep in mind this base level of self-sufficiency, the tendency towards freethinking non-conformism and the centrality of mobility to the Boaters as the paper moves into its ethnographic examples. When authorities, including CaRT and local residents' associations, wish to interpellate the Boaters as a larger entity or as a collective, they find it difficult to grasp who is in charge, whom to contact, and who is able to "speak for" the Boaters. When consultations occur, and liveaboard Boaters are to be included, it is often a representative of the National Association of Boat Owners [NABO] who is the sole presence representing the needs of boat owners. It is important to note, however, that NABO is mainly comprised of residentially-moored Boaters and Boaters who do not live aboard and who therefore are generally more affluent and have a different set of concerns to those who permanently live aboard. Occasionally, the representative body chosen is the Inland Waterways Association [IWA], which, despite its early radical history (Bolton 1991), is now a broadly conservative group that tends to represent the interests of non-liveaboard boaters and leisure or holiday boaters, including where these present a divergence from the perspective of liveaboards, in its press releases and policy documents (see Inland Waterways Association 2012).<sup>2</sup>

This takes us back to the opening vignette when Adam "represented" London Boaters at a London Assembly meeting in late 2013, when he was asked if he was an official representative of the organisation known as London Boaters, and he replied that London Boaters was a consensus-based, acephalous organisation that rejects representational democracy. When the assembled meeting found it challenging to grasp this concept, it was because they were embedded as they were in the hierarchical representational structures of their institutions. The officials could not translate into their models of official representational democratic organisation the acephalous and amorphous quality of a "group" such as LB.

In view of this, representatives of CaRT or other official bodies usually find themselves having to interpellate individual Boaters in a time-consuming way, as highly mobile and geographically dispersed individuals. When non-Boater organisations deal with representatives of Boaters' organisations, they are usually dealing either with groups who do not and do not claim to speak for cruising liveaboard Boaters or with isolated individuals who do not draw their authority from the mandate of the liveaboard Boaters as a corpus. This is a situation on which CaRT representatives do not reflect, rather choosing to bypass the fact that the majority of cruising Boaters wish to keep these political processes at arm's length.

There are obvious advantages to being a dispersed and amorphous group without obvious political hierarchical structures. Boaters are not coerced or controlled by powerful individuals within the group, and it is hard for those from outside to force structural changes upon them as a body. James Scott (2011) points out how, throughout human history, tribes and small groups have used such a dispersed and acephalous approach in order to avoid the interventions of the state. Thus, it is obvious that such a state-avoidance strat-

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<sup>2</sup> For an ethnographic description of the IWA and leisure boaters see Kaaristo 2018.

egy is by no means a contemporary innovation. Scott (ibid.: 210) uses Malcolm Yapp's (1983) term "Jellyfish Tribes" to describe such deliberately unstructured and amorphous populations.

Scott summarises his argument thusly, 'egalitarian, acephalous peoples on the fringes of states are hard to control. They are ungraspable. To the command "Take me to your leader" there is no straightforward answer' (2011: 277). His analysis brings us back to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, whose *A Thousand Plateaus* (2014) describes the tension between state-like formations (hierarchical, treelike, rigid, structured) and rhizomatic formations (amorphous, egalitarian, flexible, spontaneous, emergent). Kapferer and Bertelsen (2009) have also begun the project of applying Deleuze and Guattari's theories to ethnographies, where states come into contact with "nomadic" elements. Here, it is necessary to underscore that the authors do not necessarily mean that those resistant to the state are literally nomadic or travelling peoples; while mobility can be an element, the term is used to refer to those groups or elements that organise themselves in a non-hierarchical fashion.

Boaters are both somewhat nomadic in terms of their itinerant lifestyles and are an example of the "nomadic war machine" in the sense used by Deleuze and Guattari:

The *war machine* is "rhizomatic" ... [an] indistinct, complex shape complemented by a fluidity and mobility, and its form is exterior to the state apparatus. *The state*, on the other hand, is characterised by territory and control, sedentation and lack of mobility, where hierarchy is an important feature (Bertelsen 2009: 223).

