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Identity, diversity, and rhizomatic complexity

This paper addresses the vexing question of identity in relation to *diversity* and 'rhizomatic complexity' – a phrase that signals its Deleuzo-Guattarian orientation. It is argued that, far from being something that can be comprehended in unitary substantialist fashion (that is, as something unified and forever resistant to change), 'identity' can instead be articulated as a function of the constantly shifting relations and interrelations between and among the 'processes' comprising the 'subject'. According to this rhizomatic conception, the subject – if indeed it can be called that – comprises an assemblage-in-becoming, whose contours change as it enters into open-ended processual relations of desiring-production. This simply means that Deleuze and Guattari, complexifying Lacan's already complex subject (stretched between the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic) even further, have theorised a non-substantialist version of it, which accommodates change as well as intermittent, albeit fleeting, stability. This allows for a subject that may be described as identity-in-flux, which means that identity is not cast in stone, but instead that the rhizomatic, open-ended structure of the assemblage subject accommodates reconfigurations of identity, with the *caveat* that such reconfigurations cannot instantiate a leap over the abyss of nothingness to a point that is rhizomatically untethered to the hitherto temporally evolved assemblage-subject. This conceptualisation of the subject has far-reaching implications for, among other things, cultural and social reorientation on the part of rhizomatic interrelationality of individual subjects. Moreover, it exposes social and cultural 'diversity' as being prey to a certain mode of postmodernism, which exacerbates flux and diffe-

rence to the point where – unlike the poststructuralist models of Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari – it cannot account for difference while retaining a sense of (admittedly changeable) social 'identity' – something that undermines the political function of agency, as demonstrated in the conclusion of the paper.

Introduction

Diversity is one of those fashionable concepts which have become normative, virtually *de rigueur*, in organisations across a broad spectrum (see for example Global Diversity Practice, n.d.; Ferris State University, n.d.). What seems to be meant by it as social or organisational requirement entails representativity of various sexes, genders, races and cultural groups, whether in schools, universities, corporations, and so on, among the individuals comprising the workforce of these organisations. Yet, when one peruses published research on the topic of diversity, one does not seem to find there much of an attempt to come to grips with the meaning of the concept, for example in Basnet's (2024) paper, "Cultural diversity and curriculum", where the term is employed as if its meaning is straightforward and unproblematical, as the following statements show (2024: 2):

> Cultural diversity refers to the presence of various cultural groups with distinct characteristics, beliefs, practices, and values within a society...Cultural diversity is a multifaceted concept, which includes a broad spectrum of attributes, including language, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, etc.

Even where authors attempt to provide a more accurate description of the term, it does not really rise to a distinct ontological characterisation. For instance, Keestra (2024: 190) notes, correctly, that "Diversity stems from the Latin verb 'divertere', meaning 'turning in different directions'. As a noun it refers to the property or quality of a set or group of not being homogeneous or uniform but varied." He also notes the difference between epistemological and ontological diversity (2024: 190-191), where the former applies to different theoretical accounts of 'truth', for instance, and the latter to, among other things, the difference between mathematical entities (such as a circle) from the perspective of sensorily perceiving round objects, and that of intuiting or conceptualising the pure geometrical figure. But even Keestra does not attempt to formulate a more nuanced idea of diversity. To his credit, he does imply that diversity is not all it seems to be where – under "Diversity and the challenge of (in)coherence" – he writes (2024: 194): "The differences in epistemological, ontological and normative issues between research team members can lead to divergence and even incoherence within the team, making collaboration challenging." The

important term in this sentence is "divergence", in so far as it bears on the theme of the present paper, namely, the seldom acknowledged ontological property of diversity, that it presupposes a multiplicity of entities which are sufficiently different to make it difficult, if not impossible, to associate (let alone identify) them with one another. Nietzsche evidently knew this where he writes (2019: 6):

> We know absolutely nothing about an essential quality called 'honesty', but rather just numerous individualised, thus different, actions which we make similar by overlooking their dissimilarities, and then designate as honest actions; in the end, we formulate from them a *qualitas occulta* with the name, 'Honesty'. Over-looking individuals and reality gives us the concept, as it also gives us the form, whereas nature knows no concepts or forms, thus also no categories, but rather only an X, inaccessible to us and undefinable.

The statement by Nietzsche, above, raises the question: what are the *ontological* presuppositions of 'diversity'? At first blush it seems to be, as the term suggests, variety, divergence and difference. But if one takes this at face value, what does it imply? If diversity is really as 'diverse' as one might expect – in the light of Nietzsche's observation, above, concerning the irreducibility of the ineffably *particular* quality of 'honesty' – what happens to commonality and interrelationality between *irreducibly diverse* individuals as prerequisites for a modicum of stability or being in a sea of multicultural and individual difference, becoming, fragmentation and flux? The subject of diversity therefore poses a question analogous to that of 'honesty' in Nietzsche's analysis, above: if he or she is irreducibly diverse, that is, *different*, a subject of unalloyed becoming, what modicum of being or *stability* is left to account for identity, albeit an identity that is qualified in complex ways (as will be demonstrated below)? This is the question which the present paper attempts to answer, albeit in a revisable manner.

