

The Other Language: Reading Taylor and Deleuze Together

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Introduction.

The discussion in this paper will focus, first, on the notion of a language of personal resonance as introduced by Charles Taylor in his book "The Ethics of Authenticity" (1991). Taylor's assertion that such a language might play a central role in helping us to be more responsive to the claims of nature and the world at large will be addressed, as will Taylor's distinction of two kinds of subjectivation and the danger which, according to Taylor, arises from the confusion between the two. According to Taylor, it is the existence of such a language that enables us to be more responsive to the greater world around us by establishing a connective link to the otherwise inaccessible, yet public, order of meanings and, as a result, being able to reconstruct what Taylor identifies as the ethics of authenticity.

While recognizing the appropriateness of conceptualizing subtle languages, and supporting in general Taylor's intent of the idea of reconstruction, this paper will critically examine Taylor's views on what he specifically identifies as a deconstructive strand of philosophical thought. The paper's argument – in an effort to consider poststructuralist thinking as a sign of cultural evolution rather than decline, posited by Taylor – will address in brief Gilles Deleuze's postmodern, yet constructive and pragmatic, philosophy. Within scope of this paper, the review of Deleuzian (and Deleuze and Guattari's) thinking will be selective and limited to some aspects of the problematics of language in both its expression and content.

Taylor's work of retrieval.

Taylor's book "The Ethics of Authenticity" leaves one with the feeling of incompleteness – as might an aboriginal painting that requires one to look beneath the form of strikes and dots so as to retrieve the very content of the artist's expression. Taylor rightly claims that the notion of authenticity, or self-fulfillment, has been at the very heart of many problems of modern epoch. Analyzing the form in which the culture of modernity has long been expressing itself, Taylor undertakes, in his words, "the work of retrieval" (1991, 23) of the values behind the true self, or the moral ideal of authenticity, aiming to recover the depth of modern culture and perhaps even return a bit of magic to the currently disenchanted world. Tracing the process of the linear progression toward the authentic moral self as its ideal end, Taylor acknowledges the presence of a point at which this perfectly straight line deviated from the prescribed course. It was then, for Taylor, that the noble ideal has been reduced to its trivial form of self-centredness or self-indulgence, and the private world of the self turned narcissistic and consequently became flat, narrow and shallow.

Moreover, as asserted by Taylor, it is destined to remain such unless the said self recognizes itself as grounded in the pregiven horizon of significance, the latter enabling one to understand one's existence against, as Taylor posits, "something noble, courageous, and hence significant in giving shape" (Taylor 1991, 39) to one's life independently of one's will solely. The idea of an *a priori* horizon is closely tied with a need for a recognition at the social, political and intimate levels, because – as Taylor notices – "my discovering my identity ... [means] that I negotiate it through dialogue ... with others" (1991, 47). Continuing his argument for a critical attitude toward existing cultural practices, Taylor introduces the notion of a personal domain of subtler languages as a means to be "aware of something in nature for which there are as yet no adequate words" (Taylor 1991, 85). Two points attract attention here: first, Taylor expands the realm of social interactions by considering human agents "as part of a larger order that can make claims on us" (89) and, second: there appears to be a necessity for a means of communication – albeit implicit and metaphorical – that serves to explore the world beyond the self, thus helping to "realize the highest potentialities of our modern culture" (91).

Taylor emphasized that such a language should be used "non-subjectivistically" (Taylor 1991, 90) that is, without sliding toward the way of thinking reduced to instrumental reason, as well as – and this second point is, for Taylor, crucial – unbiased by the idea of identity stated "exclusively [as] an expression

of the self" (1991, 88) which Taylor specifies as the subjectivation of matter. He contrasts the subjectivation of matter with the subjectivation of manner, the latter described as a specific form of accessing the otherwise inaccessible realm equivalent to the nostalgic "'objective' order in the classical sense of a publicly accessible domain of references" (Taylor 1991, 88). The manner – or, in other words, the expressive form of language – is considered by Taylor as properly self-referential in the sense of its being unique for a specific individual, hence validating the subjectivation of manner. But the matter – or content – of such a subjective expression is, according to Taylor, aligned with the larger natural order which is human-independent. Therefore the issue of self-referentiality of matter – self-expression – is simply invalid. According to Taylor, the subjectivation of matter, as such, is a product of the confusion between the two kinds of subjectivation which "lends legitimacy to the worst forms of subjectivism" (Taylor 1991, 82). Such a subjectivism is manifested, as per Taylor's opinion and contrary to the virtues of the poets of Romantic era, in the worst anthropocentric vices and ultimate immorality of such "apostles of evil" (Taylor 1991: 66) as Artaud and Bataille, or in the radical freedom and "love affair with power" (1991, 67) of, for example, such figures as Foucault and Nietzsche.