It is, therefore, possible to see Boaters as representing a form of political organisation opposed in type and structure to that which is found in wider sedentary society. The two forms, as seen in the example involving Adam at the London Assembly Meeting, do not readily and easily translate or interact. Whilst political meetings are being held in which the Boaters as "stakeholders" should be represented, many continue to opt to remain marginal to the process, not to discuss the Boaters' political situation and to otherwise continue with their lives in disengagement.

Occasionally, of course, the Boaters have to speak the official language of the state and to organise themselves officially and politically. Adam described the structural difficulties against which Boaters find themselves as, 'It's a passive-aggressive way of life, pushing against something, but you can't hope to win really.' In order to fight these structural constraints, Boaters have bound together. Most Boaters find themselves to be at least occasionally on the map, with the "authorities" attempting to effect change upon them and their ways of life in a way that it is not possible to simply evade or flee. Engagement must be made, but it must be engagement on the Boaters' terms. The subsequent sections of this paper describe how this engagement unfolds around the politically contested mobility (Cresswell 2010) of the Boaters, with focus on the ways in which official representational groups arise, act, and disaggregate.

## The rise of new Boaters' groups: From the people, in response to threats

The first time I heard of London Boaters (LB) was in November of 2012, after I had moved my boat as far as the moorings in central London at Kings' Cross. The Boater who "buttied" (tied) alongside my boat, Nick, when hearing about my fieldwork, suggested that I look up an organisation known as London Boaters. A small amount of online research showed that London Boaters functioned primarily as a listserv or mailserv and as a busy Facebook page. It was some time later, when I attended a London Boaters' meeting that was organised in response to IWA and CaRT support for mooring restrictions and enforcement that some London Boaters considered potentially draconian, that I was able to see that the group functioned on a level other than an online presence.

Later, when meeting Adam, I asked him about the origin of the group, and he replied that LB had arisen in response to a specific threat from the authority, which was, at the time, British Waterways. The Lee and Stort Mooring Consultation in 2011 had led to proposed changes being declared by British Waterways, which would have made living on the Rivers Lee and Stort in east and north London practically impossible. The document produced by BW (see London Boaters, 2011) defined the entire length of the rivers as six "places" and declared their intention to introduce no-return rules whereby it would become impossible to do as many Boaters do and spend several months or all of their licensed year cruising the rivers up into Hertfordshire and back down into East London. Adam told me that BW had held two public consultations in order to debate the measures and had expected little response. He stated that, 'Sally Ash [CaRT's then Head of Boating] created London Boaters! She had a cack-handed way of dealing with things. They tried to bring in this document, and she had two meetings on the Lee and Stort, two little consultations, and there were over a hundred people at both.' London Boaters had arisen from these meetings and had campaigned vigorously, both directly in correspondences to BW and in the media, for the changes to be scrapped.

Ultimately, the Boaters, who made use of a generally sympathetic public and BW's lack of evidence to support their proposals, won their battle, and the changes were not introduced. This victory, along with LB's successful campaign to be provided with drinking water in the absence of workable taps<sup>3</sup> during the Olympics of 2012, were central to LB's understanding of their origins and purpose. Although the majority of the group's business primarily involved quotidian matters, those involved knew that the group could act together in order to bring about major change for the benefit of the community. The satirical magazine *The Floater*, produced in March 2014, described the origins of the group in the following way:

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<sup>3</sup> As Adam explained, "the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] were very interested that a charitable trust were denying us the universal right of clean drinking water, and CaRT quickly changed their tune." Despite narrowboats appearing in the London Olympics' architectural designs and promotional material, in reality the Olympic Games had caused widespread chaos on the waterways, with an "exclusion zone" being set into which boats could not pass.. This has continued long past the 2012 Games, with the area known as Bow Back Waters remaining closed now at the time of writing. The issue of water provision was, for many displaced Boaters with whom I spoke, a terrible further inconvenience and indignity, and a powerful act of aggression from the new authority, CaRT.

Once there was a dis-organisation, we called it London Boaters. It had lifted like a Phoenix from the flames, called into being, a humble email list became a fierce force to face, in meetings, on the towpaths we fought for our cause and won. The Lee and Stort Moorings Policy was defeated, lost cats were found, and lost bicycles returned (*The Floater* 2014).