Lacan and diversity

The question of (social, cultural or individual) *diversity* may be approached – like all topics – from various vantage points, for example the one opened up by Jacques Lacan's conception of the 'lacking' subject, stretched uneasily across the three registers of the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic (Lacan 1977a; Lee 1970; Bowie 1991; Olivier 2004). This tripartite structure of the subject enables one to approach the diversity among individuals by asking which of these registers is dominant in an individual subject, and demonstrating that, in some instances, the 'real' may be shown to be dominant, while in others either the imaginary or the symbolic is in the dominant position. When the supra-symbolic 'real' enjoys priority for the subject, this does not mean that she or he is incapable of

symbolic expression in language, or of identifying with an image of sorts; what it does mean is that the subject leans towards the realm of the ineffable, such as the unpresentable sublime in art, or the inexpressible in interpersonal relations, and that the imaginary and the symbolic are of secondary importance, even if the subject cannot 'leave' them on pain of becoming psychotic. Per definition the three registers at stake here function in every 'normal' subject. When the imaginary (the sphere of the ego) is dominant, it means that the 'real' and the symbolic are subordinate to the demands of imaginary identifications, while the requirements of the symbolic, as register of the social, gain precedence over those of the 'real' and the imaginary when it predominates (Lacan 1977; 1977a; Lee 1990).

This way of conceptualising the human subject is *complex* in a specific sense, which is not synonymous with being *complicated*. The latter adjective could be attributed to a jigsaw puzzle, or a detective whodunnit bestseller, but complexity is different. As explained above, while every ('normal', that is non-psychotic) subject comprises a tensional tripartition consisting of the three registers or 'orders' of the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic, this is not all there is to it. Considering that in different individuals a different one of the three orders is dominant, to which one may add the rider, that such dominance is not *qualitatively* identical, it follows that there are no two individuals in the world who are the same – not even so-called 'identical' twins. Why? The latter may be genetically 'identical', but when it comes to interests and abilities, this 'identity' wanes, a divergence which is more accentuated when one considers people who are not related to one another.

Take two people who are both symbolic-dominant – that is, where the social register of language or discourse is stronger than those of the 'real' or the imaginary. In one case this could simply mean that person A is gregarious, instead of being a loner, while person B, who is similarly sociable, also has a particularly pronounced interest in, and gift for, language and linguistic expression, which A lacks. The nuances are endless, as also in the case of the other two registers.

But there is another sense in which the Lacanian subject is complex, which is rooted in the ontological divergence among the three registers, combined with their being 'knotted' together (Fink 1995). Ontologically, the 'real' surpasses representability, whether in iconic form (imaginary), or linguistically. The imaginary, in turn, accommodates the particularistic, 'unary' (non-binary) character of the ego as identity (the *moi* or 'me'), while the symbolic constitutes the realm of the relational inscription of difference, or the universalistic register from which the 'I' (*je*) speaks. In practice this means that one can claim an 'identity' insofar as the imaginary, the symbolic and the unsymbolisable 'real' overlap, even if they are irreducible. The imaginary provides a measure of stability, but this is

always relativised by its subversion through symbolic open-endedness (one can always assume a different subject-position in language: 'I used to be a political animal, but now I am apolitical'), and through the 'real', which limits language in unpredictable ways ('You could have a saint or a monster in you, who knows?'). In sum: complexity here means the innumerable, unpredictable possibilities of being configured in terms of these three registers.

Furthermore, unlike the dictates of the Aristotelian logical rule, if a=a, it is impossible for a=not-a, here we have an instantiation of a=a *and* a=not-a simultaneously, given that the subject, for Lacan, is constituted by the tensional relationship between the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic *simultaneously*, with each of these instantiating a distinct register in which the subject functions, as explained above. It follows that 'diversity' is a bit of an understatement as far as the different incarnations of the complexly configured Lacanian subject goes. Literally every human subject is a differently configured concatenation of Lacan's three registers, with more weight given to the symbolic here, to the 'real' there, and the imaginary, again, there – and the 'weight' or emphasis, differs in every case. Understandably, all kinds of communicational problems and challenges can arise among different subjects; small wonder humans sometimes struggle to communicate. In fact, it is a small miracle that they sometimes do.

Deleuze and Guattari: complexifying subjectivity

With this Lacanian conception of the complex subject as backdrop, consider the implications of claiming that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari articulated a subject whose complexity exceeds that of Lacan. Instead of thinking the subject along the lines of distinct, albeit interconnected registers, as Lacan does, from the outset they conceive of it as the *effect* of an interconnected, dynamically complex grouping together of 'active elements': "...subjectifications are not primary but result from a complex assemblage" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 79). It is notable that, in art practice, 'assemblage' – which is similar to 'collage' – denotes the bringing together or combination of usually unrelated objects into a totality (Art terms: n.d.). This serves as a clue to the two French thinkers' use of the term, except that an artistic assemblage is static, whereas the 'complex (human) assemblage' which is produced by 'subjectifications' must be thought as dynamic.

