

**From Diversity Management to Alterity Politics:  
Qualifying Otherness**

*Maddy Janssens & Chris Steyaert*

Maddy Janssens  
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven  
Organisation Studies  
Naamsestraat 69  
3000 Leuven, Belgium  
Phone: 32-16-326874  
Fax: 32-16-326732  
E-mail: [maddy.janssens@econ.kuleuven.ac.be](mailto:maddy.janssens@econ.kuleuven.ac.be)

Chris Steyaert  
Entrepreneurship and Small Business Research Institute (ESBRI)  
Frescati Hagväg 16b  
10405 Stockholm, Sweden  
Phone: 46-8-4587808  
Fax: 46-8-152810  
E-mail: [chris.steyaert@sbri.se](mailto:chris.steyaert@sbri.se)

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### Executive Summary

The diversity domain seems currently in a struggle, having critical debates about the future direction of diversity studies as well as diversity programs and actions. It seems to have neglected theoretical reflections on notions of ‘diversity,’ ‘difference,’ or the ‘other.’ The purpose of this paper is to think theoretically about diversity, arguing that it is the thinking itself that has to become different and that a different thinking will make a difference in addressing policies and actions. The main point we try to make is that diversity is not a matter of constructing identities but of a moving alterity.

We will depart from the current debates in diversity management, in which we identify mainly four issues: a narrow or broad definition of diversity, a stable or dynamic conception of identity, the role of power, and the importance of the socio-historical context. With the discussion of these four issues, we will try to indicate the implicit ‘theoretical’ choices prioritizing the concept of ‘identity’, turning the issues of diversity into a managing of individuals and ‘their’ identities. Rather than pursuing the route of identity, we try to explore another route, paving a possible way of conceiving the other from the position of the other and not from fixed norms and possibilities. We therefor turn to the concept of ‘alterity.’

The aim of the paper is then to develop an alterity-thinking by connecting and relating to the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari, and Serres; the writings of Collins on the Black-feminist standpoint, and recent political studies on democracy. The qualifications that we connect and associate to alterity, are: its relation to an ontology of becoming, its crossing out of the identifiable into becoming anonymous, its dependence on safe, social-cultural spaces, and on open, empty public spaces. To conclude, we reflect on the different ways in which this alterity-thinking is related to the four critical issues of the diversity literature and discuss its qualifications as possible conditions for what we might sum up as an ‘alterity politics.’

## **From Diversity Management to Alterity Politics: Qualifying Otherness**

### **Individuals and Identities in Diversity Literature**

Studies on diversity seem to have a two-fold purpose. A first purpose is to identify discriminatory practices in the workplace. Several studies have examined the working experiences of minority groups, inducing our attention to phenomena such as the glass-ceiling effect (e.g. Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Wirth, 2001), wage differences (e.g. Ashraf, 1996; Blau & Beller, 1988), segregation (e.g. Anker, 1998; Ibarra, 1995). A second purpose is to examine the effects of diversity on work-related outcomes. For instance, studies (for a review see Milliken & Martins, 1996) have examined the relationship between value diversity and conflict, or between cognitive heterogeneity and problem-solving capabilities. Wanting to achieve one (or both) of the two purposes, the domain has mainly focused on the consequences of diversity and seems to have neglected theoretical reflections on the notions of 'diversity,' 'difference,' or the 'other.' This need for theorizing has been indicated by well-known scholars in the field (e.g. Cox, 1995; Nkomo, 1995; 2000; Nkomo & Cox, 1996), concerned about the continuation of the diversity domain.

Currently, the domain seems to be in a struggle, having critical debates about the future direction of 'diversity studies' and how theorizing and concept-development can play a role in this. Also in 'practice'-contexts, one can notice a call for conceptualization and reframing. As there is an inflation of diversity programs, of legal measures and social strategies, the everyday reality of dealing with and changing diversity-issues is one of 'things are easier said than done.' The experience is that every action proposal has always a political implication and that even the way one talks and thinks about problems and solutions can already be sensitive. Though the value of structural, legal and cultural interventions has been recognized, many critical comments have simultaneously been raised (Harris, 1997; Roosevelt Thomas, 1990). Furthermore, HRM-practices such as recruitment and training as a way to manage diversity seem to have a rather limited impact, not capable of changing social relations and cultural values. One could suggest that using 'old' and well-known