In summary, LB was forged in the heat of an immediate battle; it arose from the unallied mass of Boaters with specific goals and in order to combat a specific and immediate threat from the BW. I was not a witness to the birth of LB, and so I cannot confirm how much of this origin story is true and how much is hagiographic. I was, however, present at the birth of another Boaters' organisation and, as such, I could immediately notice the similarities between this group and LB. Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters (CUB) were formed in late 2012 to represent the Boaters of Cowley, Uxbridge and the West of London in the face of the threats from the waterways authorities regarding the introduction of "Roving Mooring Permits" (RMP).<sup>4</sup> The nature of these permits is outlined in the following section of this paper. A number of concerned West London Boaters formed CUB when CaRT revealed that the Grand Union Canal at Uxbridge, Cowley and Denham would be an early trial area for the RMP scheme. The group was set up with the explicit intention to enter into a dialogue with CaRT and to allow compromise (as opposed to LB's more militant stance). Nevertheless, once again it can be seen that a group arose with a specific aim (in this case to represent the Boaters in the negotiations around the bringing in of RMPs) and in response to specific threats from the waterways authorities.

The form of political organisations in response to specific threats as described here is not unique to the modern waterways or to the liveaboard Boaters of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, the Inland Waterways Association, despite now being a broadly conservatively minded organisation mainly representing the interests of non-liveaboard leisure and hobbyist boaters ('shiny boat people', as a CUB member summarised), began life as a resistant group in 1946. It used direct action to combat the actions of the British Transport Commission (BTC) who had taken legal control of the waterways after their nationalisation in 1948. The BTC attempted, throughout the 1950s, to save a small number of canals, which they deemed to be of "commercial" value and to allow the remainder to fall into disuse (Bolton 1991). Indeed, it was IWA's guerrilla cruising-tactics, and their insistence that unused canals be filled and low bridges raised for their members to make their journeys that led to the preservation of almost the entire pre-existing inland waterways network and the birth of canal-based "pleasure cruising".

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<sup>4</sup> The IWA had produced a document entitled *A Proposal for Reducing Overstaying Boats in the London Area*. This document provided no evidence of overcrowding or overstaying in London but declared both to be "problem[s] to be solved" by "greater enforcement and self-regulation" (Inland Waterways Association 2012: 1) and suggested that those who could not be a "genuine" continuous cruiser would have to purchase a "community mooring permit[s]" (ibid:4) in order to remain in London. The document also suggested that a "new culture" was needed on the waterways; one which freed up space on the visitors moorings and was marked by increased enforcement of frequent moves over longer distances. CaRT had released a press release supporting the IWA document and were drawing up their own South East Visitor Moorings (SEVM) Proposal which, time would reveal, took the IWA's suggestions and replicated them as their own, including the adoption of Roving Mooring Permits (RMP).

Thus, it is possible to see a reoccurring pattern of resistant reactive organisation and mobilisation throughout the short history of liveboard boating, although this is not always a popular view from the perspective of the authorities. As Adam gleefully informed me when discussing his meeting with the complainants of a particular residents' association and members of CaRT in Islington, 'When I said that London Boaters was a reactive group to the actions of BW and CaRT, Sally Ash started clawing the table.' The actions of members of the authorities, in other words, are regularly met with equal and opposite re-actions by the Boaters upon whom they seek to act.

### **The business of the society: How boating groups act**

Boating groups of all kinds, including London Boaters, do most of their business online, often acting as resources for Boaters by providing a mailing list (listserv or mailserv) service whereby Boaters can share information with each other; having a presence on a social networking site such as Facebook, where Boaters can discuss emergent issues; and/or having an archive of online resources such as consultation documents, press releases etc. When boating groups go beyond this online presence and do meet to act corporately, there tends to be a feeling that this concerted official action is unusual and does not fit in with the normal patterns of flexible and independent activity on the waterways. While such meetings differ, depending on the context and the hosting group, I aim to show that there are some commonalities that emerge when Boaters meet through the following case study: a comparison between the CUB and LB meetings called in order to discuss RMPs.

