

IF YOU ASK DELEUZE, 3 MINUTES IS ALREADY TOO MUCH TIME TO TALK ABOUT SUBJECTIVITY!!

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In an intriguing presentation, one of Deleuze's better known readers – Eugene Hollander (2011) – aimed at explaining in 20 minutes the core of the metaphysical proposal that Deleuze and Guattari articulated on *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Despite the apparent absurdity of such an aim, an absurdity that Hollander was well aware of, he was reasonably successful in introducing some of the key metaphysical tenets of Deleuze and Guattari's project in this allotted time. A bit like the story of Scheherazade and the king Shahriyar in the *Arabian Nights* (Sallis, 1999, chapter 5), Hollander was able to capture in his short presentation some of the core concepts that provide the frame in Deleuze and Guattari's political proposal.

Perhaps out of sheer relief and exhilaration at having been able to rise to the challenge, Hollander closed his presentation by exclaiming that, at such a pace, he could have explained 3000 plateaus in an hour. This rather 'cheeky' remark is however of relevance. Perhaps more illustrative than the explanatory text that preceded it, his remark was a powerful reference to the crucial point of the Deleuzian and Guattarian project: that the use of a thousand was not literal but a poetic way to challenge the dominance of (static) unity over (process-oriented) diversity in Western thought and that multiplicity is a concept that must lie outside of any measure. More than a preoccupation with counting, and numbers – an extensive approach as Bell indicates (2016, p. 36-9) – Deleuze's metaphysics occupies itself with diversity through an engagement with intensity and, perhaps in ways that resemble Foucault's project, it does so by articulating the nuances pertaining to one's life through a type of trinity: instead of the well-known Foucaultian power- knowledge-subject trinity, Deleuze – with and without Guattari – articulated his/their unique take through life-thought-becomings.

In fact, it is Deleuze's work on prioritizing difference over unity and identity that is at the base of Foucault's renowned admiration of Deleuze often referred to through his even more famous claim that perhaps one day "this century will be known as Deleuzian" (1977, p. 165)². Less known is the fact that Deleuze dismissed Foucault's comment as a joke amongst friends (Deleuze, 1995, p.88). This is a gesture that might be useful to mark, since it shows the unassuming position that Deleuze took through most of his life. In fact, Deleuze was a reserved man who praised the value of sobriety (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 344) and of 'becoming imperceptible' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, plateau 10). Perhaps honouring the dictum of having an 'unassuming' life in order to pursue philosophical investigations (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 3),

¹ I would like to acknowledge John R Morss for his support in proofreading this text

² The quote is increasingly inaccurate since it was meaning to refer to the 20th century... which is not 'this' but 'that'...

he lived what appeared to be a rather quiet and uneventful life: he lived for most of his life in the same neighbourhood³, hardly attended conferences⁴ and taught at the same place for most of his academic career – Vincennes, notwithstanding it was an extraordinary place.

In particular, Deleuze disliked engaging in debates or discussions⁵ in ways that are partly explained by his dislike for the linguistic turn that was witnessed within the philosophical circles of his times. From this perspective, one way of understanding his position is by conceiving his work as a recursive development within critical practices: as, itself, a differentiation of and a way forward – a line of flight? – from the dominant critical ideas of his time. And here lies the difference that makes the difference with his project. Deleuze’s take on the critique of modern ideology was not postmodern nor discursive but metaphysical. Like his peers, he indeed critiqued realist assumptions in the West, but he did so in a different way: whereas most of his colleagues reneged on metaphysics as part of their engagement with Heidegger and what was later defined as ‘the linguistic turn’, Deleuze ‘stuck’ to metaphysics. As May (2005, p. 13-5) says, Deleuze was the only one of his generation who offered a positive proposal. More than a critique, a critical proposal.

Because this movement against the tide, Deleuze is by its own nature, difficult to grasp. My attempts in this paper have been to not only point to some of his ideas but also to try to bring them to life to this audience. In terms of the first of these intentions it is central to understand Deleuze’s ideas through his ongoing commitment to immanence – a commitment that he saw at the base of the entire history of philosophy – and how this pursuit was affected by mirages, “illusions” that restore transcendence to the plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, example 3). In particular, I will organize this article by looking at the ways that Deleuze’s concerns in relation to these mirages have something to say to our discipline. Deleuze explains that transcendence re-enters philosophy through the search for Universals. He clarifies further that “[t]he three sorts of Universals [...] are like three philosophical eras – Eidetic, Critical, and Phenomenological” (1994, p. 47). I thus have organized the paper in four sections, the first three will be speaking to each of these eras. The Eidetic era will be addressed through a consideration of metaphysical claims that make statements of a reality ‘out there’ that one engages with a passive contemplation. The Critical era will be addressed by looking at the problems with unexamined assumptions about what is meant by the idea of thought. The Phenomenological era will be addressed by questioning assumptions of a phenomenological *Urdoxa* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 202) that affords ‘common and good sense.’ The fourth section will return to the discipline as such and on the effects that all these considerations have on it.

