**Vibrant identities and finding joy in difference**

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As Street’s (1993) memorable phrase ‘culture is a verb’ suggests, cultures are ‘doing things’: vibrant, pulsating and alive. Such a statement heralded a turning point in our view of cultural identities, one that worked towards more unsteady, porous, and messy processes. Far from being fixed in a particular place, the articulation of biography, space and materiality in the intercultural encounter is never at rest. Like ‘life in a caravan’, multilingual and multicultural existence is lived in constant motion, movement and chaos. Inseparable from such buzz of activity and cacophony of ‘difference’ are the rhythms and assemblages of ‘doing’ and ‘becoming’ in the intercultural encounter.

Like the geometric patterns of the moiré effect described by Jaworski (2017), the approximate and imperfect alignment of forces in the intercultural encounter can appear like the pleasant ebb and flow movement of watery or wavelike pattern on silk, as ‘people come and go, objects move, conversations start and end’ (p. 536). And yet, too often, the feelings and mood typically associated with interculturality are the bitter after-taste of pain, conflict and defeat. This issue claims that there is a secret force and potentiality in the intercultural encounter which resides in the messiness and the stumbling of the intercultural (Phipps 2006). This article argues that it is in this slight misalignment of purposes, frictions and rupture where identities thrive and create something new: other realities and other possibilities.

The title of this issue, *vibrant identities,* captures the organic and complex nature of identity in the entanglement of material, dynamic and multiple configurations of life. It seeks to sketch out an understanding of identity that thrives in chaos rather than in order, in unpredictability rather than certainty, and in entanglements rather than in straight lines. It discusses the myriad of temporary and radically unstable identities that are open to modification and alteration (de Freitas and Curinga 2015) and how such imperfect, exploding, and vibrant identities are played out in the fields of education, translation, educational philosophy and literacy studies.

We see *vibrant identities* as removed from an anthropocentric understanding of cultural formations that relies on a sovereign subject who gives meaning to life. This approach equally rejects binary traditions that see culture and nature as irreconcilable. It challenges the existence of clear cut boundaries between humans, their context and organic and non-organic life. Instead, a vibrant understanding of identity sees culture and nature in a continuum and draws on a monistic view of the world that sees signs of life everywhere. This is an understanding of identity that gives primacy to the materiality and force of life rather than man-made language and culture. It also takes a fresh look at identity by focusing on perceptual and pre-verbal aspects of languages and cultures. Such a multisensorial view of languages and cultures forces us to see identity as conferred through moment-by-moment living and compels us to focus on the material and sensual aspects of our make-up.

At the centre of our understanding of identity is that there is an advantage in seeing identity in vitalistic terms. Identity, in this sense, goes beyond the discursively constructed subject to include experience derived from life and its finitude. Starting from the idea that life itself encompasses death (Braidotti 2013: 134), this life-death continuum exists beyond the human individual. So life need no longer be seen as given meaning by the prospect of death, since in new vitalistic understandings, death is part of life. This is in contrast to the traditional understanding of death in which life is finite and lived with death on the horizon, ‘a sort of ontological magnet that propels us forward: death is rather behind us.’ (Braidotti 2011: 343). Such a profound certainty is what the rational individual shapes his life against. Instead, the vitalistic life-death continuum radical approach facilitates transgressing boundaries: ‘It connects us trans-individually, trans-generationally and eco-philosophically.’ (Braidotti 2011: 135)

Indeed, a vitalist approach to identity celebrates the energy of life and requires a new conceptualisation of the self as it moves through life and leaves traces ‘held together by the immanence of his/her expressions, acts and interactions with others and by the powers of remembrance or continuity in time.’ (Braidotti 2013: 138). Rather than seeking to separate and give meaning to the subject and its identity by oppositions such as that between animal life and nature, life and death, or past and present, a ‘vibrant’ understanding of identity embraces an ontology of identity that proposes desire as the engine of creativity and life-affirming processes of becoming. As Barad poignantly puts it ‘humans are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming’ (2007: 150).