### ***Roving Mooring Permits: The response in West and East London***

Roving Mooring Permits (RMPs) are an idea proposed by CaRT in 2012 and 2013. Ideas similar to RMPs had been around for some time and had been floated as a method for dealing with the "problem" of overstaying in "hotspot" areas in various CaRT proposals and circulars. The essential idea behind the RMP is that Boaters will be allowed to purchase a permit, for roughly the same price as their boat license paid on top of it, which will allow them to cruise within a particular area without incurring the enforcement procedures of CaRT in which Boaters deemed to have not moved far enough or frequently enough are put into a process of surveillance and warnings that can lead to them losing their boats (see Bowles, in press). The Boater would be counted as having a "roving" home mooring and, therefore, would not be a continuous cruiser. There was talk of allowing RMP holders permission to moor in a particular location for a month rather than fourteen days and of making new "community moorings" available for RMP holders.

Critics of the RMP scheme argued that this would be giving CaRT money for "what we're allowed to do already", meaning that in their interpretation of the law there is nothing wrong with cruising around a particular area as long as one regularly moves from place to place. Supporters of the system argued that many continuous cruisers would love to have an affordable mooring, but that these are far too rare in the south-east of England.

An RMP would, in effect, be an "affordable" mooring that would allow a Boater to live and work around a useful geographic area without fear of legal proceedings or fines.

At the first LB meeting I attended in February 2013, Roving Mooring Permits, also called "London Mooring Permits" in some of CaRT's correspondences, were high on the agenda. As became evident to me over the course of this meeting, London Boaters' group decisions are based upon consensus decision-making processes rather than through representational democracy, voting, or other such standard political forms. Consensus decision-making has been a technique used by various left-wing anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist, and socialist groups throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Hartnett 2011).<sup>5</sup> Under consensus decision-making, the entire group unanimously agrees upon a course of action and then empowers individuals to take action or to "action a decision" on behalf of the group. In this way, at least theoretically, no individual is able to claim hegemony over the will of the group. The proximity and small numbers involved mean that the decisions made in this way tend to be effective and binding, leading to concerted directly democratic action.

Notwithstanding this, because boats are so scattered around the dispersed waterways, and because Boaters are so interested in personal freedom, it is hard to make the Boaters, as a corporate body, act in any particular way. When actions are decided on at meetings, the minutes are sent out to the mailserv, at which point list members will often hotly debate the "right" of the meeting to have made such decisions, and the debate will continue. Meanwhile, the Boaters tasked with actioning on behalf of the group may or may not enact their action (letter-writing, creating online lists or databases, printing and distributing leaflets, or whatever action may have been deemed appropriate), with proposed "working groups" usually failing to meet or to act beyond the proposal stage. A Boater at this meeting referred to the consensus system as a 'feminine more than a masculine process' in that it allowed Boaters to 'find a way to co-operate more than compete.' From this experience comes part of the subtitle of this paper, "(dis)organisation", as London Boaters is often referred to in this way; Boaters are proud of how their group is loose, lacking official structure, and often ineffective, just as they are proud of their victories when pressed and threatened. A Boater at the meeting I am describing here spoke of LB as a 'squiggly wiggly not-quite-democratic thing', in doing so giving this paper its main title, but recognised that it is one of the only ways it is possible to conceive of Boaters getting together in order to make decisions to benefit the group.

This particular London Boaters meeting dealt with the question of RMPs in a way that was consistent with their consensus decision-making systems. There was a unanimous response from within the group that the idea should be rejected out of hand. Boaters were of the opinion that being charged to stay within London was beyond the legal powers of the authority and was not an appropriate measure. One Boater received widespread agreement when she stated that the charge was 'not even a stealth tax; it's demanding money with menaces.' It was agreed that a response would be drafted by a Boater who volunteered for the job, to be sent to CaRT, the IWA, NABO, and various boating media outlets, which would state that the London Boaters would not pay to stay

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<sup>5</sup> For an ethnography of other groups who use such techniques, see Graeber 2009.

within London and would deem any measures to make them do so to be illegal. Thus, LB's tendency towards non-engagement, their militance with regard to CaRT's proposals, and their reliance upon consensus processes were all in evidence at this first meeting.