The existence of a language of personal resonance therefore becomes imperative; otherwise the large objective order remains beyond access and articulation, and the anthropocentric self asserts itself as the only reality. Because the discovery of one's identity requires "poiesis, [that is] making" (Taylor 1991, 62), the language of expression has to change from the mimetic language of representation to the metaphorical and creative – poetic – language rooted in the sensibility of the artist who alone is capable of exploring "an order beyond the self" (Taylor 1991, 82). The language of the personal resonance with an artist's sensibility thus makes it possible to enrich one's identity with the long lost feeling of belonging to nature which is derived from a strong sense of linkage to "more-than-anthropocentric ... wider whole" (1991: 91). Thus poetic language becomes a means of engagement, for Taylor, into very "real, never-completed battle" (Taylor 1991, 91) to rectify and correct the course of progression to the higher moral ideal. Taylor proposes that such a language is indeed used as "one of our main weapons in the continuous struggle against the flattened and trivialized forms of modern culture" (Taylor 1991, 91).

Let us pause here ... Wow! The language that was supposed to be subtle sounds quite aggressive, and the poet's quill, as appropriated by Taylor, turns into a weapon. It is clear that by focusing on the wider whole of the ideal and more-than-anthropocentric, public, order of meanings Taylor fails to recognize the real human, perhaps all-too-human, flesh-and-blood, and deeply unhappy beings behind the names of Nietzsche, Foucault and the like. If, for Nietzsche, God had not died, would Taylor still have undertaken his work of retrieval of moral values in their highest manifestation? For Taylor, what he calls the Nietzschean challenge is carried further by such postmodernists as Derrida and Foucault up "to the point even of 'deconstructing' the ideal of authenticity, and the very notion of the self" (60). The critique of values as created can only, as Taylor states, "exalt and entrench anthropocentrism. In the end, it leaves the agent ... with a sense of untrammelled power and freedom before a world that imposes no standards, ready to enjoy 'free play', or to indulge in an aesthetics of the self" (Taylor 1991: 61).

It seems that, to Taylor, the transgressive intent as a feature of postmodernist thinking, appears to have assumed an ugly form incompatible with his aesthetic ideal, and hence immoral – because for Taylor beauty and the ethics of authenticity are intimately linked. Taylor's rationale then closely follows the trend of analytic philosophy to equate the ideal with its fixed meaning so that any deviation from such a rigid meaning would be indeed considered a disordered intrusion in the orderly – and objective! – world. As it stands, to redirect such a deviant form back to its original destination would appear to be a necessary and noble task, an ongoing battle indeed, and a sign of progress for its apologists such as Taylor.

Taylor's creed to "identify and articulate the higher ideal behind the more or less debased practices, and then criticize these practices from the standpoint of their own motivating ideal" (1991, 72) is a cause shared by liberal thought. Thus, Taylor's presupposed liberal "self" indeed possesses an *a priori* sense of self-identity and certainty and, using it as a criterion, is therefore able to discriminate between authentic and inauthentic values and to make moral judgments against the preexisting higher ideal. Poiesis – never mind its being advocated by Taylor – sinks, as it seems, back to mimesis, despite Taylor's otherwise assertion, and the language that was supposed to serve a higher mission, stays at the level of representations. Moreover – and as if ironically confusing even more those ranks of order that Taylor insists on maintaining – it risks its own downfall until regressing up to the point of, as we have just seen, turning into hostile and aggressive. Taylor accuses postmodern thinkers of deligitimizing horizons of significance by positing a trivial and deviant form of a free choice as the major remaining value therefore, according to Taylor, further intensifying anthropocentrism by setting up a vicious circle of the cultural condition.

Becoming-language/becoming-other.

Can there be any means to overcome the said circularity, to break out of the vicious circle? In this respect it seems that there exists a definite, even if subtle, affinity of Taylor's reconstructive effort to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze who still is just a marginal figure in the Anglo-American thought. Yet, several philosophers of education (Leach and Boler 1998; Peters 1998; Semetsky 2002) have explored his "potential for thinking differently with respect to the public and currently scholarly debates around educational theory and practice" (Leach and Boler 1998, 150). Philosophy, for Deleuze, exists in an "essential and positive relation to nonphilosophy" (Deleuze 1995, 140) thus making new means of philosophical expression, exceeding rational thought alone, imperative. The new language of expression is as paramount for Deleuze as for philosophers in the liberal tradition but is not limited to its linguistic representation: the language may take either linguistic or non-linguistic forms, from writing to film to hybrids like artistic images or signs. As with any Deleuzian concept, the language should undergo transformation up to the point of a new language being created.