If much theory on intercultural communication has focused on the many internal and external conflicts that the construction of new identities engenders, this issue sets out to focus on a little- researched aspect of the quest for new intercultural identities, that of the life-enhancing opportunities of the intercultural encounter in the multiple configurations of life. We will be arguing that whilst being and living in-between cultures means being exposed to meaning in disarray, thanks to the powerful antidote of desire (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Braidotti 2011), it is also possible to find rich meanings and identities in unexpected arrangements of the self. Whilst rejecting oppositions and binaries, we would like to align with Deleuze’s concept of ‘difference’ which gives rise to a multiplicity that is non-hierarchical (Deleuze 1994). This difference manifests itself not only in the linguistic but also in the many semiotic expressions through which identity is performed. Difference, unlike ‘sameness’ is not a static and fixed dead-end. Rather, it is full of possibility and provides us with a wealth of identity repertoires.

The philosophical foundation of this vitalistic power of difference can be found in the work of Spinoza, especially his *Ethics*, from which Gilles Deleuze draws his life-affirming approach. Deleuze and Guattari explain Spinoza’s radical approach as one refusing finiteness: ‘Thus each individual is an infinite multiplicity […]’ (2013: 296). In his lectures on Spinoza, Deleuze draws on the reluctance to accept bounded identities by emphasizing joy as the engine of identity, which is constantly at work, what he calls the ‘labour of life’ which renders life as a complex flow of intensities.

This life-enhancing view of the intercultural requires new vocabularies and new intellectual influences that cut across disciplines but that have similar ontologies. In this volume, we draw on cultural studies, applied linguistics and philosophy to sketch out what we understand by *vibrant identities* from nomadic (Braidotti 1994, Deleuze and Guattari 2004), posthuman (Braidotti 2013, Pennycook 2018) and vitalistic (Braidotti 2013, Bennett 2009) perspectives.

In order to do this, we explore how the notions of vitality, materiality, and posthumanism give us an alternative lens which enables us to envisage a new ontology of identity. Such an ontology moves away from the individual to focus on the subject as multiplicity, as process and on a pre-individual subjectivity, a subjectivity that is open to the vital force that allows the subject to decentre. Braidotti calls the energies generated by such a force ‘positive passions’, a step further from what we would call powerful motivations. These ‘positive passions’ are also addressed as ‘becomings’, the kinds of transformations that take into account not only the ‘spurious efficiency and opportunism of advanced capitalism’ (Braidotti 2013: 92) but our dreams, desires, imaginations and memories, and our body materialities.

Above all, by invoking movement, multiplicity and materiality, this issue will challenge understandings of identity that are static, bounded, and human-made. This is best understood by developing our concept of *vibrant identities* along five axes: (1) *becomings, (2) relationality, (3) language, (4) agencements, and (5) affect.*

1. *Becomings*

In re-thinking the notion of ‘identity’ in languages and cultures we have undertaken not only to explore but ‘to explode’ the terrain of identity, allowing it the vibrancy that nomadic philosophy accords to subjectivity and processes of becoming. *‘*Whereas identity is a bounded, ego-indexed habit of fixing and capitalizing on one’s selfhood, subjectivity is a socially mediated process of relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multi-layered social structures*.’* (Braidotti 2011:4). Nomadic theory as expounded by Braidotti (2011) unambiguously rejects unitarian, essentialised identity, preferring to think in terms of a multiple and dynamic decentred subjectivity. In intercultural studies, the concept of identity persists, most likely because it relates to language and national, regional and local identities, alongside the intensely personal and subjective. In this issue we accept a distinction between identity and subjectivity, the former fixing the self in a particular time and space, the latter, allowing it movement and transgression by crossing time-space boundaries that allows the self to evolve and thrive in new environments by making new complex relationships. As Fenoulhet’s article (this volume) explains 'I take subjectivity as the part of the individual that is lived in the moment and identity as stemming from the social and political discourses that surround the subject'. But in other contributions (Budach and Sharoyan, for instance), this distinction dissolves. However, Ferri (this volume) expands on the interplay between identity and subjectivity with recourse to the figure of the cyborg (Haraway 1991) by explaining how subjectivity ‘subverts the sovereign role of the rational subject’ (identity) and instead redefines identity as ‘embodied, fractured, and as outsider’. For Ferri, the cyborg breaks through a number of dualities presented by the notion of identity: self-other, mind-body, nature-culture, private-public, and truth-illusion. Indeed, the notion of the hybrid, cyborg organism made out of both human and machinic properties, exemplifies this multiple, dynamic and decentered notion of ‘subjectivity’ which creates ‘new fusions between heterogenous categories’ (Fenoulhet, this volume). Like cyborgs, rethinking identities as *vibrant identities* allows the self to add new subjectivities rather than to exclude old ones, i.e. ‘and’, ‘and’, rather than ‘either’, ‘or’ so that subjectivities which emerge through these intersections and interactions are the result of an ‘active engagement with the world through which it constructs meaning and finds purpose’ (Ferri, this volume). Quoting Haraway, Ferri states that these new engagements with the world which are created through this process, are located in a (cyborg) world which ‘might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints’ (Haraway, 1991: 154)