This is suggested by the fact that 'assemblage' is the translation of the French term, *agencement*, which means 'arrangement', in an active, dynamic sense, as "processes of arranging, organising, and fitting together" (Livesey 2010: 18). Therefore, if the 'subject' is considered as an 'assemblage' in this 'processual' sense, its constitution is constantly (and not predictably) changing, albeit – as

suggested by the term 'subjectifications' – not in a fluid, uninterrupted sense, but precisely as a series of intermittent stabilisations, alternating with processes of rearrangement. Rearrangement of what? Of the complex interconnections which comprise the primary ontological stratum of what manifests itself as a 'subject'. This can be tested against Deleuze and Guattari's description of the characteristics of an assemblage (1987: 88; emphasis in original):

> On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away...

The dynamic complexity involved here is immediately apparent. Whether a 'machinic assemblage of bodies' (a group of soccer players interacting on a field), or a 'collective assemblage of enunciation' (students in a tutorial talking to one another), and whether the interactions tend to territorialise (that is, claim a certain terrain as accomplished), or deterritorialise (open up new avenues for interaction), every action affects every other action reciprocally. Hence, the assemblage in question is never conclusive, but always open to new interconnections. This is the case, first, with distinct bodies and statements, etc., but in a different sense also with what we usually call the 'subject'. How is this possible?

Recall that Lacan depicted the subject as stretched precariously between three registers; Deleuze and Guattari have not only reconceptualised it as described in the citation, above – in terms of two axes (horizontal and vertical), but on each axis there are two kinds of sides or segments (content and expression, and territorialising as well as deterritorialising, respectively). The number of permutations, and the qualitative divergences at every level of these niveaus is mind-boggling, at first blush, but on closer inspection it affords the interpreter (or analyst) the opportunity to grasp the dynamic complexity at play, not merely among the members comprising distinct groups, and *between* different groups, but also within the subject itself. (Elsewhere I have elaborated on this with reference to the 'ethical status of theorising the subject' and the film, *La la Land* [Chazelle 2016]; see Olivier 2017).

Rhizomatics

In light of the above, it will come as no surprise that Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 130) explicitly deny that there is such a thing as "the subject": "...a subject is never the condition of possibility of language or the cause of the statement: there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation". The almost unfathomable complexity of what one has been accustomed to calling the 'subject', as if it comprises one, monolithic thing, asserts itself here. Given this remark on their part it seems to be admissible, however, to conceive of this dynamically changing, ephemeral 'non-entity' as a function of the assemblage, or, succinctly, the 'assemblage-subject'. Furthermore, this conception exposes the autonomous Cartesian, self-transparent, substantialist modern subject as inadequate conceptual foundation for comprehending the incessantly unfolding, processual character of the extant world, including the supposed 'subject'. Deleuze and Guattari, by contrast, equip one with the theoretical means to grasp the conditions of possibility of such a state of affairs. In a nutshell: by means of the concept of the 'rhizome', they enable one to conceive of the 'becoming-subject' as being rhizomatically configured or 'structured' – although, given their articulation of a dynamically changing entity, it is evident that the implications of 'structure' are too static; one would have to substitute 'machinically connected' or some cognate formulation, to do justice to its multiplicitous, constantly becoming, clustering and layered interconnectedness.

One may be forgiven for thinking that the concept of the 'rhizome' in Deleuze and Guattari's work seems synonymous with that of 'assemblage'; on closer inspection 'rhizome' appears to be more 'fundamental' in the sense that all assemblages display a rhizomatic configuration, that is, structure-in-becoming. Assemblages therefore come into being through rhizomatic combinations, and changes in these through rhizomatic recombinations and dissolutions, which are related to what Deleuze and Guattari call territorialisation and deterritorialisation. What do these terms mean?

By 'deterritorialisation' Deleuze and Guattari appear to have in mind the unravelling of a 'stable' condition or assemblage, that is, one that exhibits a noticeable degree of 'stasis'. Its opposite is 'territorialisation' (and 'reterritorialisation'), in other words the bringing about of a space of stability or stasis, or in their words, "arrest[ing] the process". The latter accompanies 'identifications' of all kinds, which arrest processes of change (as Lacan also argued) and are antithetical to the rhizomatic formation and dissolution of assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 382). As such, deterritorialisation

is part and parcel of what they understand by (the task of) "schizoanalysis" – the alternative they posit for psychoanalysis – which functions by freeing or dissolving all (imaginary) identifications on the part of the subject (1983: 316).

The degree of complexity involved in rhizomatic interrelations becomes clearer when one reads the French duo's explication of the rhizome in terms of different principles, namely those of "connection and heterogeneity", "multiplicity", "asignifying rupture", and "cartography and decalcomania" (1987: 7, 8, 9, 12).