As pertaining to the philosophy of language, the form of content, for Deleuze, is inseparable from the form of expression. It seems that a language of the personal resonance advocated by Taylor is related to Deleuze's poetic undertaking (Deleuze 1994, 23-29) of creating a new language system. A new non-representational language of expression, exemplified in what Deleuze called a performative or modulating aspect, is being created by means of the language *structure* going through the *process* of its own becoming-other and undergoing a series of transformations giving birth to a new, as if foreign, language. Language, as any other philosophical concept for Deleuze, is posited as an intensive multiplicity, that is, language as a *system*, which becomes effective and expressive as long as the form of expression is *not separated from*, but supplemented by, the form of content: both exist in assemblage. The two may even appear to parallel Taylor's subjectivations of manner and matter, if not for the different logic constituting the relationships between and within each of the categories. For Deleuze, both exist in assemblage comprising a machinic multiplicity functioning *semiotically* in accord with the triadic logic of included middle. As for Taylor's formalizations, they seem to be presented by means of a "double articulation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 44) of binary and dyadic logic. Dualistic split makes one of the forms of subjectivation take priority over the other, establishing hierarchy and seemingly providing a "sound" ground for Taylor's identifying the danger of confusing the proper ranks of order as located on disjoint levels.

Moving, however, from the dyadic logic based on a signifier-signified correspondence – the word as representing world – to the triadic, *a-signifying*, semiotics, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that the primacy of content as the determining factor cannot be posited vis-à-vis primacy of expression as a signifying system, such a double articulation indeed breeding dichotomy. Ranks of order are irrelevant: both content and expression are embedded in a complex, not hierarchical but heterogeneous, system of relations in such a way that one reciprocally presupposes the other. Yet, "[u]tterances are not content to describe corresponding states of things: these are rather ... two non-parallel formalizations, ... assembling signs and bodies as heterogeneous components of the same machine" (Deleuze 1987, 71). The metaphoric stuttering, posited by Deleuze (1994), does enable becoming of a new syntax because it "itself ushers in the words that it affects" (Deleuze 1994, 23). As such, it seems to function in a mode of what, for example, Dewey would have called "total organic resonance" (Dewey 1934/1980, 122) – but this resonance mode differing from Taylor's notion of a personal resonance. As a poetic modulation, stuttering is always creative because the subtle variations of the refrain tend to destabilize language, thus creating a positive change inscribed in "a grammar of disequilibrium" (Deleuze 1994, 27) – rather than Taylor's asserting any deviation, and therefore destabilization, appearing as a line that needs to be rectified and corrected back to its original course.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987), emphasizing the potential of such a language to be truly creative, refer to Proust "who said that 'masterpieces are written in a kind of foreign language'" (1987, 98). The language functions on the margins like any other becoming, that is, in a form of "*the outside* of language, not outside of it" (Deleuze 1994, 28) or as a limit case of language modulations. The language becomes effective as long as the form of expression exists in a reciprocal relationship with the form of content. The reciprocity between the two is derived from "a different logic of social practice, an intensive and affective logic of the included middle" (Bosteels 1998, 151) which defines them "by their mutual solidarity, and neither of them can be identified otherwise" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 45). In its most effective mode the binary opposition between content and expression becomes blurred, leading to the emergence of a new property: a highly expressive, passionate language, in which an utterance affected by a play of forces becomes an expressive enunciation.

At the ontological level this indicates, for Deleuze, the *univocity* of Being, that is, the highest possible affirmation of its process-structure. This dynamics is described as

“a transformation of substances and a dissolution of forms, a passage to the limits or flight from contours in favor of fluid forces, flows, air, light and matter, such that a body or a word does not end at a precise point. We witness the incorporeal power of that intense matter, the material power of that language. ... In continuous variations the relevant distinction is no longer between a form of expression and a form of content but between two inseparable planes in reciprocal presupposition. ... Gestures and things, voices and sounds, are caught up in the same ‘opera’, swept away by the same shifting effects of stammering, vibrato, tremolo, and overspilling. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 109).