CUB, by contrast, were a new organisation set up at around this time in order to deal with a concrete and immediate RMP proposal in their immediate neighbourhood. I attended the inaugural CUB meeting at around the same time as my first LB meeting. An upstairs function room in the *Malt Shovel*, Uxbridge, had been hired for the occasion and, immediately when I arrived, I realised that the evening would be different from the LB experience. I met a few of the CUB organisers in the bar beforehand, and it was revealed that a few Boaters were planning on coming down 'to cause trouble' and, as such, there was to be a Boater positioned on the door to act as a "bouncer." The room was laid out in rows of seating, in contrast to the circular and inclusive set-up at the LB meeting. The rows of seating were set out before a front table, where Boaters were confronted with the chair of the meeting, a few prominent CUB members, and two representatives of CaRT, including Sally Ash, CaRT's Head of Boating.

The meeting was clearly being led by the representatives on the front table, who were questioned by Boaters with the polite raising of hands and who had far more opportunity to speak than any Boater in the crowd did. Rather than beginning with introductions on behalf of those present, the Boaters in the "audience" were introduced to the CaRT officials at the front of the room and to the CUB founders who were running the meeting. It was clear that the CaRT representatives were being interrogated about the details of the scheme, but the mood towards the scheme was clearly generally positive. "Common ground" was sought, and the typical Boater antipathy towards the authority was subtextual rather than overt. As one of the CUB executive committee stated, 'The important thing is we're talking to each other, seeing you [Sally Ash and the CaRT representatives] are human.'

This was the case until, from the doorway, heckles to Sally Ash's responses such as 'Yeah, yeah', and 'Who asked us what we want?' along with raucous laughter, interrupted the meeting. The small size of the room meant that some Boaters who had arrived later than the starting time had been left out in the corridor at the top of the stairs, leaning in through the gap in the top of the door. These Boaters were literally and figuratively excluded; they seemed to represent Uxbridge-based Boaters who were against RMPs and who did not feel represented by the CUB members inside the meeting. Sally Ash was stern with these Boaters, accusing them of trying to 'disrupt the good work we're trying to do here', but they continued to interrupt. One shouted, 'You're checking boat numbers every week, why don't you check the facilities whilst you're going?' and another, 'Yeah, check the shitters [a colloquial term for toilets].' When Sally Ash failed to answer a question, the response came from outside "Doesn't know much, does she?" When Sally Ash explained that, 'There [were] people in flats and houses [by the canal] complaining about the smoke, the noise [from boats moored nearby]', the response came back, to general cheering from outside the room, 'Well, I don't like them and their ugly buildings.'

There was a sense of discomfort among the rest of the crowd. I was left with the impression at the end of the meeting that, despite the best intentions of CUB, this

group was neglecting part of the spectrum of different opinions present in the Cowley and Uxbridge area and excluding Boaters with vested interests in the process. Many of the Boaters in the seats at the meeting seemed to be a self-selected group who were willing to engage with CaRT, who were accepting of being represented by a political group and who were not outwardly hostile towards the RMP proposal. However, this is not the whole story on the waterways. The contrast between the two meetings was immediately obvious and informative, and it was clear that CUB were trying to speak the official bureaucratic language of CaRT, to play by the authority's rules, unlike most of the travelling Boaters' advocacy groups that I had met up to that point.

LB revel in their lack of structure, even though it does frustrate many Boaters who would rather have a more traditional group in place, with an executive committee, an official membership list, and a voice at official consultation meetings. CUB, by contrast, in the layout and format of the meeting, had chosen a structure which, although it was recognisable or legible (Scott 2009) to CaRT and provided those Boaters who wished to discuss the RMPs a forum to make their voices heard, reflected the opinions of only a certain section of the Boaters of Cowley and Uxbridge. Those heckling Boaters outside the door in the *Malt Shovel* clearly did not feel represented by those on the inside and were keen to make their non-conforming presence felt. LB's chosen structure (or lack therein) reflects many Boaters' preferred disengagement from and cynicism towards authorities, as described earlier in the paper, whereas the CUB meeting was based around a self-selecting sample of Boaters who had decided to enter into negotiation from within a formalised and structured group.