The first conceptual couple, above, indicate that a rhizome can be *connected* at any "point" along its constitutive "line(s)" to anything else, and that what is connected in this way can be *anything* (hence 'heterogeneity'). This means, perhaps surprisingly, that not only semiotic signs are (inter)connected in this manner; connections are established continually among ontologically heterogeneous, diverse things, which implies that – insofar as the rhizome is the "primary" processual constituent of reality – 'things' as well as signs can only be said to 'be' (or to become) to the extent that they are rhizomatically interlinked. The heterogeneity characteristic of the rhizome is evident where Deleuze and Guattari observe: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (1987: 7).

The second trait of the rhizome, "multiplicity", emphasises the "substantive" nature of the multiple – an unambiguous indication of the radical nature of this ontology. It means that multiplicity is not merely adjectivally applicable to a given, primary quantity of entities that is said to comprise a multiplicity at a secondary level. *Multiplicity is primary*. Furthermore, they are rhizomatic, and therefore have no discrete ontological status or 'unity' at subject or object levels, because their "determinations, magnitudes and dimensions" (1987: 8) are always changing, in the process modifying the character of the multiplicity. An assemblage therefore amounts to "precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections". Moreover, there are "no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8).

The third principle of the rhizome, "asignifying rupture" (1987: 9) appears to suggest a crucial difference between rhizomes (including therefore assemblages and multiplicities) and "structure". Whereas the latter may be decisively broken, or cut in a manner that signifies a qualitatively insurmountable "rupture", this does not apply to the rhizome – when it is fragmented or shattered it does not signify anything as decisive as this, but commences expanding again along one of its remaining "lines", no matter how minimal its remains may be (for example "ants", as "animal rhizome"; 1987: 9).

Number four, the principle of "cartography and decalcomania", or "map" and "tracing" (1987: 12), distinguishes between, on the one hand, the rhizome as a "map", as opposed to a "tracing", and on the other hand, a "deep structure" (Chomsky) and a "genetic axis". According to Deleuze and Guattari, the ideas of a "tracing" and a "deep structure" are incompatible with rhizomatics because they do not constitute a departure from the 'representative' model of the tree, a variation on the oldest form of thought (1987: 12). They argue that the difference is that a *map*, unlike a *tracing* (which obeys the "tree logic" of "reproduction"), allows "experimentation in contact with the real" (1987: 12). Furthermore, unlike a tracing, the map is part of the rhizome, is "open and connectable", performance oriented, can be perpetually modified, reworked and reversed, and has "multiple entryways", while a tracing does not allow experimentation, always returns to "the same" and involves "competence" (1987: 12-13). In sum: Deleuze and Guattari propose an ontological conception which, by rejecting hierarchical 'tree and root' thinking, is radically different from the customary foundationalist one of western thought. They provide the following summary of the rhizome's features:

> Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees, or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added (n + 1). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted (n–1). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or lineaments, should not be confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure.

This brief reconstruction of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "rhizome" makes it apparent that 'the subject' is here conceived of in terms that exclude any notion that construes it in atomistic terms, regardless of whether it claims self-transparency and autonomy – the point being that a 'rhizomatic' subject is one of unmitigated complexity, not merely in its social and cultural relationships with other subjects, but 'in itself'. This is suggested by Deleuze and Guattari's remark, at the very beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987: 3):

> The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away. We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think. Also because it's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking. To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied.

In a nutshell: each human subject, prior to entering into relationships of diversity, is always already *multiple*, which, as the two French thinkers have acknowledged by stating that multiplicity is primary as a trait of the rhizome, therefore applies to individual human 'subjects' too. What each of us *is* as a 'multiplicitous subject' may seem to defy intelligibility, but it need not be the case. Think of it this way: you get up in the morning and realise that you don't feel as well as you did last night. You may even say to your life partner that you *are* '*not* yourself' today, which already introduces the moment of rhizomatic complexity, because in trying to pinpoint what it is that ails you, you retrace your movements, actions and interactions with others the previous evening, before you went to bed. Then it strikes you: last night you got a phone call from a colleague who informed you that your application for the position of Head of Department at the university where you work was unsuccessful. You had been coveting this position ever since its previous incumbent retired, and at the behest of your partner you finally decided to submit an application. And suddenly 'you're not half the man or woman you used to be', as the saying goes. What has changed? Along the rhizomatic lines of the academic assemblage within which you have lived for more than a decade, certain possibilities for new connections had opened up '*virtually*', as Deleuze and Guattari would say, already changing you into an anticipating subject – after all, subjectivity is a function of the interconnections

comprising (always overlapping) assemblages. But this possibility (of becoming an HOD) has not been *actualised*, which appears to take things back to what they were before it became a possibility. But is this the case? No, because your subjectivity has been unmoored, *deterritorialised*; you are now no longer as contented as you used to be; you are crestfallen, and now inhabit the assemblages of which you are a part differently than before – something that will show in how you comport your bodily being-in-the-world, as well as in the largely negative qualitative aspect of your interpersonal enunciations (even if it is only the minor tone of your voice), which will be noticeable to your friends and colleagues. In sum, you are no longer the 'same' (multiplicitous) subject as before, and you will continue changing in comparable ways, as indeed will other individuals who are rhizomatically encountered by yourself in the interrelationships comprising the assemblages you inhabit. But at the same time, paradoxically, you *are* still you, albeit a changed you – because along the trajectory of becoming different, there are moments of stabilisation, or *reterritorialisations*, such as where your partner tells you reassuringly that she or he still loves you (more on this 'moment of stabilisation' below). These are the implications of this radical poststructuralist conception of the 'subject' encountered in Deleuze and Guattari's thinking (for a different elaboration on this by means of a cinematic narrative, see Olivier 2017). How does the conception of the subject in terms of 'diversity' compare with this?