Deleuze’s brilliant metaphor of stuttering is used precisely as a marker of in-between-ness, or threshold : “*Stutterer, thinker of the outside* – what better way is there to register the passage of a philosopher?” (Boundas and Olkowski 1994, 3). Deleuze’s philosophy is different from a rational consensus, and an intellectual understanding gives way to an “intensity, resonance, musical harmony” (Deleuze 1995, 86). The rationale of Deleuzian philosophy is pragmatic, as ascertained by its effects, and the thinking it produces is experimental and experiential bringing the element of art into rational thought, the former, almost by necessity, making the true philosopher a creative artist capable of thinking the unthinkable. We remember the regret expressed by Taylor due to the lack of a language that would serve to connect the individual and social aspects of self-formation: well, it is Deleuze and not Taylor who is capable of articulating the conditions of possibility of creating such a language.

It is when expressed by stuttering that some new form of content becomes manifest: the intensity of stuttering, “a milieu functioning as the conductor of discourse brings together ... the whisper, the stutter, ... or the vibrato and imparts upon words the resonance of the affect under consideration” (Deleuze 1994, 24). It is pure affect that serves as a precondition for resonance: by having produced a state of a-signifying rupture, “the transfer from the form of expression to the form of content has been completed” (Deleuze 1994, 26). Pertaining to language in its mediating function – a diagrammatic function, says Deleuze -- “content is not a signified nor expression a signifier, ... [instead] both are variables in assemblage” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 91) the latter described by a distributed, non-representational and a-signifying semiotic process. A diagram, in its function of linking discursive and non-discursive modes of expression, acts as a diagonal connection, the purpose of which is to “pursue the different series, to travel along the different levels, and cross all thresholds; instead of simply displaying phenomena or statements in their vertical or horizontal dimensions, one must form a transversal or mobile diagonal line” (Deleuze 1988a, 22), specified as a line of flight.

The language of expression – and we remember that Deleuze refers to it as *foreign*, that is always implying a new content by means of new expressive form – comprises heterogeneous levels and is unstable, described by “style [that] carves differences of potential between which ... a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed” (Deleuze 1995, 141). The language may be subtle, sometimes even “like silence, or like stammering ... something letting language slip through and making itself heard” (Deleuze 1995, 41), or appearing in its extra-linguistic mode of functioning as the regime of signs. Such a mode of communication is indirect and operates in order to bring this assemblage “to the light of the day, to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self (*Moi*)” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 84). The self then is not posited *a priori*, but is produced – or, as Nel Noddings says (1998, 183), is *constituted*. When extracted from experiential happenings and occurrences, such “my Self” becomes itself a relational sign-event going by the name *moi*. Subjectivation – of *matter*, indeed – becomes manifest in the *manner* of free expression: the two presuppose each other. Such a mode of subjectivation, for Deleuze, “has little to do with any [constituting] subject. It’s to do, rather, with individuated fields, not persons or identities. It’s what Foucault, elsewhere, calls ‘passion’” (Deleuze 1995, 98, brackets mine, IS).

This is subjectivation not degraded to what Taylor called the worst kind: we remember that he defines the subjectivation of matter in terms an anthropocentric self-determining freedom. It is freedom, sure enough, as well as aesthetics of the self – the latter also downgraded by Taylor. Deleuze proclaims subjectivation as artistic creative potential indeed close to the Foucauldian “art of oneself that’s exact opposite of oneself” (Deleuze 1995, 115): free expression and free speech contribute to self-becoming-other, thus constituting the very *process* of subject-formation. The new subjectivity manifests by expressing itself passionately and freely so as “to bring something to life, to free life from where it’s trapped, to trace lines of flight” (Deleuze 1995, 141). And the language for doing so is – repeating and

emphasizing the meaning of the earlier Deleuze's citation -- "always unstable, always heterogeneous, in which style carves differences of potential between which ... a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed" (Deleuze 1995, 141).