³ And, as he commented in a filmed interview, witnessed with amusement how it moved from being a chick quarter to a proletariat neighbourhood (Stivale, C.J. 2000).

⁴ visited USA only once to the schizo-conference in New York in 1972 (Dosse, 2010)

⁵ “Discussion is just an exercise in narcissism where everyone takes turns showing off. Very quickly, you have no idea what is being discussed.” (Deleuze and Eribon, 1991, p. 380, see also Deleuze, 1995, p. 135-6)

In terms of the second of these intentions – to make these ideas a bit more alive and of relevance to this audience – it remains for you as readers to define how successful I have been in this endeavour.

A problematic (eidetic) unity

The keystone of Deleuze's project lies in his thesis of aggregation *Difference and Repetition* where the position of identity and representation as core tenets of philosophical thought in the West are displaced in favour of difference and repetition.

As pointed out above, the genius of Deleuze is in having been able to hold a positive proposal that was very much of his times yet, at the same time, counter to these times. In order to do so, his metaphysical proposal was paradoxical: what is real is that things change. What takes place in Deleuze's project could be described for pedagogical purposes as an inversion of the order of things so that instead of identity being the central definition, a definition that implicitly positions difference in a secondary position – as that which results from the relation between entities or within an entity when considered through time – it is difference in itself that is central, with identity becoming then a secondary phenomenon – as that which repeats.

Some have commented that Deleuze's metaphysics could be considered as a philosophical engagement with the quantum developments in science (e.g. May, 2005, p. 73). This connection helps us understand a rather intriguing claim made by Adkins that *A Thousand Plateaus* "is a book of metaphysics, it is not a book of ontology. It is an experimental, pragmatic metaphysics that replaces ontology's 'to be' with a series generated by the conjunction 'and . . . and . . . and . . .'" (2015, p. 24). Adkins' comments illustrates the effects of focusing on difference rather than identity. Applied to life, this displacement leads us to the realization that life is not an entity in itself nor a predictable event but emerges as an epiphenomenon of an active engagement in the establishment of planes of immanence or plateaus.

To make sense of these ideas, we need to refer ourselves to Deleuze's insistence that the substratum of life is chaos and that life – living a life – is a unique engagement with this chaos. Here is the connection to Deleuze's admiration for Joyce's concept of chaosmos (Deleuze, 1994, p. 299)⁶ as a useful concept to express the world we live in. Note that the chaos that Deleuze refers us to is without judgment yet brings forth a very different type of ethical evaluation. Chaos is not a special type of "thing" – a transcendental unity of sorts – that threatens our livelihood in some sort of mystifying way. For Deleuze chaos is infinite speed. Such a speed can perhaps be best apprehended as a type of vitality at the base of our lives, a vitality that is central in configuring the conditions of/for existence.⁷ It is out of disorder and out of this

⁶ "The word chaosmos itself was taken from James Joyce. Compressing 'chaos' and 'cosmos', Joyce had written in *Finnegans Wake* of 'every person, place and thing in the chaosmos of Alle'. Here 'Alle' is a Joycean-Germanic term for plurality." (Nichterlein and Morss, 2017, p. 38)

⁷ It is in this sense that we – as subjects – as well as what we experience as "things" external to ourselves transcend which is different to being transcendental, hence Deleuze's method being described as 'transcendental empiricism' (Sauvagnargues, 2009).

chaos, that order is established through the organisation of a double articulation of matter and semiotics.⁸ This organization takes place through repetition. It is in this sense that Deleuze considers ‘the refrain’ to be perhaps his original concept (Deleuze and Eribon, 1991).

We have written extensively on this matter elsewhere (Nichterlein and Morss, 2017). For the purposes of this presentation, I want to focus on the danger that Deleuze saw in reading life as a linearity of sorts. There is indeed a certain linearity – a certain continuum – that is established in this process of organisation proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, a linearity that sees as its polarities chaos – intensive speed and total disintegration – at one end and, at the other, full stability/rigidity – of stratification (matter) or of fascist/despotic regimes of signs (semiotics).