Diversity as opposed to rhizomatic subjectivity

One may come to grips with the notion of diversity, as opposed to rhizomatic complexity, by employing, as angle of incidence, the distinction among modern/ modernism, postmodern/postmodernism, and poststructuralism. This enables one to demonstrate that diversity is a comparatively inadequate approach to the understanding of changing, but somehow relatively 'stable' relationships among individuals, social or cultural groups, compared to the DeleuzoGuattarian (and even the Lacanian) complexification of the subject, and hence, of social relationships.

Although it is counter-intuitive, understanding the difference between modern(ism), postmodern(ism) and poststructuralism is facilitated by the philo-sophical disagreement between the Greek thinkers, Parmenides and Heraclitus, in the ancient world. Heraclitus claimed that everything in the world is subject to ceaseless change, or *becoming*, as formulated in one of his gnomic expressions, namely, '*panta rei*' — 'all is flux'. Nevertheless things *are*, because they are sustained in existence by what he called the *logos*. Parmenides, on the other hand, contended that only *being* is, and becoming is *not*. His reason for arguing this, was that things of the world of perception, the world of the *many*, where

time and change occurred ceaselessly, are subject to becoming (as Heraclitus pointed out), and therefore they *are not* in the true sense of enduring. Only being, or the *one*, which cannot be perceived by the senses, but are comprehended through thinking, truly *is* (Zeller 1969: 44-52)

Strangely anachronistic as it may seem (and putting it very tersely), the phenomenon known as *modernism* in literature, art and architecture may be understood in terms of this ancient Greek divergence of thought. It is a mode of thinking that attempts to locate Parmedean *being* or a sense of permanence within the Heraclitean *flux* of existence by finding the *one* there, while *postmodernism* is content to abandon any sense of being in favour of the *many*, becoming or flux (Harvey 1989: 10-65). *Poststructuralism* – the most complex of these cultural phenomena, charts a course between the two, 'thinking them together'. One might say that poststructuralism – embodied in the work of Lacan as well as Deleuze and Guattari (and others, like Jacques Derrida) – negotiates a course between the mercurial Scylla of incessant change and the Charybdis of sterile permanence, demonstrating in creatively different ways that being and becoming cannot be separated, are mutually implicated, and that each is limited by the other. Along this avenue, change and stability enter into a reciprocally life-giving pact (for an elaboration on this, see Olivier 2015).

In passing, one should note that 'modern' and 'postmodern', although related to their 'ism' counterparts, do not mean the same thing. Each of these concepts denotes a certain kind of society or culture, structurally speaking, while each of the corresponding terms ending in 'ism' represents a distinct critical stance towards the kind of society corresponding to it. In sum, 'modern' society is characterised by the valorisation of a coherent relationship among reason, science and technology, while 'postmodern' society neither displays, nor strives for, any coherence among these three domains, being content with flux, fragmentation and discontinuity instead (Harvey 1989: 10-65).

Harvey (1989: 10) further reminds one that, in the 19th century, Charles Baudelaire formulated the difference between the modern(ist) and the postmodern(ist) (perhaps unwittingly) implicitly when he claimed that what he called the "modern poet" has a twofold task: firstly, to be receptive to all the endless change, particularity and transformation (the *many*) around him or her, but secondly, to discern and articulate that which is permanent, essential, or universal (the *one*) within the perpetual flux of modern social and cultural existence. Although he did not use the terms, what he described corresponds to what are known, today, as postmodernism and modernism, respectively: poets, filmmakers, novelists, architects or artists who record, stress or capture

incessant *becoming* or change in their work in creative ways, are by that token postmodernists, while those who detect and disclose elements of *being* within the flux of becoming, or stabilise it by different means, are by that token modernists.

It follows that there are many ways to do this in the different arts – in literature Virginia Woolf revealed her modernist temperament by using images of becoming, like the intermittent flash of light from a lighthouse (*To the Lighthouse*; 1927), or the regular, intermittent movement of waves in the ocean (*The Waves*; 1931), in conjunction with preponderant ones of being, such as the never-changing nature of light itself, or of the ocean, which reveals itself in the epiphany of the recurrent lighthouse-beam, or the regularity of the waves breaking on the beach. In other words, her work corresponds to what Baudelaire identified as the twofold character of the 'modern poet', or, alternatively, one could see in this a manifestation of a poststructuralist temperament – a both/and literary logic – where manifestations of being and of becoming alternate.