## **The death and dispersal of boating organisations**

It has been demonstrated above how boating organisations arise in order to combat specific threats. They then act in a fashion which, if too hierarchical, attracts criticism and questions over their right to represent and, in the case of London Boaters and the NBTA, tend towards a "flat" organisational structure, designed more to facilitate the concerted power of individuals rather than to assert power over others. It shall now be demonstrated how these groups disperse, decline, or die when they are not immediately useful as a way of combatting a specific tangible threat.

London Boaters, around the beginning of 2014, were not under the immediate threat of a new or drastic mooring proposal or an enforcement crackdown. This was evident in the downturn in attendance at their approximately monthly meetings. After one poorly attended meeting at which Boaters attempted a mapping exercise in order to achieve a consensus for what would count as a "neighbourhood" for the points of detailing a "place" in a Boaters' movement pattern, many on the mailing list began to question what right those few Boaters who were in attendance had to create such a map, which could be used against the Boaters in the future. Messages on the mailserv questioned whether or not the meeting may have given CaRT more ammunition to enforce minimum distances of travel or, as one Boater put it, 'enough rope to hang us with'. As a Boater at the aforementioned February meeting stated, 'The only people who want that - subdivision, neighbourhoods - are people who want to put into place systems of control.'

At around the same time, messages began to come in on the mailserv regarding Adam's decision to "represent" London Boaters at the London Assembly Meeting (described above), at an Islington Residents Association meeting, and in a written response to CaRT's Strategic Waterway Plan (the latest reworking of their plans for London mooring and enforcement), without being mandated by a large number of London's liveboard Boaters. This, combined with the dwindling numbers at recent meetings, led to a few Boaters questioning who it was that London Boaters represented, whether they could be considered to represent the Boaters' of London, and whether or not they should be empowered to make statements which may appear to be on behalf of London's boat-dwelling population. When Adam wrote on behalf of London Boaters to a CaRT consultation, he received several sceptical responses from members of the mailing list. One e-mail read:

The only part I'm concerned about is the bit where it says "London Boaters Response" and the omission of an introduction. What is London Boaters? Who is London Boaters? Who are you claiming to represent?

Some suggested that London Boaters was becoming a clique, which, despite the best intentions of these central figures, only represented a limited number of individuals and a limited array of interests and opinions. Some on the list who had had previous experience of consensus decision-making within left-wing organisations warned that such processes can become dominated by powerful cliques who ensure consensus by using the general apathy of the majority, and warned that under consensus systems, the "protest vote," rather than the majority opinion, can tend to control the agenda (see Blisset 2008). Thus, when LB was not being immediately affective, it became easy to criticise it and to question its role and function.

As a direct result of these online critiques, a meeting was held at which it would be decided how, and even if, London Boaters would continue. The meeting went ahead on 19th April 2014 and was one of the better-attended LB meetings to be held over the course of my time in London, with over thirty Boaters in attendance, including many newcomers. The instigators of the meeting and those with the greatest stated desire to make drastic changes to LB were not in attendance. This, combined with the presence of Boaters who were no longer active LB members but who returned to share stories of the group's purpose and successful history, led to the agreement that LB would continue as an organisation in its current form without any significant changes. Once again, it was a threat to the group, this time from dissenting voices within that served as the catalyst for a vibrant and well-attended meeting.

When I interviewed Adam, even before London Boaters as a group came under criticism and almost disappeared, he recognised that the (dis)organisation had changed greatly in the short time since its inception. He acknowledged that the lack of an immediate threat (i.e., a consultation to overturn or unpopular proposals to fight) had led to LB being less vibrant and lessened its pub-based sociality. In recognition of how the group had changed in the absence of an immediate urgent task, he told me that, 'the group for whom it's boats or nothing [those who would otherwise be homeless] has been lost from London Boaters, and they were a powerful, emotionally and physically powerful, group.'

It's more of a hobbyist thing now.' This did not mean that he was despondent regarding the ability of LB and similar groups to make a difference, or that he doubted their necessity. He realised, however, that these groups change in their focus and outlook as the demographics of the membership change and the threats with which the group are dealing change. With a smile, he hypothesised that, 'Maybe London Boaters will be the IWA in 20 years' time?'