But, and here is a critical point to fully understand this project, life is not this continuum but it is *in/on* this continuum that life takes place; life takes place by organizing itself within this range while avoiding either of its extremes. Here is where Deleuze perhaps best known concept comes into play: the assemblage. Notwithstanding its prominence in Deleuze and Guattari’s thought, the concept of assemblage is not easy to define. As we stated elsewhere,

assemblages are not unified nor stable entities, but work instead more like ‘swarms of difference that actualize themselves into specific forms of identity’ (May, 2005, p. 114). Rather than ‘things’ with some persistent essence, the assemblage takes the form of an emerging collective containing a number of different elements. Following from this, a second characteristic of assemblages is that they are not made *only* out of material elements, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as ‘content’ including bodies, actions and passions – ‘an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 88). They are also made out of ‘expression’, a concept that includes the ‘incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies’ (ibid) such as acts and statements, or what is more commonly known as a regime of signs (Zourabichvili, 2012, p. 145). (Nichterlein and Morss, 2017, p. 46).

The assemblage emerges out of the continuum – thus Deleuze’s concept of transcendental empiricism as distinct from transcendence – establishing planes of immanence or plateaus (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). These plateaus are rhizomic and transversal to any order we can envisage. And it is at this level that difference is embodied as multiplicity. It is at this plane that life is experienced as unique and singular. It is in these conditions that life is perceived as an incommensurable (and, perhaps of more importance, an indominable) multiplicity. And here there is a connection between assemblages and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of desiring-machines in *AntiOedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) and, with it, to their claim that a better model to understand our psyche is through the stroll of a schizophrenic (rather than the

⁸ In this sense, for Deleuze it is misleading to think about these structures as “either-or” – either matter or symbolics – but as “both-and” – a knead of matter and semiotics that is referred by the concept of assemblage.

psychoanalytic image of the neurotic lying on a sofa). Comprehending the concept of the assemblage then invites us to consider our life and the universe as a creative delirium (or one of Vishnu's dreams).

Indeed, Deleuze's project does problematize our sense of the world by confronting us with a reality that instead of starting with idea of stability and identity, does so with chaos and indeterminability. Multiplicity is key to difference and to think and live within multiplicity is the challenge. Rather than the notion of the one – of a universe of sorts, a unity that can be constituted by a number that returns to the one (the Hegelian trinity) – Deleuze focused his project on articulating the becoming of multiplicity. Central to understanding his concept of multiplicity is to understand that this becoming was not an intellectual – rationalist – exercise but an existential experiment: an active participation in what Deleuze would call, the creation of the earth and the people to come (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 218).

Problematizing critical thought

Prior to discussing further on the matter of the subject and the people to come, there is value in reviewing the tension between knowledge and thought.

The foundational shift from a metaphysics based on identity to one based on difference that I attempted to describe in the previous section leaves nothing untouched, including the role of thought and of knowledge. The effects of this shift are also explored in *Difference and Repetition* and it is here that the idea of *the image of thought* becomes critical as a way to discuss the limitations of the traditional mindset of Western thought. It is by now a recognized feature of Deleuze's project that his critique is targeted at a conceptualization of thought as representational. That is, of conceiving thought's function to be one of making a good re-presentation of what is out there – of the world. Whether it is in the case of Plato, that what we have is but ideas that emerge as in a cave darkly or that, as in the case of Descartes' ideals, we can have access of the real thing if we are careful to follow the correct method of selection, Western thought has for millennia conceptualized itself as a faculty whose aim is to represent what is out there.

For Deleuze, this conceptualization of thought as representational is not thought per se but an image of thought and the confusion between these two has the perverse effect of hindering our efforts to think. As Williams explains, “[t]hey are false idols present in philosophy when it gives itself timeless images and postulates of what constitutes true and good thinking” (2012, p. 41). In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes eight postulates that define this image of thought (p. 167). Williams sums up these postulates in the following way: “postulates of the natural good will of the thinker and rectitude of thought; of a shared common sense; of a faculty of recognition regulating all others according to an object; of representation as determining the object; of error as the negative of thought; of designation as determining the truth of a proposition; of solutions as resolving problems; and of knowledge as the result of thought, as opposed to an endless apprenticeship to thought [...]. Accordingly, thought is defined as inherently good and as well directed when it proceeds as common sense which recognizes its proper objects” (2012, p. 41).

Deleuze warns against this understanding of thought, in particular from its presentation as common and good sense. Once we accept the shifts required by a metaphysics of difference, the restricting elements of such an approach become clear. As Zourabichvili explains, in a metaphysics of difference “problems are not given and there is no neutral or objective standard by which to distinguish the upside down from the right side up” (2012, p.76). In line with critiques of the way in which the discipline of psychology has engaged with empiricism (e.g. Slife and Melling, 2009, Slife and Slife, 2014, Stenner, 2009), a critical evaluation is left out of thought when this image of thought is left unexamined, turning thought into a type of Nietzschean shadow of thought – a phantom of its own possibility – letting stupidity instead prevail. Stupidity is a central concern for Deleuze. Stupidity is not about error since, in a world of multiplicity, it is nonsense to claim knowledge of the ‘correct’ answer. In fact, it is the preoccupation with error, to the detriment of a more substantive engagement with thought and its role for life, that is the source of stupidity. As Zourabichvili continues “yet this [error] is not the question, for stupidity consists less in a permutation of the important and the unimportant than in its indifference regarding the two, in its incapacity to distinguish between them and consequently to distinguish anything whatsoever” (ibid).