Another English novelist, John Fowles, used multiple endings (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*; 1969) and telescoped narratives within narratives (*Mantissa*; 1982) in his novels as postmodernist devices, for example, although a closer inspection of a novel such as *The Magus* (1965) reveals, as in the case of Woolf, a poststructuralist structure that interbraids being and becoming, not allowing either to prevail over the other. Furthermore, although these are embodiments of distinct cultural phenomena, they are not devoid of social implications – the endless flux (diversity) of unadulterated postmodernism implies an absence of sufficient stability for the requirements of social and political agency, while the kind of modernism which overemphasises stability and permanence lacks the conditions of possibility for change. It would appear that an overemphasis on 'diversity' would fall in the category of the former, postmodernist overemphasis on flux and becoming, lacking a countervailing, fleetingly stabilising, element of being or stability – which Deleuze and Guattari (as well as Lacan) do provide.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard also formulated 'models' for conceptualising modernism, postmodernism and poststructuralism (Kierkegaard 1971; 1971a; Melchert 1991; Olivier 2005). In *Either/Or* he elaborates on what he calls the "aesthetic model" and the "ethical model", each of which corresponds to the structure of postmodernism and modernism, respectively. The aesthetic model, which is founded on the principle of the "interesting", is clearly post-modernist, structurally speaking, in so far as Kierkegaard describes a mindset and corresponding social practices that revel in identity fragmentation and aesthetic enjoyment *for its own sake* (allegedly to combat boredom). The character of A (the "aesthete"; one of the pseudonymous characters created by Kierkegaard) learns

that the method of "rotating crops" is the best way to overcome the greatest enemy, namely, boredom. This is done, not by changing one's surroundings as much as by changing one's mindset. For example, instead of taking anything seriously, aesthetic "play" is recommended — if you're at the opera, and by chance it's the same opera being staged as the one you saw last week, you can change your pattern of enjoyment by coughing in time with the tympanum, or by humming along with the strings, and if other members of the audience throw you glances of dismay, so much better; it makes things more interesting.

However, as Kierkegaard's character of Judge William (another pseudonym) tells A in a series of letters, this approach to life means that one is *different* in every situation, and that your personality has no unifying integrity: you are no one, except a series of masks: the *many*. This is the structure of the *postmodernist*. Judge William proceeds by recommending to A that, instead of this disintegrative lifestyle, he should marry, to combat the worst enemy of all, namely *time*, by renewing your relationship with your spouse every day in an inventive way, which would not only prevent you from becoming bored with each other, but would impart a *unifying* integrity to your personality: the *one*. In short, you would make your life into a work of art, according to Judge William. This is the model for the *modernist* work of art, as it is structurally characterised by unity, integrity and beauty.

It should be noted that these two philosophical (as well as social and cultural) 'models' cast indispensable light on the notion of *diversity*. In the case of the postmodernist ('aesthetic') model there is a series of unrelated, atomistic points of identification, with no coherence or any semblance of unity – it constitutes a fragmented cluster of *becoming*. By contrast, the 'ethical' model, espoused by Judge William, promises a modernist strategy of finding the essential in the fleeting, or being in becoming (there is inventive change, but also integrity) – which already approximates a poststructuralist position, as in the case of Woolf's novels alluded to earlier.

Kierkegaard (1971; 1971a; Melchert 1991; Olivier 2005) also anticipates, in an ingenious manner, the structural outlines of poststructuralism, where he talks of the "religious model". He does not follow it through, however, but eventually makes the switch to faith as a "leap into darkness". The suggestive part of the religious model emerges where he writes about how, no matter how much one tries to either practice the *fragmented* enjoyment of the aesthetic model (postmodernist) by distancing yourself from everything in order to manipulate it for the sake of "the interesting", or (alternatively) dedicate oneself to the elaboration of a *unified* self through commitment to one's loved one, integrating

all experiences into a single, coherent totality (modernist), you always fall between two stools in the ashes. In other words, because you are fallible, you will not always succeed.

Put differently, in either case you are guaranteed to find that you cannot practice the chosen model or way of life 'perfectly', without sometimes failing in your intentions. As Kierkegaard points out, as compared to God (who is infinite), we find that we are woefully fallible and finite, and that we cannot perfect whatever we set out to do. This marks the point where Kierkegaard introduces ways to accept one's finitude in relation to an infinite God, but even if one does not make this fideist commitment, you don't have to leap into faith. As long as you learn the poststructuralist lesson, that we have to interbraid or negotiate what has usually been seen as binary opposites between which we must choose, following the logic of ambivalence: a = a *and* b *simultaneously*. This way one acknowledges the logic of complexity, which the postmodernist model cannot do because it dissipates into fragmentation. Unfortunately, this goes for 'diversity', too.

In other words, don't *choose* (as Derrida says, we are not in a position to; 1978: 370), whether it is between two countervailing models of interpretation, or between the aesthetic and the ethical models, as if one is absolutely better than the other – or between the *one* and the *many*, black and white, male and female, sensibility and intelligibility, writing or speech, nature or culture, the engineer or the *bricoleur* – something our culture has always encouraged us to do, believing that one of these pairs of opposites is somehow 'better' than the other, and establishing invidious axiological hierarchies as a result. Learn to *think them together*, or approach them in a creative, re-configuring manner. Don't choose between nature and culture, for example, because that way death lies: we need both. This is a *poststructuralist* way of thinking — not the *one* OR the *many*, but the *one* AND the *many*. This way we learn to do justice to the richness of life. A commitment to diversity does not allow for this, because it chooses *only* the *many*, not allowing for communication among its constituents, considered as *identifiable* subjects (as articulated earlier in this paper).