methods makes diversity equally into an 'old' problem that is not really given a change to be looked and listened at with fresh 'theoretical' eyes (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Therefore, we will in this article take a step back, and take the time to think theoretically about diversity, arguing that it is the thinking itself that has to become different and that a different thinking will make a difference in addressing policies and actions. The main point we try to make is that diversity is not a matter of constructing identities but of a moving alterity. Following this line of thinking, we question whether diversity can be approached policy-wise as a 'management' and propose to address it as a 'politics.' For this, we will depart from the current debates in diversity management, in which we identify mainly four issues: a narrow or broad definition of diversity, a stable or dynamic conception of identity, the role of power, and the importance of the socio-historical context. With the discussion of these four issues, we will try to indicate the implicit 'theoretical' choices prioritizing the concept of 'identity', turning the issues of diversity into a managing of individuals and 'their' identities. Consequently, it is argued that the recent criticisms on the identity-concept (and its policy) as a view through which the other is understood in terms of its similarities with the self, shortcutting the notion of difference and implying that one's development is based on lack, also apply to diversity management and linger in policy-proposals and actions. Rather than pursuing the route of identity, we try to explore another route, paving a possible way of conceiving the other from the position of the other and not from fixed norms and possibilities. We will refer to the concept of 'alterity' for this, but our aim is not to erase 'identity' and then simply replace it by 'some other concept.' Rather, we want to stimulate the thinking and conceiving through a centrifugal force that alters the thinking and conceiving itself (instead of proposing a centripetalling concept). The purpose of the paper is then to develop this thinking by connecting and relating to the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari, and Serres; the writings of Collins on the Black-feminist standpoint, and recent political studies on democracy. The qualifications that we connect and associate to alterity, are: its relation to an ontology of becoming, its crossing out of the identifiable into becoming anonymous, its dependence on safe, social-cultural spaces, and on open, empty public spaces. To conclude, we reflect on the different ways in which this alterity-thinking is related to the four critical issues of the diversity literature and discuss its qualifications as possible conditions for what we might sum up as an 'alterity politics.'

### **Critical debates in the diversity literature**

A first, central, question within diversity literature is whether diversity should be *narrowly or broadly defined* (Nkomo, 1995). Scholars favoring a narrow definition argue that the domain of diversity research should be restricted to specific cultural categories such as race and gender (e.g. Cross, Katz, Miller & Seashore, 1994; Morrison, 1992). On the other hand, scholars preferring a broad definition (e.g. Jackson, May & Whitney, 1995; Thomas, 1991) argue that diversity encompasses all the possible ways people can differ. Individuals do not only differ because of their race, gender, age and other demographic categories but also because of their values, abilities, organizational function, tenure and personality.

Those favoring a narrow perspective argue that diversity based upon race, ethnicity and gender can not be understood in the same way as diversity based upon organizational functions, abilities or cognitive orientations (Nkomo, 1995). Differences due to organizational function or to gender have different effects and therefore, they need to be distinguished. One further stresses that the key issues of diversity are those that arise because of discrimination and exclusion of cultural groups from traditional organizations (Cross et al., 1994; Morrison, 1992). If diversity is a concept that is inclusive to all individuals, it will become very difficult to identify discrimination practices. The main concern of this perspective is that a broad definition may imply that all differences among people are the same. Diversity studies would then only reach the reductionistic conclusion that ‘everyone is different’ and, if this conclusion is accepted, the concept of diversity may become “nothing more than a benign, meaningless concept” (Nkomo, 1995, p. 248).

The risk of the narrow approach, however, is that research usually focuses only at one dimension at a time (race or gender) and that one fails to recognize the interactions with other dimensions. Those favoring a broad definition argue that an individual has multiple identities and that the multiple dimensions can not be isolated in an organizational setting. Individuals bring not only their race and gender but also their particular knowledge, personality, and cognitive style to the work setting. If diversity literature wants to understand the dynamics of a heterogeneous workforce, it needs to address the interactive effects of multidimensional diversity. Broadly defining diversity is further considered crucial

to prevent the domain of diversity of falling apart into separate subdomains. Having a broad understanding of all types of differences is seen as helpful to understand one's own research better, without necessarily arguing that all differences are equivalent. Another argument favoring a broad definition refers to the potential positive effect on diversity programs. The expectation is that diversity management will become more acceptable if it is not only oriented towards specific groups of employees but if it is inclusive to all employees (Thomas, 1991).