Rather than this traditional understanding of thought, what Deleuze proposes then is to engage with thought as immanent, with thought not representing what is (already) outside – not as an ultimately passive perception of a static order of things – but as a passionate engagement with life. Two things are important in this statement. Firstly, that knowledge is not just a (Cartesian) rational process but is an engaged process that has to do with our affects, with what affects us⁹. Thought is not a moral judgement but is constantly evaluating what is of importance, what matters. Thought is felt and is evaluative and, as Buchanan says, “the more general point Deleuze and Guattari make about concepts [is] that they should have cutting edges” (2015, p. 383). The second point has to do with what is implied in the activity of thought. Thought is not about representing but about dealing constructively with problems that present as part of living. If anything, what is real is that we live and that life is problematic. Thought is then about how one deals with these problems. Thought is an active and creative response to the problems that present to ourselves as part of living a life in order to do so in noble and affirmative ways. In this sense, there are no truer thoughts – not even ‘just’ thoughts, thoughts of justice – but, as Deleuze would say, there are just thoughts, thoughts that serve functions in one’s life. For Deleuze, it is not that there have been better – more correct – thinkers, but thinkers who have wrestled with different problems in different circumstances. The validity of any knowledge is not dependent on its content – for knowledge is valid inasmuch as it has been thought¹⁰ – but according to its usefulness in terms of the unique

⁹ A warning is required at this stage. We need to be aware and be wary of the subtle distinction between the two uses of ‘affect’ involved in this statement. This subtlety points to the danger of reifying Deleuze’s emphasis on Spinozean affects into the more familiar use of affects as emotions.

¹⁰ There is a subtle nuance here for Deleuze was equally critical of ‘thoughtless’ knowledge, in particular, opinions and common and good sense.

problem at hand. Needless to say perhaps, the set of circumstances that presents itself as ‘the problem at hand’ is – in itself – different from the one that saw the emergence (and thus the validity) of concepts that one is using to deal with the problems at hand. In line with a radical difference, what worked before cannot be relied upon to work now.

This positioning of thought by Deleuze, shifts the responsibility from ‘thinkers out there’ having correct or incorrect/true or false/better or worse arguments to ‘us as thinkers’ critically engaging with the throw of dice that constitutes our lives. It is in this sense that for Deleuze then, thought is experimental and is constructive. It is a response to the violence of life, to the unexpectedness of life. And, as a response, it is an experimental attempt to identify ways forwards. Life as an existential experiment has little to do with ‘avoiding error’ but has much to do with the quality of one’s response. Here, Deleuze makes direct reference to Nietzsche. As we wrote elsewhere:

For Deleuze, the eternal return was central to Nietzsche’s idea of life as tragedy (1886); a tragic throw of the dice (1954). Life, in this sense, articulates the ultimately undecidable throwing of the dice. We know life is constituted by imponderables and that our life as a human calls for an active engagement with the circumstances implied in the throws (throws?) that we are confronted with. Nietzsche talks about *good* and *bad* players, good players being those who engage with such a throw in constructive and affirmative ways while bad players get stuck in either guilt or resentment. (Nichterlein and Morss, 2017, p. 12-3)

The problem with an (effacing) phenomenological subject

This reference to Nietzsche in Deleuze brings us to the topic of the subject and the effects that the previous displacements have had in relation to the subject.

The subject – and its subjectivity – have always been central a focus point for psychology despite the fact that such a subject has been conceptualized in various ways. Currently, and given the popularization of psychology, one can readily make reference to the images of the subject that emerge out of the main psychological traditions. Without doubt the simplest and most easily accessible to the discipline of psychology within the Anglo-Saxon world (and for this reason perhaps most problematic) is that which conceives the subject as a construct that emerges out of series of behaviours and cognitions. This image has also the caveat that these ‘faculties’ have established themselves through habit. Another available image of the subject presents itself more readily through cultural references in art and the humanities, despite its clinical origin. I am referring to psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the subject as the depository and the articulation of unconscious forces. Very close to this description – a fold of the same text – is the Lacanian version of the subject as an articulation of unconscious symbolic structures that cover/veil the central absence of such a subject. A third, perhaps increasingly growing conceptualization within the British discipline of psychology (as compared to the central European counterpart), is the subject as it is conceptualized by phenomenology: a being with an intentional consciousness, a being in search of meaning.