It is evident from the discussions around London Boaters' right to represent and from Adam's own words that boating groups are at their most effective when they are new and not stagnant, and when they form an adaptable and immediate response by concerned individuals whose lifestyles are under direct external threat. In the social world of the waterways, there is a constant background noise of disapproval, scepticism and distrust of any budding authority, as could be seen in the heckling at the CUB meeting. LB, finding itself in a time of relative peace (or, more correctly, a time when the actions of the authorities were "back-stage" and hard to gauge), was almost brought down by this background scepticism toward authority and official representation.

## **Conclusion**

It has been shown that groups designed for the representation of residential Boaters tend to arise in response to threats, act in ways which are either contested by sceptical elements of the community or are non-hierarchically designed so as to avoid this contestation, and then change or disappear in the absence of an immediate goal or a diminishing of the threat that framed their original purpose. In this way, they tend towards what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as "the outside thought of the nomad war-machine" (2014: 376), a form of existence that tends towards the unstructured, the free-flowing, and towards flat, egalitarian structures that state-form organisations find hard to grasp.

Throughout this paper, I have weaved through a sense of how the geography of the waterways and the particular qualities of water and the waterways help to support this political shape, but it is important to also state these factors explicitly below. The Boaters have such a variety of opinions, life histories, political orientations, and approaches to concerted action that it is natural that they will not support one central advocacy group. As such, when such groups arise, their power is continuously checked by those within the community who do not feel their views are represented. The Boaters themselves are scattered around the waterways at long distances, meaning that they can often only act as part of a wider waterways community through online forums. They are often also fierce defenders of their political freedoms and will not be told how to act, as quotes attesting to their "bloody-mindedness" and describing boat-dwelling as "pushing against something" will attest. To overgeneralise to a small degree, groups arise and are used instrumentally, and then, like the functional items that are most valued by Boaters, are abandoned when they cease to be useful. Groups with the fripperies of membership cards and paperwork who do not base themselves in immediate and direct action (structures for the sake of structure), for example, the short-lived CUB, do not tend to gain much traction.

In Reading, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was not aware of any official representative groups, and yet groups (meaning in this case friendship groups of boats

moored together) tended to arise and then disaggregate in the same way. Nick, a Boater friend from the early days of my fieldwork in Reading, explained that such groups naturally fall apart as an inevitable ‘problem with trying to coop up free spirits.’ He further explained, with reference to his current small band of Boaters who were starting to go their separate ways, that this is ‘[...] how small groups spring up and fall apart, Tony with the messy lot, us guys, other small crews,’ an experience that is so much easier when Boaters can physically use the mobility afforded to them by their boats’ capacity for movement to give up on circumstances that have become restrictive and to seek out new formations and arrangements. Where governance is increasingly reckoned through a control and manipulation of mobilities (Baerenholdt’s (2013) governmobility), the Boaters have both an advantage in that they have the capacity for a hard-to-govern mobility inherent in their social lives, and a corresponding disadvantage in that their mobility is one of the ways in which they are visible. Therefore, this mobility becomes problematised by more sedentary people who see this kind of mobility as a feature of a threatening nomadic “other” and therefore something to be regulated, surveilled and controlled.

This pattern, this general way of being, is repeated throughout life on the waterways. There are, of course, exceptions, and there are also those who seek to change it, to bind together as a regional or nationwide corpus of Boaters, much like there have been limited attempts by the equally rhizomatic Gypsy groups of Europe to create officially representative political structures, kingdoms, and even states (Fonseca 1996: 278–305). Despite these attempts to build state-form structures, society on the waterways tends towards short-lived coming together, before an entropic driving apart. In this way, the Boaters tend to represent an example of what Scott (2011: 29) calls ‘the local mechanisms of bands, margins, minorities, which continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of state power’: a way of existing that is rare within a contemporary, bounded, post-enclosure society marked by its reliance upon bureaucracy and official representation through the mechanism of hierarchically structured groups, societies, and associations.