A second issue in the debates refers to a *stable or dynamic conception of identity*. Relying on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), several diversity studies link individuals' identity directly to the social category they belong to on the basis of their individual characteristics. For instance, a person is being identified as 'a woman' if she belongs to the social category of women. The reasoning is that people categorize themselves and others on the basis of how closely their individual characteristics match the prototypes of various groups. Such a categorization process is not merely a cognitive process but is followed by an identification process with affective and evaluative components (Tajfel, 1982). According to this perspective, a person's identity is conceived as stable, fixed, unitary and internally consistent. It is an objective set of characteristics, which leads to a specific identity. The view on the self can be considered as autonomous, as "a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe... organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background" (Geertz, 1979, p. 229).

Other researchers however favor a reframing of identity toward relational embeddedness (Shotter & Gergen, 1989), where the concept of identity is not one of cross-time and cross-situational coherence but one of multiphrenic embeddedness (Gergen, 1991). From this perspective, identity is "best seen as a set of contradictory, fluid, contextual constrained positions within which people are capable of exercising choice" (Ely, 1995; p.184). Questions like 'Who am I?' or 'What kind of person am I?' are not answered once and for all, but are being constructed as social interactions and experiences change, not only over time, but also during the work day as one encounters a variety of people and situations. Important in this relational perspective is the fluid, processual nature of identity that is contingent upon social relations (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). Behavior that was formerly

attributed to the individual alone is now seen as arising out of the negotiated relationship with other individuals. Even if people belong to the same social category, the meaning of their identity is not necessarily the same because they develop their identity in close interaction with other people who confirm, support or disrupt different identity claims. A person may see herself as a result-oriented manager as well as a loving mother and a politically conservative voter. Identities are dynamic, multiple and contextual. From this relational perspective, the question of 'Who am I?' opens up a world of multiple possibilities.

The discussion on the concept of identity as relational and contextual brings the diversity literature to two other issues e.g. *power* and the *socio-historical context* as two important factors that can create and re-create identity in potentially infinite ways. Attention to these two factors is put forward mainly by scholars stressing the emancipatory purpose of diversity studies. Especially those who take a narrow definition try to understand differences between people within structures of power inequalities and the socio-historical context. However, the danger of this approach lies in the assumption that it is only those in the oppressed position - women, people of color, ... who constitute diversity. It leads to phrases such as 'the diverse group' or 'the diverse person', implying that the condition of diversity inheres solely in members of oppressed groups: only people of color have a race, only women have a gender, and only gay, lesbian and bisexual people have a sexual orientation (Nkomo, 1992; Ely, 1995). This assumption has also important consequences for formulating strategies of how to deal with diversity and identity. If diversity is only a characteristic of a certain, oppressed group, then dealing with diversity means dealing 'correctly' with oppressed groups. For people in dominant positions, this means that they only need to change their perceptions of and behaviors towards those 'others.' As such, prescriptions for change require little of dominant groups in the way of self-reflection or addressing the inner workings or logic of oppressive mechanisms within the organisation. The danger of the notion of diversity as a set of attributes that reside in some people and not in others is that it leaves dominant groups fundamentally unchanged and relations of domination intact (Ely, 1995). Ely (1995) therefore proposes an approach to diversity which places power at the center and which considers diversity as a certain condition of a relationship instead of a set of attributes. She proposes to define diversity broadly, to distinguish people's experiences into experiences of dominance and suppression, and to

explicitly study both. By engaging multiple axes of identity - both dominant and oppressed - within each person, this approach may create the conditions for empathy among people who may otherwise feel frustrated with, guilty about, or angry toward one another. Because such experiences are simultaneously present in each person, members of the dominant group do not have to feel frustration and guilt while members of the oppressed groups do not have to hold onto their position of being dominated. As a result, people may engage more fully, more consciously, and more productively in their relationships and their work.

A fourth issue in the literature debates refers to the importance of the socio-historical context to fully understand the dynamics of diversity at the workplace (Cox, 1995; Triandis, 1995). Given the importance of intergroup dynamics for diversity, contemporary interactions are considered to be influenced by the legacy of prior interactions among members of those groups. It is the history of intergroup relations, which is the social-cultural background on which the effects of diversity are constructed (Alderfer & Smith, 1982). This background includes not only an organizational, but also a societal component. Occupational roles tend to be segregated by race or by gender on the basis of assumptions about race- or gender-related competences, having their roots in the history of the labor market and in differences in educational opportunities. Having more attention to the role of history would therefore help to understand how segregation phenomena and oppressed mechanisms function in organizations. This implies that organizations reproduce rather than invent these mechanisms and are therefore reflections of the broader society.