The element of novelty as something that "we were hardly aware existed" points to Deleuze's rejection of mimesis. So he would not disagree with Taylor here. Yet, Deleuze posits what he calls a repetition of the Different described by him as "not the emanation of an 'I', but [as] something that places in immanence the always other" (Deleuze 1998a, 98). As such, the repetition of the Different is a conceptualization more complex than Taylor's poetic making which would indeed require "I" as a *constituting* – vs. *constituted* – subject. The process of placing in immanence the always other as self-referential and *autopoietic* (Semetsky 2001, 2002) would be qualified by Taylor as biased in terms of subjectivation of matter and therefore disregarded as leading towards establishing a vicious circle of anthropocentric predicament. For Deleuze, however, subjectivation *is* the relation to oneself; it is self-reference but of the paradoxical quality where one's self is always in a process of becoming-other. As such, subjectivity does not presuppose what Taylor calls "my discovering my identity" (1991, 47): instead – and far from return to identity -- novelty as *difference* presents "life as a work of art" (Deleuze 1995, 94). For Deleuze, subjectivation means inventing and creating new forms of life, and the infamous death of the subject is not to be mourned. Personal crises are not some ugly forms of life betraying Taylor's dream of an aesthetic ideal. Instead, they are to be considered as conditions of possibility of becoming *other* than the present self: it is along the line of flight that "a new direction of the zigzagging line" (Deleuze 1995, 45) is being established – this new direction indeed, that Taylor has been positing as a deviation from the straight progression toward the authentic moral ideal.

Conclusion

Where then would be a place for ethics in Deleuze's philosophy as compared to Taylor's ethics of authenticity addressed at the very beginning of this paper? We have seen that subjectivity is capable of expressing itself in its present actuality neither by means of progressive climbing toward the ultimate moral ideal, nor by "looking for origins, even lost or deleted ones, but setting out to catch things where they were at work, in the middle: breaking things open, breaking words open" (Deleuze 1995, 86). The vicious circle therefore is not the sole logical conclusion for, as Taylor said, "trivialization of our predicament" (1991, 68) which "deeply subverts" (69) his moral ideal. In fact, and in the framework of Deleuze's philosophy, the *vicious* circle seems to be a false problem: it may indeed turn into *virtuous*. The Deleuzian subject is able to avoid being stuck in a vicious circle because it is free to invent new concepts and capable of articulating new values contingent on the dynamics of experience.

When Deleuze refers to philosophical concepts as created, he describes them *not* in the language of *propositions*, but in terms of a cinematic image, or a musical composition, or an artistic creation: "A painter is someone who creates in the domain of lines and colors ... Likewise a philosopher is someone who creates in the domain of concepts, someone who invents new concepts. ... Concepts are singularities which react with ordinary life, with ordinary or everyday fluxes of thought" (Deleuze, original French, quoted in Bogue 1989, 155); as contingent on experience, concepts are inseparable from affects and percepts. The newly created concepts, or concepts the meanings of which have been altered, impose new sets of evaluation on the aforementioned fluxes of life, and – sure enough – for Deleuze, no thinking, no speaking, and no acting, are value-free. Contrary to Taylor's nostalgic sentiment, values are to be created precisely because life is full of conflicting and *differing* experiences and is not a straight-forward affair.

For Deleuze, "once one ventures outside what's familiar and reassuring, once one has to invent new concepts for unknown lands, then methods and moral systems break down" (Deleuze 1995, 103). A moral ideal simply does not enter Deleuze's discourse because a concept always "speaks the event, [and] not the essence" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 21) of things. Event is always an element of becoming, and the becoming is unlimited. Deleuze is firm on the question of the impersonality of event: as a multiplicity, an event is profoundly social and collective therefore "irreducible to individual states of affairs, particular images, [or] personal beliefs" (Deleuze 1990, 19). One – in whose body an event is localized – is to be worthy of this event. For this purpose, one has to attain an ethical *responsibility* or, as Deleuze says, "this will that the event creates in us" (Deleuze 1990, 148) as if ourselves becoming a quasi-cause of that what is being produced.

The creative process does not provide a room for the old set of values, nor eternal ones are stored there: Deleuzian philosophy "always speaks of values that are to come" (Ansell Pearson 1997, 4). The

ethical question, for Deleuze, consists in evaluation of multiple modes of existence that would not be expressed solely in rational value-judgements. Consistent with the intent of contemporary philosophy of education to stay in pursuit of “new vocabularies and new meanings for old vocabularies” (Noddings 1993, 6), Deleuze prefers affective tones specified in terms of “I love” ... instead of ‘I judge’” (Deleuze 1989, 141) that serve as a means for ethical evaluations. Ethical concerns are embedded in experience because the pluralism of significations breaks down any *a priori* moral ideal as being the same for everyone and under any circumstances. As pertaining to education, the fact that ethics is to be explored anew is inseparable from recognizing, as Deleuze says, “the other in me” (1998, 98), that is, to be capable of speaking *the other language* – a concept articulated in the title of this paper.

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