So, how might identity lose its fixity and rigidity? In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, ‘becomings’ are the ways in which this may be achieved. The most fundamental kind of becoming is a becoming-minor; that is, embracing the margins and leaving behind fixed, established identities. In a patriarchal society, the first step would be a becoming-woman. And a becoming-animal can activate new energies, just as a becoming-child might put us in touch with our pre-individual self. Ferri’s article (this volume) provides an example of an intercultural journey narrated from a minoritarian subject position in the biomythography of Audre Lorde, who subverts the binary self-other from a feminist and postcolonial perspective. Lorde claims a minoritarian position as a mark of positive difference.

The process of becoming in this volume, however, is not one that is achieved by finding some sort of autonomy of the self, freedom from its dependency on others and one’s surroundings. This is the ‘finding yourself’ motto of self-help books of today’s psychotherapeutic society that looks for an ‘‘essential’ and a ‘true’ identity (Lawler 2012). Instead, a *vibrant identity* looks to connect and branch out in different directions, to build relationships and intra-actions with the environment, to grow rhizomatically and entangle with specific milieus and circumstances. *Vibrant identities* are the result of intra-active becomings, a ‘stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity’ (Barad 2007:151).

The notion of becoming is about transformation as the basis of all life, organic and non-organic. Life in this sense is seen as a giant network of connections which change and mutate. In a lecture on Posthuman Knowledge(s) (Summer School, University of Utrecht, 2019) Braidotti illustrates this point by referring to Lynn Margulis, an evolutionary biologist, who argues that the big leaps in the development of life, i.e. in new species, are caused through a process of symbiosis in which neither of the original organisms dominate over the other (see the film Symbiotic Earth, 2017). Becomings are not linear developments from one static state of ‘being’ into another static state. They are processes of ongoing change and mutation as organisms keep on interacting, merging and mutating in this vibrant process of life.

As with physical organisms, so with social life and its concrete lived experiences. People don’t live in closed-off systems of cultures, societies, and other groupings, with fixed pre-ordained meanings. Instead social life allows us to create new understandings as we relate to ourselves, to others, to the world around us in ever complex and shifting patterns. In other words, we create new understandings as we connect with our various cultural allegiances in the everyday of our lives through the information we consume, the institutions we are part of, or the languages we speak. Each contact, encounter or new piece of information can lead to new ways of attaching and detaching ourselves. We develop new ways of seeing, interpreting, and thinking about ourselves: it is what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) call ‘lines of becoming’. Budach & Sharoyan (this volume) see the development of a new subjectivity and a new set of relationships with the world as an explosion, an explosion that ‘produces beauty rather than destruction’. Such an explosion of identity allows us to ‘deterritorialise’ ie. to leave models and sets of relationships already established and created by others to create our own ‘lines of flight’.

Becomings then are creative, vibrant, embodied processes of transformation, which in the light of new experience and new connections, create new productive understandings – as if something is just caught in a different beam of light, altering its appearance, its meaning. The vibrancy and materiality of making new connections in this process of discovery, is captured by a recent Instagram post by an artist:

‘There’s something really fun about the painting process, not really knowing where it’s heading, while seeing the traces of where it’s been. There comes a certain moment in the process […….] which breaks the equilibrium and it spirals into uncharted territory.’

(Kimbal Bumstead, Instagram, 13 May, 2020)

The joy experienced in these becomings, of engaging with and reflecting on this process of change, in other words of ‘breaking the equilibrium and spiralling into uncharted territory’, is one that is also part of the process of becoming in intercultural encounters. A process that brings joy and creates new forms of life and new forms of being. The field of intercultural communication, however, has traditionally been less one of joy and discovery, and more one of focusing on the negativity of new encounters. For Budach & Sharoyan (this volume) the notion of ‘difference’ can be related to Pratt’s (1991) idea of the ‘contact zone’, *‘a space where cultures meet and mingle and where intercultural encounters and frictions are being reflected critically and made productive’*.