Whatever explanatory mechanism adopted by one's preferred theoretical line of enquiry, the subject "is" the crucial point of analysis for psychological investigation. It is here where the connection with thought as representation becomes evident. We might fight – at times literally – about its meaning but, like a common technique used to lull children into doing what they are being told to do, the subject as the conceptual entity that constitutes the discipline's unit of analysis is the concept that prevail.

To claim that the subject is the psychological representation of the concrete individual and that, as such, it is a non-negotiable unity for a discipline – psychology – that attempts to understand the human condition seems a tautological statement. But articulating this tautology is useful to remind us to be wary of the banality of a discipline where thought is not exerted. Given that it is reasonable to expect of this audience to know of Foucault's critique of the human sciences (2004), the articulation of what is taken for granted in this tautology is not an exercise in poor style but one of rendering visible what has been obscured by the discipline in its search for legitimacy. This 'shedding light' onto what has been obscured is to afford a more substantive exploration of the discipline: rather than articulating a representation of the subject, perhaps the discipline might find more value in thinking through what is involved in making sense of our selves and of the task at hand, that of living a life.

Despite the attempts so far in critical circles the problematic subject resists disappearing (Barney, 1994), forcing critical ideas in the discipline to reconsider their critical assumptions. This violence of the subject is indeed desirable for a critical response to the banality of the discipline and the search for more substantive alternatives. Discursive ideas in the field have contributed significantly to dismantling hegemonic descriptions of an unreflective and unproblematically, neatly self-contained subject. Through the idea of the psy-complex, much has been done to explain that what is often presented as a normal subject is in fact a subject of subjugation, a docile body whose loyalties are more to the governing bodies than to the people themselves. Deleuze, with and without Guattari, has much to offer at this level. The Deleuzian (thinking) subject gets its critical edge through its indeterminacy, through its active engagement with a process of differentiation. In line with these ideas, the Deleuzian subject brings forth a critical conceptual reorientation: the subject is not a representation of a specific entity but an experimental becoming that is constantly working out what it can do. In this sense, this subject has something to do with the notion of the assemblage discussed earlier, but cannot be fully equated with it. This is so because the subject as a site of consciousness – the psychological subject – is not located, according to Deleuze, as the foundation of knowledge or production but, as Hollander clarifies, "the subject emerges *only as an after-effect* of the selections made by desire [...] *not as the agent* of selection" (1999, p. 33). Deleuze and Guattari are bold in their claim that "the subject is produced as a mere residuum" (1983, p. 17).

Yet, there is a need to account for the materiality and a certain positive stubbornness of subjects. We must look not just at the subjects in their subjugation but also wonder at their resistance. And it is out of this need that much of the thought of Deleuze is of value to a critical approach to the discipline.

To engage with this line of thought, we need to start, as Deleuze did, with empiricism. But this is a different type of empiricism altogether from the one that is familiar to the discipline. Indeed, we need to start by accepting what presents to our senses. We need to come to terms with the fact that this, for lack of a better word, “un-shakeability” of the subject points to something of relevance, something that the discipline needs to make sense of. This subject however “is not to be confused with discursive formations, or with propositions and their extensional relations” (Bell, 2016, p. 80). At one level we need to think in terms of practice and concrete realities. After all, and rehearsing a Cartesian type of contemplation to some extent, isn’t it me – Maria, a person with clear presence and a sense of identity – who is writing these words? And isn’t it you – the reader reading this text now – also holding an equal position? And isn’t it that you are reading and evaluating what I am saying in the context of your own ideas of the discipline? Not only so, but also that you are reading and evaluating this paper wanting ‘this discipline’ to be better than what it is? In other words, how far can we push the idea that most of us in this conference will share a certain commonality regarding discursive practices?

Of course, the above account is to some extent a pedagogical trick that reduces some of the complexity of the ideas implied with the concept of discourse. But pedagogical tricks are used for pedagogical purposes. There is a (perhaps automatic) uneasiness that emerges if one does not come to a centre, a base, a unity that enables us to shape a reference point. These are dilemmas that are central to a discursive stance. After all, wasn’t Foucault’s project based exactly on this point? On the disquiet that emerged when laughing at one of Borges’ stories, a laughter “that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other” (Foucault, 2004, p. xvi)

Isn’t Foucault’s entire project an articulation of the insights that emerged out of such a disquiet, an insight that afforded the emergence of his triad knowledge-power-subject? On how the subject is constituted through the dominant practices of surveillance that shape us as docile bodies for government (including of course the psy-complex)? And wasn’t it Foucault himself who wrestled, as Deleuze described so elegantly (1988a), with the locking effects that such insights had on himself? And of equal importance but perhaps not as widely discussed, isn’t it Foucault’s later reorientation towards a preoccupation with the care of the self that, in conjunction with his ongoing preoccupation with Kant’s revolutionary spirit, articulates a direct reference to a double gesture of, at one level, questioning the subject by, at another, repositioning it within discourse?