Hannah Arendt and 'diversity'

To elaborate further on the reasons for rejecting diversity on ontological grounds insofar as it fails to provide cogent grounds for a sense of identity, one may turn to the work of Hannah Arendt, which simultaneously enables one to come to grips with the question of political agency – which diversity does not support either. (This will be further elaborated on in the conclusion, below.)

In a nutshell, at first blush it may appear as if Arendt's claim, that human beings are constituted, among others, by two inalienable existential conditions: *natality* and *plurality*, are the equivalent of diversity, which is not the case, as I shall show. As the word suggests, 'natality' – the givenness of having been born into the world – marks a novel addition to the human race, comprising a new beginning, as it were. 'Plurality', in turn, indexes the irreversible fact that no two humans in the entire history of the species have ever, nor could ever be, exactly the *same* – not even so-called (genetically) 'identical' twins, who often display markedly different interests and ambitions. Paradoxically, each one of us is unique, *singular*, and therefore we are irrevocably *plural*, irreducibly different. Arendt elaborates on these two qualities as follows (2000: 294; see also page 179, where Arendt links plurality with speech and action):

> Unpredictability is not lack of foresight, and no engineering management of human affairs will ever be able to eliminate it, just as no training in prudence can ever lead to the wisdom of knowing what one does. Only total conditioning, that is, the total abolition of action, can ever hope to cope with unpredictability. And even the predictability of human behavior which political terror can enforce for relatively long periods of time is hardly able to change the very essence of human affairs once and for all; it can never be sure of its own future. Human action, like all strictly political phenomena, is bound up with human plurality, which is one of the fundamental conditions of human life insofar as it rests on the fact of natality, through which the human world is constantly invaded by strangers, newcomers whose actions and reactions cannot be foreseen by those who are already there and are going to leave in a short while.

In a nutshell: through *natality* new beginnings come into the world, and through *plurality* these actions are different from one person to the next. As Arendt suggests here, 'political terror' can enforce uniformity of behaviour for comparatively long periods of time, but not forever, for the simple reason that natality and plurality cannot be erased from humans, even if it might be possible to eradicate them from a technically engineered creature that would no longer answer to the name 'human'. We are able to resist all would-be dictators in so far as, through our actions, we instantiate new, unpredictable beginnings, sometimes by rupturing fascist, totalitarian practices – through bodily actions as well as linguistic acts. Importantly, however, it does not end there. Unlike 'diversity', which only stresses the *differences* among individual subjects, plurality (multiplicitousness) and natality (uniqueness) – which may seem, at first blush, to be synonymous with diversity – share a quality which bathes them in a more auspicious light, particularly concerning the possibility of human agency.

This quality is the manner in which these categories (natality and plurality) combine *particularity* – which is embodied in both natality (temporally) and plurality (spatially) – with *universality*, in this way disclosing the similarity between Arendt's notion of the human subject and those of Lacan and Deleuze/ Guattari: although in themselves comprising instances of *singularity*, their *universality* is evident in the fact that *all human beings as speaking creatures* share natality and plurality. Put differently: just as Lacan's subject displays a complex interweaving of registers which combine particularity (the imaginary and the 'real') with universality (the symbolic register of language), and Deleuze/Guattari envisages a 'subject of assemblage' who is encountered as an interweaving of active and passive (particular) bodies, as well as (universalistic) linguistic acts and statements (more on this below), so Arendt, too, gives us a subject that is inscribed in both registers. And this means that such subjects are capable of social and political agency, because a subject lacking in *either* of these (singularity or universality), or in the universalising medium of language, could not participate in a social sphere where others have access to the significance of their (bodily) acts and (linguistic) enunciations. The concept of *diversity*, by itself, does not meet these requirements.

Conclusion: social identity according to Deleuze and Guattari vs. 'diversity'

The conceptualisation of the human subject put forward here via the rhizomatics of Deleuze and Guattari (and to a lesser extent Lacan's tripartite subject and Arendt's subject of natality and plurality) has far-reaching implications for, among other things, cultural and social (re)orientation on the part of individual subjects through rhizomatic interrelationality. Moreover, it exposes social and cultural 'diversity' as being prey to a certain mode of postmodernism, which exacerbates flux and difference to the point where – unlike the poststructuralist models of Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari – it cannot *account* for difference and flux; it can merely *posit* it. The reason is that it lacks the sense of (admittedly complex and changeable) identity, which both Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari *can* account for, as demonstrated above. The common understanding of diversity, which cannot put forward a cogent notion of identity – because it comprises unmitigated *difference*, with not even a semblance of (intermittent) *stability* – therefore undermines the political function of agency in so far as the one who chooses and acts is – like Kierkegaard's aesthete – fragmented into a series of 'masks'. In inimitable poststructuralist fashion, Deleuze and Guattari describe the ambivalent character of 'identity' as follows (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:16):

> [...] the production of consumption is produced in and through the production of recording. [On 'consumption' and 'recording' see Olivier 2014.] This is because something of the order of a *subject* can be discerned on the recording surface. It is a strange subject, however, with no fixed identity, wandering about over the body without organs, but always remaining peripheral to the desiring-machines, being defined by the share of the product it takes for itself, garnering here, there, and everywhere a reward in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state...Doubtless all desiring production is, in and of itself, immediately consumption and consummation, and therefore, 'sensual pleasure'.