The recent shift in intercultural communication research also focuses on this productive quality of the intercultural encounter. It focuses on the multiplicity and messiness of identity formations, the movement and sensual nature of real life encounters heralds a new understanding of intercultural subjectivities or vibrant identities that focuses on such untamed and multiple becomings. Ros i Solé (2016) describes the vitality that a student of Serbian experiences while informally experiencing the language in a cultural centre:

‘Whereas in the first scene there is no movement of objects, no dynamism, the second time everything is fully animated. If in the first scene, the adjective ‘slowly’ summarised the mood, in the second, it is the adjective ‘buzz’ that defines the moment. Weronika does not merely take an observer and passive position, but she partakes and contributes to the mood of the place. She is busy doing ‘emotion work’ and joining in the sociality of emotions . She is busy talking, eating typical food, drinking spirits and smoking’. (Ros i Solé 2016: 112)

This extract points towards a key aspect of the reconceptualising of ‘difference’ within a posthuman framework: one that acknowledges cultural particularities, embodied experiences and the positive force of ‘difference’. In other words a rhizomatic approach which breaks through the self-other dualism by embracing difference as a productive force of becoming.

1. *Relationality*

At the centre of the posthuman project is the idea of relationality. Instead of taking the human subject of white rational Man – associated with traditional humanism – as its frame of reference, posthuman theory provides an alternative framework for rethinking our subjectivity as relational within the universe as a whole: relations to ourselves, to others, to animals, to machines, to the planet. Key to this philosophical stance is the idea of a generic, not-necessarily-human life force, which Braidotti refers to as *zoe.* By resituating humanism in this *zoe*-centred force all forms of life are valued. The posthuman then also becomes an ethical undertaking as it necessitates an empathy towards all forms of life with the aim of keeping the planet a habitable environment. The rejection of individualism in posthuman theory and its relational emphasis require new understandings of the non-unitary subject. The tools which Braidotti provides for developing these understandings, such as cartographies, rhizomatic thinking, the importance of creativity, the powers of memory, can all be usefully applied in developing posthuman interpretations on questions of belonging and intercultural relations. These would be steps towards the force of intercultural relations not so much for creating or solving conflict but rather as an engine for de-territorialisation, for leaving behind old moulds, for creating new grooves and avenues for movement and change.

Fenoulhet’s paper in this volume, *The Relational Identity of the Translator*, uses the translation of the novel *Eva* (1927) by the Dutch writer Carry van Bruggen (Fenoulhet, 2019) to propose a posthuman and relational approach to the figure of the translator. In her chapter, Fenoulhet vividly presents translation as something more radical than just the rendition of one ‘bounded’ language into another. Fenoulhet reflects on the role of translation as a personal and subjective journey into the re-working of the self. Drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, rather than focusing on the linguistic for its own sake, the focus of the translation activity is transformed into an act of ‘becoming’. This article presents the act of translating as a deeply subjective experience in the Deleuzian sense ‘becoming minor’, here a ‘becoming woman’. Such an experience is not only realized in discourse and language, but the translator harnesses the materiality of language and its entanglements with matter to enact the ‘tools’ of the translator as an embodied and lived subjective experience.

Translation is then used as an exercise to reflect on the more visceral, embodied and experiential aspects of language and identity. Through the exploration of the different non-hierarchical entanglements, the translator establishes a personal relationship not only with the text to be translated but with the dictionaries, personal computers, documents, and the history and experience of two women are entangled and mutually constituted: one from turn of the century Amsterdam and another from the beginning of the new millennium in London, England.

Such an entanglement of life experiences at different points in history is reminiscent of Busch’s (2017) theory of linguistic and cultural lifeworlds and repertories. According to her theory of ‘lived repertoires’, our relationships with the fabric of our experience not only entail the here and now, but also the links with our memories and histories. As Busch argues, ‘with every interaction we position ourselves not only in relation to what is present but also in relation to what is absent’ (p.53). Such an awareness of time and history is introduced in Fenoulhet’s article where we see how the complex webs of meaning established between the different embodiments of identity in particular time-space junctions allow for the multiplicity and different planes of meaning to intra-act. Whereas the historical context of Eva, the protagonist of the novel and its moral meaning at the time, is where the translation of the novel is situated, this meaning is not used to fix an identity at a particular time and space and its cultural codes. Rather, Fenoulhet’s article argues that the meanings opened-up from the translation of the novel allow for the protagonists’ subversion and feeling to spill over onto the subjectivity of the translator.