Despite the fact that what I was referring to with the rather quirky notion of ‘the un-shakeability’ of the subject is something different to these considerations on Foucault, there is perhaps value to use this Foucaultian double gesture to start to articulate what a Deleuzian ‘subject’ would look like for a critical discipline. For Deleuze’s project, a more useful image – more so than the comfort that Descartes found in

his God-given cogito – is the discomfort that Foucault experiences as his contemplation transgresses the habitual forms of perception (and existence). This is so because, as I have indicated earlier, for Deleuze neither the subject nor thought is defined as an intellectual exercise of some kind. There is value however in the idea that the subject is intimately connected with contemplation. Yet, although both Descartes and Foucault were engaging in contemplation, their contemplations were incommensurably different. To understand the difference, a subtle yet significant distinction needs to be made between contemplation and reflection. Reflection, as the word indicates, implies a return of sorts, a bending backwards “in an Hegelian manner” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 8) to a return that implies identity and representations. Contemplation instead, sets the “practical foundation of the theatre of the future, the opening up of a path” (p. 9) of what is to come by a summoning of elements, by the passive synthesis that lies at the base of what we take to be ourselves and the world (1994, ch. II). Contemplation for Deleuze then has an empirical element that involves an engagement not with ‘things’ but with signs, and signs become ‘things’ through the same process in which we confirm our one identity. This is a profoundly important point that is currently beginning to be explored in philosophy (Williams, 2016).

Furthermore, we must recognize also that there is something more to the contemplative practices of Foucault and Descartes. Foucault’s discomfort is of importance in establishing the difference. And it is worth mentioning that Descartes also was experiencing discomfort when he wrote his famous *cogito ergo sum* (Pocock, 2013, p. 1). But his was a physical discomfort, a discomfort that led him to retreat from the world and to reflect. Foucault’s discomfort on the other hand is of a very different kind, it was epistemological. One way of explaining Foucault’s discomfort is through arguing that his discomfort stems out of his experiences living elsewhere, of opening his world to what is different. From 1955 until 1960, Foucault lived away from France (in Sweden, Poland and West Germany) occupying governmental cultural positions. Foucault reflects on these experiences as follows:

[T]hose societies near my own – but a little different – were very important. They looked sometimes like an exaggeration or an exacerbation of my own society [...]. And a lot of the trends in France which were not perceptible were visible to me – though the Swedes were blind to them themselves. I had a foot ten years back and a foot ten years ahead. (Foucault and Dillon, 1980, p. 300)

In a line that stands in opposite direction to Descartes’ retreat (and the consequent reduction) to the warmth and the comfort of the familiar, Foucault’s discomfort came from difference and shattered “all the familiar landmarks of [his] thought.” What was left has more resemblance to a Deleuzian subject not only because of its origin and its ‘nature’ but also because of its creative effects. In this shattered landscape, what Foucault encountered was an opening for ongoing experimentation, a constant pushing of definitions to their limit in order to transgress them. The transgression that I am referring to through the use of Foucault as an

example, is not a result of a moral judgement of what is good or bad¹¹ but is an affirmation of a foundational vitality that is always in the process of ongoing differentiation. It is in this sense that attempts to capture “its essence”, to define what “it is” – the search for El Dorado in psychology – inevitably leads to a certain stupidity in the search.

The response to the riddle of the subject lies in the fact that, as with metaphysics and with thought, Deleuze calls us to re-think what we understand by this concept. Deleuze calls us to focus not on what ‘the subject is’ but on experimenting on what we as subjects amongst other subjects can do. Our subjectivity is not a static entity waiting for its moment of release (from the societal shackles) but an experimental laboratory installed in the middle of an unfolding life that is larger than the self. In such an environment, the question is not what we are, but what can we do. More importantly, what can we do that is both significant and constructive to such a life. To respond to this question requires that we continue with the paradoxical kind of thought that Deleuze invites us to use. For, if there is any place for a subject in a Deleuzian critical psychology, it will need to be the subject as an artist. Deleuze has written significantly of the artist, in particular in relation to authors of great literature. Such an author experiments with language and pushes it to its limits ‘mak[ing] the language itself scream, stutter, stammer, or murmur’ (Deleuze, 1997, p. 110). Bogue explains that ‘The artist, the surrounding world and the work of art are all part of an apersonal unfolding of signs, and the finished artwork is a Joycean “chaosmos,” a chaos-become-cosmos’ (2003, pp. 3–4). But we must be clear on this point, the position of an artist is not so much about a person but about the individuation that takes place around the becoming of an artist. The artist then refers to a certain ‘special consistence as if it were thus separated from a more general regime to assume a kind of autonomy’ (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006, p. 89).