To be able to understand the full context of this quasi-identity – "something of the order of a *subject*" – one has to get to grips with Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming, of flows, desiring-machines and the body-without-organs (which at the time of writing *Anti-Oedipus* and its sequel, *A Thousand Plateaus*, arguably was, and still is, in somewhat modified form, capitalism). In sum, it can be stated that *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) is a sustained attack on the 'Oedipal' basis of psychoanalysis, which, according to them, is the notion of the 'ego'. In contrast, the idea of the 'multiplicitous' 'subject' is fleshed out in *Anti-Oedipus* (and later differently in *A Thousand Plateaus*), in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of flows, desiring machines, desiring-production, schizophrenia, the 'body without organs' and the emergence of a 'spectral' subject. The overwhelming impression created by their ontology – which is further elaborated upon in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) – is one of dynamism and becoming, which is mitigated, however, with intimations of intermittent moments of 'being' in the course of the process of desiring-production. In other words, unlike identity-in-perpetual-flux, conceived of via the postmodernist notion of 'diversity', the poststructuralist account as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari allows for both *being* (relative stability) and *becoming* (change). You *are* who you are, but you *also* participate in a process of development, of *becoming*. In Nietzschean terms: 'you become who you are'. (For a full discussion see Olivier 2014.)

But is the preceding clarification not applicable to individual subjects only? What about the social, which Lacan, it will be recalled, accommodates in the register of the symbolic? Here one has to remind oneself that Deleuze and Guattari write the multiplicitous subject into social (and political) relationships via their notion of the 'assemblage', which is itself always rhizomatically constituted. Among other things – as explained earlier – an 'assemblage' "...is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies".

Put differently, the (multiplicitous) subject-in-process is not to be conceived of as atomistically isolated from others – which it ineluctably is in the case of the subject of diversity, when difference is emphasised without any mitigating commonality or temporal interconnectivity – but as rhizomatically inscribed in (mostly) overlapping assemblages of 'bodies', but also of 'acts and statements'. It is at the level of the latter where the social inscription of the DeleuzoGuattarian quasi-subject (that is, non-atomistic subject) occurs. Hence the claim that Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of the 'subject' exposes the subject of diversity as falling short of the requirements of both becoming *and* being (insisting as it does on becoming to the exclusion of being), which their own account demonstrably accommodates.

The manifestation of assemblages at the level of 'acts and statements' draws attention to something that is crucial for understanding what was alluded to earlier regarding the political implications of unalloyed diversity, insofar as the latter neuters political agency. 'Acts and statements' fall under the '*collective assemblage of enunciation*', that is, language, the conception of which on the part of Deleuze and Guattari, one could easily forget, implicates *power*. Ronald Bogue formulates the issue clearly (2007: 20):

> The primary function of language, they argue, is not to communicate information but to impose power relations. To learn a language is to learn a host of categories, classifications, binary oppositions, associations, codes, concepts, logical relations and so on, whereby the world is given a certain coherence and organization. Far from being neutral, the order imposed by a language is part of a complex network of practices, institutions, goods, tools and materials imbued with relations of force. Following the line of analysis developed by speech-act theorists, Deleuze and Guattari insist that language is a mode of action, a way of doing things, and the condition of possibility of any language is the complex network of practices and material elements that shape a given world. This complex network is made up of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'assemblages' (*agencements*), heterogeneous collections of actions and entities that somehow function together.

Language is not, in other words, some abstract system that hovers, wraith-like, over the material world; it is predicated upon complex, rhizomatically interconnected webs of social practices and material entities comprising the world within which humans interact. For such interaction to bear political weight – that is, for mutually effective 'actions' to rise above the level of diverse, random occurrences – they have to be related to a complexly configured political agent

as someone who has the capacity to affect the power relations within which they are always, inescapably, enmeshed. This does not mean that *only* language is imbricated with power relations. As argued above, for Deleuze and Guattari it is always rhizomatically interconnected with social, political, economic, educational and other human practices – it ineluctably serves to organise these practices, albeit in a manner that is not cratologically innocuous; far from it. Just like Lacan's (2007: 31-32) notion of 'discourse(s)' – which, for him, has an 'ordering' social function, implying that social relations are simultaneously power relations – it functions to establish, modify and dissolve such social relations. 'Diversity', in the atomistic, randomly free-floating, ontological sense disclosed in this paper, cannot account for this, given its lack of a cogent account of *agency*.

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