### **Diversity equals identity: Implied choices**

The above overview of the diversity-discussion might be considered a ‘wrong’ discussion. Wrong because it doesn’t fully address some fundamental conceptual choices, implicit but with far-reaching implications for diversity practices and interventions. That is the main point of this text, namely to ‘question’, ‘shake’ and ‘change’ the conceptual preconditions and choices lingering in the four issues of ‘critical’ debate. The question we pose is whether this debate is critical enough. It seems as if a large part of the diversity discussions are tied up to the notion of ‘identity’: *diversity equals identity*. As a consequence, a lot of subtle and difficult questions related to diversity are shortcut and reduced to a riddle of identity. For instance, is the future direction of the diversity domain cared for when we say that people



'have' diverse characteristics, that they are 'individuals' having identities (even socially constructed), that they belong to 'minority' groups that are oppressed, and that we speak of 'organizations' which repeat and mimic societal histories? Debates on diversity seem inevitably to be debates about identities, which brings us to the need for a close examination of how we construct the whole diversity-identity debate. We will enter some of the criticisms on the notion and the use of identity, as well as - in the next part - develop 'other' qualifications that might open up into multiple and differing conceptions of alterity and lead to other intervention conditions that renew our ways of dealing with people in organizations: *diversity multiplies then alterity.*

Identity politics in feminism and in other contemporary social movements refers to formulating and validating political claims on the basis that those making the claims share a certain social location as, say 'lesbians,' 'black women,' 'people with disabilities' (Cameron, 1998; Calhoun, 1994). Part of the strength of the notion of identity and of identity politics lies in the fact that it sets out realistically accomplishable goals that are particular to groups of common interests. However, identity politics seems on the defensive as the concept of identity is increasingly criticized as narrow and ineffective in addressing the needs of those groups that have been marginalized by the rest of society (Lusane, 1996).

Identity politics, as the label suggests, centres on the idea of authentic, fixed identities. This is its strength because by narrowing the purview of emancipation it can set realistic goals. Therein, however, lies also the problem. Identity politics is in the impossibility to consider multiple subjectpositions as it centralizes certain forms of being namely the standard of something. For example, first wave feminism has been accused of heterosexism and indifference to race. Both lesbian and black women blame early feminism that their idea of 'a woman' was the white middle class woman with no attention toward the differences among women. In addressing this critique, Butler (1990, p. 143) points out that the list of adjectives referring to different social groups, color, sexuality, ethnicity, class and able-bodiedness, invariably closes with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list. It is through this horizontal trajectory of adjectives that one strives to encompass a situated subject, but invariably fails to be complete. It is this inability to treat multiple subject positions, the inability to attend to more than one specific subject at a time - which has come to be an important critique of identity politics (Nealon, 1999). Identity politics fails to recognize the

interactions among different characterizations and the possibilities of different identities within the same social category.

Another formulated critique is that identity politics is an attempt to thematize the other in terms of its *similarities* with the self. Because any state of sameness actually requires difference in order to structure itself, identity requires difference in order to be. It is this necessary dependence on difference for its own identity that has kept open a space for the other. This realization comprises what Nealon (1999) calls the theoretical success of multiculturalism. There is an increasing appreciation of differences and everybody seems to love the other. However, at the same time, the realization of difference's necessity hasn't led to a significant increase in social respect and tolerance.

Both critiques bring Nealon (1999) to the formulation of the central critique that identity politics is a *politics of lack*. The difference that is needed for the own identity is also always a difference-as-lack. This thought that one can never complete one's identity already assumes an ideal other that one wants to be but that one never can reach. We need the other because we all have been excluded from the privileges of an ideal self. And because we need each other for recognition and happiness; the *needing* the other often shows itself as *resenting* the other. This resentment is for Nealon a symptom of a larger problem with an identity politics of lack. The very notion of intersubjectivity is thought as lack implying that any specific lack or failure becomes an indication of a more generalized lack. What we have in common is that we all lack in some way: "I can't have everything - I lack completeness; I cannot be a positive term - so I live in/with the solace of others, who likewise lack such wholeness" (Nealon, 1999, p.5). If the subject is no other than a symptom of a founding lack, its primary mode of agency is then directed toward making up for that lack. Therefore, it is resentment, rather than collective resistance, which is the pre-eminent social effect of the politics of lack. As long as difference is understood in terms as the constant discovery of lack, one underestimates the hazardous productivity of difference's specificity. It is therefore that difference must be reinscribed outside the realm of loss, lack, or failure. Or in the words of Nealon (1999, p.3): every identity politics as a project is doomed to fail because every specific identity likewise fails to be complete.