Key to this opening of possibility and intensities of the translation is the concept of ‘deterritorialising culture’ with which it plays. As Fenoulhet explains, the translator ‘moves away from the major, or the settled and habitual, towards the minor’. Indeed, the use of different languages, different cultural references and embodied relationalities with the present but also the past and the future, the ‘minor’ (e.g. a minor language, a novel in translation, a multilingual translator) allows the translator to become creative, empowered and enter creative and ‘radical’ processes of becoming. With each new and unexpected relationship built, the translator establishes a new movement of empowerment and vibrant becoming.

Brodie’s contribution on translating surtitles for performance offers another example of the process of becoming and the deterritorialisation of culture. Her case study focuses on a Dutch-language version of three of Shakespeare’s plays performed at the Barbican Theatre in London with surtitles in English. Thus a major world language becomes minor in the heart of London where Shakespeare himself worked. At the same time, a major cultural icon becomes minor: his familiar words are rendered unfamiliar in the English of the surtitles since they are a translation of a Dutch-language stage adaptation thus allowing for new meanings and interpretations to emerge.

1. *Language*

It is not only the translation of one language into another that allows for new processes of becoming, but language itself is pregnant with intentionality. Indeed, we argue in this volume that language is not only the disciplined entity we ordinarily think of, governed by and serving humans whilst obediently representing reality. In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, language is not a social tool of information and communication. It has the power to disrupt the world order and its materiality. This is because, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 89), language is not part of life, but it gives life orders. Life itself does not speak. Language can wait in the margins of life and listen, but it can also compel obedience; it can constrain and squash life. Provocatively, Deleuzian philosophy sees language as consisting of collective assemblages of enunciation. It is essentially heterogeneous with multiple connections which is why Deleuze and Guattari state that ‘there is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 6). This means that language is not the key to understanding identities as it cannot enact identity on its own as it is entangled with other semiotic systems and other materialities. At the most, language can communicate identities in reconfiguring identity through its materiality. For Deleuze and Guattari language is part of a semiotic chain that includes different ‘states of things of different status’ (1987: 7).

Indeed, the complexity and relationality of language is not only pragmatic and instrumental, there is a ‘wild’ element in language that is bound-up with contradictory desires ‘functioning less as sense and more as nonsense’ (de Freitas and Curinga 2015: p.250). Language does not exist on its own, it is firmly anchored in our experience and surroundings. Barad (2007) has summarised it as ‘Discourse is not what is said, it is that which constrains and enables what can be said’ (146).

This entanglement of relationships and constant movement of meanings that language in part responds to the conferring of agency not only to humans, to the materiality of language, but also to the material worlds surrounding them. The centrality of material life in language is eloquently expressed in the work of Bennett (2009) who postulates that things (like language) may be inanimate objects but they are material and not devoid of a ‘thing power’ and vibrancy that confers agency on them. This view of language changes dramatically our relationship with objects from a unidirectional (humans conferring agency on objects and matter) relationship, to one that grants a greater force and a power to the object and relationship with it. Indeed, meaningful relationships are no longer constrained to humans. Instead, organic and inanimate materiality has the possibility to contribute to our intercultural living and our identity becomings. As Bennett (2009) has argued, the material world is not inert and inconsequential, but rather, it confederates into deliberate ‘assemblages’ that have an agency of their own.

Lytra and Ilankuberan (this volume) investigate how children navigate their faith identities and their understanding of their self and place in the world through faith-inspired text creation. In looking at scrapbooks, with texts and images as material objects, created by two London children of Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu/Saiva heritage, they do not so much focus on the interrelationship between the different languages the children use (English, Tamil and Sanskrit), but rather on the entanglement of the languages with the broad range of communicative repertoires and semiotic chains of cultural practices, material and symbolic resources at the children’s disposal. Lytra and Ilankuberan show that as part of the process of creating and talking about these texts as vibrant objects and languages, spaces open up in which multiple meanings relating to previous school knowledge, faith practices, memories, community or home celebrations as well as other linguistic and aesthetic texts, are united and reconciled.