Thereby, it is my contention that we can conclude that Deleuzian ideas of the rhizome should be part of our toolkit for theorising about dwellers on the waterways. The waterways themselves tend to loose laminar flow rather than structure, and cities with many canals and inland waterways are often disordered and rhizomatic in exactly this fashion. I argue that this can also be seen in the loose and flexible political tactics of these boat-dwellers, or at least the boat dwellers in my ethnography, as they eschew hierarchical, bureaucratic forms. The Boaters utilise the “outside thought of the nomadic war machine” to fight threats, but not present a solid structure to be interpellated and, in turn, fought.

Deleuze’s fascination for canals as a metaphor for diffuse and de-centred channels here makes sense. Canals have no centre; they are relatively “flat” and hard to control. Just as individual Boaters are hard to map and to grasp, Boater organisations are hard to map and to grasp, and as soon as they become something that Boaters may not wish to be part of, something that restricts their mobility, Boaters use this same mobility to “vote with their feet” and disperse out into the marginal areas. When on a mooring, with

boats moored close together, several boats are broken into in a spate of robberies, the next morning inevitably you will see the Boaters pulling up their mooring pins and abandoning the space of danger; scattering out from the threat and moving along flowing decentered channels. Boat organisations show the same pattern; when there is a reason for them to be there, they are tightly together, performing a kind of community that Boaters value highly (see Bowles 2015), but then when they represent a threat, individual Boaters scatter and become ungraspable in a fashion that implies Deleuze. How does one articulate where authority or power sits on a diffuse waterway without a centre, where people are free to move away from anything that they feel is trying to control or manipulate their actions? The Boaters find another London from the one known to its sedentary residents, a London that is Deleuze's 'city without roots' (Deleuze & Guattari 2014: 21), the rhizome city where state-like hierarchical logics find it hard to reach.

However, a last word of caution, in line with Deleuze and Guattari's third use of the word canal, where they advise against, reductively, taking the tree and the rhizome, the nomad and the state, to represent two opposed models. They recognise that even mobile societies, tribes and bands have hierarchy and are not entirely "flat." Instead, they distinguish between 'supple' and 'rigid' forms of segmentation (Deleuze & Guattari 2014: 209), in which one is flexible and tends towards flattening, and the other is rigidly structured and tends towards the hierarchical and state-form. In this paper, when I wrote about the Boaters' form of organisation in comparison to CaRT's, I did not mean to describe the Boaters as being completely without structure or hierarchy, or CaRT as being some form of bureaucratic monolith. Rather I am describing such a tendency towards one form or the other: the difference between Deleuze and Guattari's supple and rigid hierarchies. It is this suppleness, emergent from a life spent dwelling with water, that make boat-dwellers such fascinating, sometimes romanticised, sometimes maligned figures in bureaucratic systems and their hierarchical and sedentary logics, and the Boaters themselves such fascinating and significant political actors; models of a living politics that is more of the water than of the land.

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## **Povzetek**

Ljudje, ki se premikajo in živijo na rečnih plovilih v Londonu (barkarji) uporabljajo »ploske« politične strategije v Deleuzovskem smislu, strategije, ki izhajajo iz mobilne narave vode, na kateri živijo. Zavaljo te specifike je barkarje težko zapopasti skozi državne agenture, ki poskušajo barkarje interpelirati. Ob poskusih identificiranja predstavnikov te skupnosti so namreč zunanji opazovalci soočeni z neulovljivim, ploskim organizacijskim površjem skupnosti. V prispevku je predstavljena življenjska zgodba politične organiziranosti londonskih barkarjev, ki kaže na njeno rizomatično naravo. Trdimo, da se politične organizacije barkarjev pojavljajo kot odgovor na zunanje pobude, da zavračajo sprejemanje hierarhičnih oblik, se jim upirajo ali pa se razpršijo še preden bi jih lahko ulovili v oblike državnih hierarhij. V prispevku pokažemo, da so Deleuzovske ideje lahko uporabno orodje za preučevanje medsebojnega vpliva materialnih pogojev in organizacijskih družbenih oblik.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** barke, vodni kanali, potujoče skupnosti, Deleuze, horizontalne organizacije

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