### **Shaping side-roads: Diversity multiplies alterity**

For Nealon, the challenge is to work out a notion of difference as other than lack or failure of sameness for which he uses the term 'alterity.' Defining it, "the term 'alterity' is closely related to the concept of 'othering' and Foucault's notion of the 'exteriority' or marginality of the subject. Often thought of as synonymous with 'Other', the condition of alterity exemplifies the marginal or peripheral that does not have access to the centres of power. The centre (or centres) represent(s) a point of origin in which meaning is fixed and validated as the determining norm. Those excluded from the centre by virtue of race, caste, gender or religion are categorised as irrelevant to normative conventions and designated 'other' " (Gamble, 2000). Considering the critical reception of the notion identity and how it shapes identity politics, we will depart from Nealon's notion of alterity, and try to multiply its versions shaping side-roads that can alter our thinking about diversity. The idea is to qualify alterity through relating with the other that does not merely return to the same and work out a notion of difference as other than lack or failure of sameness. The concept of alterity implies a response first and foremost to the other. Such a response does not respond to a problem or question, it responds to the other - for the other. For Nealon (1999), subjectivity thought as lack seems to separate the subject from what it can do. It thematizes the subject as an effect (a noun) rather than an effectivity (an action): "as long as identity is not thematized as a hazardous performative act - a verb rather than a noun, a multiple becoming rather than a monological symptom, a deployment of force rather than an assured process of mourning, it seems destined to remain a locus for resentment, naming itself always in terms of expropriation from an ideal that it can't ever hope, and doesn't even wish, to attain" (Nealon, 1999, p. 12). Response to the other is, therefore, about action, about producing deeds and negotiations, not about mourning for a loss or lack.

### **Qualifying Alterity/ Altering Otherness**

Our purpose now is to further conceive the notion of alterity. How to qualify alterity and its conditions? How to speak of otherness and difference, without immediately again fixing the other, without creating ideals by fixing possibilities (and repeating the same problems of identity)? Is it possible to engage in an 'open' qualifying, to phrase (concepts) without

qualities? Is there another way of conceiving other possible? How to think of alterity that itself is becoming and multiplying? Alterity is then not a well-defined fixpoint, but rather a traffic island or refuge for multiple visitors with diverse experiences, impressions and stories. There are many inspirations to connect (to), such as art, philosophy and the many so-called minority studies resisting dominant representations or resisting the act of representing *tout court* (see Janssens & Steyaert, 2001). We relate here to the work of Deleuze (1995; 1997/1993), Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980; 1994), Serres (1995/1982), Collins (1991) and IJsseling (1999) and Lefort (1981).

### **Becoming, multiplicity and becoming other**

Identity can be considered a notion of order. It is a concept of structuring and constructing cohesion, even if, within a social constructionist frame, one conceives it relationally and embedded within multiple subjectpositions. Becoming other is, however, first of all *a* becoming, a swimming following the ‘repetition’ of multiplicity, participating in the ongoing streams. We connect here with the philosophical thinking of Deleuze (1995; 1997/1993), Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980) and Serres (1995/1982). Given our purpose of developing qualifications of alterity, we would like to stay close to their own texts and therefore present their thoughts by mainly quoting their own words.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980), a person is an open multiplicity, a series that is open ended. For a person on the move, it is a matter of keeping open possibilities, the ability for making ever-new connections. Sometimes, we think to have reached a harbour, but soon enough we will find ourselves (thrown) back in an open sea (Deleuze, 1995). What counts, are the plural lines of flight that keep one’s life open. Instead of through discipline and control, Deleuze and Guattari approach a life through creativity and pluralism. The other in ourselves, such as ‘being’ a woman, is not a feature to build upon one’s complete identity, no, it is rather a line of flight, through which a woman with all women and men, can become woman, a becoming-woman: “To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule - neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form” (Deleuze, 1997/1993, p.1).