The meaning making process and assemblages of meanings allow for new identities to be explored and developed in a highly personalised way. Drawings of a *kolam,* an intricate geometric shape traditionally created from rice flour in Hindu/Tamil cultures on thresholds of homes, were a recurring feature in these scrapbooks. The process of creating a *kolam* and reflecting on it constitutes a rhizomatic network in which different elements of the childrens’ lived experiences merge and mutate adding materiality and intentionality to the languages, faiths and cultures the children inhabit. Traditional aspects of Tamil culture, ethnicity and religion are explored and combined with new digital technologies (which provide examples of *kolams* to draw), occasioning a reflection in one of the children on his own faith, his own observations of traditional *kolamsn* in Southern India and Sri Lanka, and his moral responsibility towards all creatures of the world. It is in the merging of these various aspects of the lived intercultural experience of the children that their faith identities can develop as infinite becomings.

Such examples illustrate how cultural artefacts and multilingual speakers are not independent entities, with their separate bound identities. Rather, they are mutually constituted as ‘Objects, rather than being seen as the background stage in which speakers act, are viewed as sediments of individuals’ meaning-making practices, where feelings, memories and experiences are played out’ (Ros i Sole, 2020).

1. *Agencement*

Another central aspect of a vibrant view of identity is the false dichotomies and artificial separation between agentic and non-agentic beings that has often been presented by more Cartesian and rationalistic philosophies that separate mind and matter and establish a clear division between the two. Instead, this approach takes transversality and lack of hierarchy of matter and organisms at its centre. Here, the material, the organic and the human coalesce and confederate to construct different patchworks of desire and volition. The different sites of a kaleidoscopic identity will reflect and refract different aspects of the subjectivity and cultural identity-in-progress, making something new at every turn, depending on the ‘thing-power’ reflected (whether organic or inorganic), the angle, the speed and the movement applied. In other words, objects and materials become part of one’s relationships and entanglements with the world. As Phal and Rowsell (2010) argue, even if we tend to think of objects as necessities or something we indulge in, we forget that objects are powerful and key companions to our emotional and mental life.

An example of *agencement* in this volume is the one presented by the article by Dagenais *et al* (this volume) where we see how the relationality of agency is effectively explained with the use of punctuation -hyphens- to indicate that things enter into relationship and function as a collectivity ‘and together follow a path of becoming as an agencement’. Dagenais *et al*’s article examines how literacies can be seen as involving a complex set of material conditions and the relationships these establish with humans. Through the account of a nuanced and detailed multilingual and multimodal story creation in an Anglo-French family home, this article presents a fascinating conceptualisation of how identity is self-actualized through the entanglements and dynamics involved between the different material and human actors in the literacy event of story creation. The contribution “*La vie secrète d'un ananas*”: *Becoming, relationality and multiplicity in online story creation* uses Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of *agencement* and becoming to challenge the primacy of human activity and its essential characteristics in favour of a construction of intercultural identities in which nature and the human are mutually constitutive. For them, it is the ‘intermingling of bodies’ and the collective nature of transformations and becomings that is key in meaning-making and identity construction. Agency then does not come from one particular direction or body, rather, it is fluid and unpredictable. Such movement is expressed as constant processes of self-actualisation and *agencement* where language and the literacy event is self-organising, like a natural organism. The article leaves us thinking about intriguing and far reaching questions concerning the nature of the intercultural encounter: What if words and language are not only just passive material entities but they are a form of material expression that are sentient and knowing? What if literacy events, their content and expression are not only passive recipients of human agency but active actants of the many entanglements between individuals, things, discourses, physical arrangements and social positionings?

The Shakespeare performance described by Brodie in this volume is another illustrative and persuasive example of an assemblage in which humans (actors, audience, surtitler and stage hands) form part of a creative entanglement with the materiality of the set and the digital performance on screen. This machinic assemblage generates new energies to transform and re-enliven Shakespeare. In this way, past and present are caused to ‘vibrate’ together in a way that changes Shakespeare’s identity for audiences. This theatrical assemblage changes the way in which translation is viewed since it reveals multiple layers of language – Shakespeare’s English present in many of the audience’s minds, the Dutch spoken on stage which encompasses both Flemish and Netherlands Dutch accents, and the modern English of the surtitles – in a dynamic relationship to one another. More than this: it shows how translation can be multiple rather than unidirectional or bidirectional.