The artist is then someone who is not ‘in itself’ but who emerges out of a wrestling with the forces that compose it so as to create ‘a life’ which, for Deleuze means a certain moment of singularization, a unique and unrepeatable individuality that populates the space in ways that go beyond good and evil. Deleuze explains this using one of Dickens’ characters (2001, p. 28-9). More so, such a life – such a representation of life – goes against good and common sense and portrays the minorities that have been silenced by the normalizing and domesticating forces that we have to wrestle with. What the artist then does, is not to articulate one ‘critical’ voice but help in the construction of the multiplicity that allows the expression of the richness of life beyond the humanistic ideas so pervasive in contemporary life. Another way that Deleuze explains this is in relation to how humans can occupy space (a desert island):

human do not put an end to desertedness, they make it sacred. Those people who come to the island indeed occupy and populate it; but in reality, were they sufficiently separate, sufficiently creative, they would give the island only a dynamic image of itself;

¹¹ This is an important point for, if the content of the discovery is used to critique only, it runs the risk of turning into a dialectic of sorts which is not Deleuzian but Hegelian, not the affirmation of difference but a return to the one.

a consciousness of the movement which produced the island, such that through them the island would in the end become conscious of itself as deserted and unpeopled. The island would only be the dream of humans, and humans, the pure consciousness of the island. For this to be the case, there is again but one condition: humans would have to reduce themselves to the movement that brings them to the island, the movement that prolongs and takes up the *élan* that produced the island (1950s, p. 10-1)

This awareness that Deleuze is inviting the reader to consider, an awareness of oneself that is about forgetting oneself so as to have a full engagement with the outside, is what is at the base of his idea of becoming imperceptible as the ultimate goal in one's becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, plateau 10). It is in this sense that the title of this piece finally comes to make full sense.

There is one last point in relation to a Deleuzian subject that is important to make, a point that once more speaks to the un-shakeability of the subject despite the value of its becoming imperceptible. It is yet another paradoxical point that for many is perplexing. And it is so because it seems antithetical to the imperceptibility I was just referring to and to the critical search for an 'a-signifying' singularity implied in the letting go of definitions of essential unities and other semiotic limitations¹². I am referring to Deleuze and Guattari writing in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

you have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of significance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it [...] and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. (1987, p. 160)

I wanted to bring this rather puzzling point as a final comment in this section to serve as a reminder of what I stated earlier on, that life occurs in/on the continuum, as a variation within it, not as a final destination as such. We if continue with the image brought forth by the title of this paper, to have no time for subjective would have missed the point altogether. More than "being" imperceptible, the task at hand is about "becoming" imperceptible so as to connect with the forces that constitute our singularity, to wrestle with the forces that threaten it, either the nothingness that results from infinite chaos or the rigor mortis implied in fascist regimes of signs. It is the becoming without consummation that is the central element of life¹³. The point is to have some subjectivity. Enough subjectivity, as Deleuze says, so as to reform each dawn and continue the task of responding to the dominant ideas. For it is out of

¹² I am very aware that time and space has not allowed for a proper discussion on the work that Deleuze and Guattari have done on the complex relationship between semiotic regimes and the subject. See Nichterlein and Morss, 2017 for a more extensive introduction to this very relevant area in their work.

¹³ Thus the importance of the concept of "plateau" and Deleuze's admiration to Bateson.

this engagement with what needs to be transformed that the creative exercise of developing ways forward – a line of flight? – takes place.

It is in this sense that the shaking of the subject needs to continue encountering aspects that are unshakeable so as to engage with the process of “shaking and stirring” as a much longer – nay, an infinite – task of creating the space – the untimely space – for the earth and the people to come.