*(5) Affect*

In this issue we would like to consider the texture and movement of affect and feeling through the subject. Indeed, identity is not only shifting, dynamic and multifaceted, but it is also the resulting plane of the relationships established by emotion and feeling. The following description of the creative process and how it affects the researchers’ mood in Budach & Sharoyan’s article is evocative of such process. The researcher’s mood puts a sharp focus on the affection and intensity of feeling that can be felt with non-human subjects by conferring on them anthropomorphic qualities.

‘for a while [Gohar] is sitting at the table, hands wrapped around her head, looking sad and clueless at the orange, pointed shaped carrot bodies lying before her on the table’

Feelings, in Deleuzian terms, are like identity, have porous boundaries, are relational and fluid. They live independently and overflow and spill over beyond the person experiencing them. Budach & Sharoyan’s article (this issue) is a good example of the advantage of seeing feelings in this light. The notion that objects can become ‘emotional companions’ provides a powerful illustration of the link between animate and inanimate matter. Most importantly, it shows how the relationship between the two can create entanglements that produce challenging and destabilizing moments that provide opportunities for creativity and ‘lines of flight’.

Similarly, Macleroy and Shamsad (this volume) describe the use of artefacts such as Bengali rickshaws to explore ‘felt connections’ and the affectivity and intensities that flow through things. From the streets of Dhaka to Brick Lane in East London, the identities of Muslim-Bengali-English pupils are explored through the affective encounters with the objects that are admired, reflected on and played with. The intricate drawings painted on the rickshaws merge and connect worlds and traditions: London sights and the artisan craft of rickshaw painting. Such artefacts then are in turn used to create digital stories and help the pupils construct their British-Bangladeshi ‘vibrant’ identities as the ‘encounters with Bengali artefacts connect them with intergenerational stories about their language, heritage and culture’.

**Concluding thoughts: the tempos of ‘difference’**

This article argues that a problem in ‘difference’ can only be found when this is seen as static: i.e. standardised and essentialised into predictable, well-defined bound identities. In such stasis and head-on violent confrontation there are no gestures, no genuine intra-connections and flows between different types of life, no rhizomatic ramifications, no horizontal, secretive and unexpected movement. In such stilted version of ‘difference’, the intercultural encounter can take a number of predictable and often binary forms and shapes. In *vibrant identities* such confrontations have no place as difference is seen in a continuum. There are no losers or winners. There are no single cartographies and tempos for developing new identities and subjectivities, neither is there a hierarchy of relations that constructs it. This new system is neither human nor matter, but an amalgamation and an *agencement*, a multiplicity and arrangement of organic and inorganic agencies that are self-organising whilst constructing something completely new.

The aim is to re-frame ‘difference’ not as an ideal transcendent commonality, but as a contingent and temporarily-fixed plane of intensities that is shot through with life: a *vibrant identity*. The following description by Deleuze and Guattari (2013:297) helps describing such a formation:

‘a pure plane of immanence, univocality, composition, upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relation of movement’

Like many of the accounts in this volume, carrots, rickshaws, characters in books, surtitles, actors and ipads become endowed with agency and thing-power. Through their entanglements and *agencements*, materialities and human subjects enter into processes of transformation that create new subjectivities. By entering into new modes of looking, touching, smelling, and rhythmically working with carrots, ipads, dictionaries and *kolams,* such modes of relating to objects and assemblages create new becomings and vibrant identities that get immersed and create new life. These are intercultural identities that are de-territorialised: they leave the fixed and well-trodden territories of established discourses and ways of doing by experimenting and creating with new subjectivities and new lines of flight.

Here we propose that *vibrant identities* incorporate these multidimensional, unpredictable and even chaotic changing tempos of identity. We do so to combat the stasis and negativity often inherent in the understanding of the encounter of cultural identities and the conflict that it may give rise to, but we also set out to challenge a fear and paralysis in the face of the unknown. A ‘vibrant’ understanding of identity avoids judging and constraining identity possibilities (without offering fixed choices). Instead, it offers a reaffirmation of difference, of life and vitalism as a resource to combat prejudice and deconstruct pre-established cultural understandings. It approaches difference and the encounter of cultures as a meeting and projection of strong desires that can be combined and merged in order to respond to the intercultural encounter with personal risks but also with the possibility to experience personal gains and losses; the possibility for a greater intensity of feeling, and the perception of new ‘signs of life’ (Fenoulhet 2017).

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