Challenges to/for a critical psychology

I have used harsh words in this paper, words that perhaps could be seen as not proper to the collegiality and the contemplative restraint that is desirable within intellectual pursuits. In our book, we have been even bolder and goaded psychology to consider some of the status quo in the discipline to be “morbid, insipid [and] florid” [p.168]. Yet, in line with Deleuze’s considerations on a friend as someone who unhinges us from conceptual traps and allows us to engage further in conceptual creation, I hope these provocations are seen as gestures to shake some of the dormitive principle (Bateson, 2002, p. 80) and stupefying assumptions regulating the discipline. It is in this spirit that I have commented on the stupidity experienced by a discipline that aims to understand and work with the human condition when it focuses on identifying a human essence based on identity, and of knowledge as representation, and that, in doing so, it is unknowingly disempowering and regimenting those who it claims to help. As we wrote elsewhere,

There is in psychology a pattern of domestication and of reification. This pattern – for it is not a specific ‘thing’ – is inextricably connected with the desire in psychology to ‘shed light’ onto, to create an image of, its subjects. Perhaps the major concern we have with psychology, then, is that it has turned into a type of King Midas, at whose touch everything turned to gold. Psychology is like a Midas who claims to be a chemical analyst who has ‘discovered gold everywhere’. Midas might claim to have found gold but, in doing so, other dangerous mechanisms have been set in place that ensure that ‘finding something else’ is now impossible for him. That is his tragedy, and therefore it is ours. (Nichterlein and Morss, 2017, p. 32)

Furthermore, and in order to continue with this relentless provocation, it could be even argued that if we are not careful, discursive approaches could also run the risk of falling into this category as they become more legitimate in the disciplinarian horizon. It worries me when I hear conversations where discursive language is presented as an antinomy – an opposition – to realism for, if it is not done with due care, it falls into the trap of claiming the space for a new set of ‘isms’... “it is not ‘reality’; it is discourse”... and, before we know, we are again making representational claims. It is for this more enlightened audience – the audience of critical psychologists – that I am writing this paper at this time of celebration for the achievements reached. There is indeed need for celebration for the work has been and will continue to be hard. If anything, I hope that my provocations serve as a reminder that the critical work is untimely and never-ending.

If there is any value for the discipline in Deleuze, such value is in part because he is clear in providing warning not to fall prey to what other great thinkers have; that there are no right nor wrong ways to go about living and making sense of our lives and thus that the danger is not about error but about falling prey to illusion. And illusions, as Deleuze says “are not abstract misinterpretations or just external pressures but rather thought’s mirages” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991, p. 49). Applied to our discipline, these mirages translate into a type of psychology that “continues to reduce the power and the potential of the event into predictable forms of knowledge (Motzkau, 2011) [and thus] continues to deny the complexity of its subject matter” (Nichterlein and Morss, 2017, p. 31).

There continues to be an urgent need to rise to the challenge of attempting to articulate the complexities of a discipline as rich as psychology. Psychology, as Rojas states, is “a discipline that is actually composed by a multi-textured and heterogeneous set of practices, fields and problems” (2016, p. 1). As such, it seems to some extent insane to believe that such complexity can be given credit through standardization and reduction. If there is any value in the contemplations that have given shape to this paper, it lies partly in the courage to accept that we need to observe and wrestle with the dangers of our own stupidity. In such a challenge, the discipline has two important allies in whom it can sometimes take solace.

One has to do with the transgressive elements inherent to misinterpreting rather than representing. The right for the young to misinterpret is one of the values that Deleuze thought Nietzsche fought for (Deleuze, 1973, p. 252), the right to wrestle with knowledge so as to bring something new to life. Deleuze responded critically to the dangers of what he described as “an appalling synthesis” (ibid) between Marx, Freud and Nietzsche as being “the dawn of our modern culture.” He explained that although Marx and Freud would go well together under such a description, Nietzsche was “something else entirely, the dawn of a counterculture” (p. 253). I have explained elsewhere why I find this comment of such significance:

Rather than providing for a stable system of critique – as perhaps was attempted by Marx and by Freud – this critique engages with what Deleuze calls “the dawn of a counterculture” (1973, p. 253) where the concepts of ‘dawn’ and of ‘counterculture’ have significant value. ‘Dawn’ is of importance due to its half-light dimension: as a time and space of emergence rather than of plenitude; of becoming rather than of being. ‘Counterculture’ is of relevance because it is a practice that draws its *puissance* from the act of ‘going against the grain,’ engaging in an endless process of demystification. What is of relevance in this engagement is that demystification is defined as a differential and relative concept: it doesn’t refer to a certain state of affairs – of facts – but refers to an ongoing process of differentiation from any system of representation, including those that claim critical attitudes. It is this ongoing differentiation that allows the movement towards the new – to what is yet to come – confirming the ultimate act both of resistance and of art. (Nichterlein, 2013, p. 252-3)

The second ally we find in a constant invocation to life as the measure of all the activities of the discipline. And, in this tenor, I would like to close this rather long paper with a quote by Brown and Stenner:

The problem we face within psychology is not then, as is commonly assumed, the problem of 'the subject', but rather that of 'life'. Or more precisely, of understanding how particular lives are extracted from the modes of existence, relations, normativities and processes which comprise life-in-itself. (2009, p. 176)

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