This becoming-thinking implies unfinalizability. A becoming is not a change between two states (contraptions) from a point of departure to a point of arrival, one is in the middle, experimenting without a destination. One will never be, for instance, a woman or a gay, fully emancipated: one can not get 'out' of it. The coming out of a gay is then exactly that, it is coming in the middle, in between, following the line of flight of gayness, and being taken by and within all the (im)possibilities. And when one thinks to have reached a safe harbour (like equal wages for women or the right to marry for gays), one will soon be back in the open sea. Becoming, a becoming cannot 'have' or 'be' a fixed identity, it is always a becoming-other, pure differences, multifications rather than uni-fication. The multiplicity of becoming requires always escaping from the many accessible and accepted codings and overcodings, even one's own name: "It's a strange business, speaking for yourself, in your own name, because it doesn't at all come with seeing yourself as an ego or a person or a subject. Individuals find a real name for themselves, rather, only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities everywhere within them, to the intensities running through them. A name as the direct awareness of such intensive multiplicity is the opposite of the depersonalization effected by the history of philosophy; it's depersonalization through love rather than subjection. What one says comes from the depths of one's own underdevelopment. One becomes a set of liberated singularities, words, names, fingernails, things, animals, little events: quite the reverse of a celebrity" (Deleuze, 1995, p.6-7).

Deleuze and Guattari are here close to the work of Serres (1995/1982) in *Genesis*, where he takes *noise* as background of all geneses. Noise is the multiple, multiplicity, chaos that is always there, invisible but unavoidable in things coming along. Multiplicity can then be considered a leitmotiv in Genesis: "We were afraid of wind and water, we are now afraid of disorder and the rarely predictable. In fact, we are afraid of multiplicities. We never want to conceive multiplicity as such. We run away from this thought" (Serres, 1995/1982, p.108). The multiple has been locked out since we have been making boundaries, drawing lines and rounding off, establishing the individual (i.e. the immigrant), the organization ('our company') as a consequence of believing that being presupposes a unity: "I am trying here to raise the brackets and parentheses, syntheses, whereby we shove multiplicities under unities" (Serres, 1995/1982, p.4). Serres (1995/1982; p.4) describes a route, very

poetically, from monadologies to nomadologies, though aware of the difficulty: “Can I possibly speak of multiplicity itself without ever availing myself of the concept?” The multiple is not the aggregate (like a school, a heap or a pack) but more like “a like under the mist, the sea, a white plain, background noise, the murmur of a crowd, time” (Serres, 1995/1982, p.5).

For Serres, the way to ‘study’ the multiple is not by seeing but by hearing. This is because: “by the ear, of course, I hear: temple, drum, pavilion, but also my entire body and the whole of my skin. We are immersed in sound just as we are immersed in air and light, we are caught up willy-nilly in its hurly-burly” (Serres, 1995/1982; p. 7). Images are sound-images, soundings. Maybe we have been able to think multiplicity but not yet have we evoked its soundings. Hearing always continues even if seeing has long before been halted. Multiplicities - think of the sea - is not something you see but something you hear. We are immersed in noise as we are in air and light. Noise is always there; it’s the material for all our forms. What for, where to listen at: “The multiple is water, the sea: ‘Life, the mantle of life that covers me, the generative field of life in which I am only a singularity alive. A certain death at an uncertain hour. Life, my life, work, my work, my labor, my project, this desert with or without a masterpiece, with or without any Mount Carmel summit. Sea, forest, rumor, noise, society, life, works and days, all common multiples; we can hardly say they are objects, yet require a new way of thinking. I’m trying to think the multiple as such, to let it waft along without arresting it through unity, to let it go, as it is, at its own pace. A thousand slack algae at the bottom of the sea.’ ” (Serres, 1995/1982, p.6).

Serres (1995/1982, p.31) conceives being as becoming, and plays literally with Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum”: “Who am I, beyond the joy coming from this shudder of awakening, the growth of this green ivy, this dancing flame, this living fire? I think in general, I am a capacity to think something, and I am virtual. I think in general, I can think anything. I think, therefore I am indeterminate. I think, therefore I am anyone. A tree, a river, a number, an ivy, a fire, a reason or you, whatever. Proteus. I think, therefore I am Nobody. The I is nobody in particular, it is not a singularity, it has no contours, it is the blankness of all colors and all nuances, an open and translucent welcome of a multiplicity of thoughts, it is therefore I don not exist. Who am I? A blank domino, a joker, that can take any value. A pure capacity. There is nothing more abstract. I am just the plain whore of the thoughts that

accost me, I wait for them, morning and evening, at the crossroads, under the statue of the angel Hermes, all wind and all weather. And, maybe, I *am*, maybe, if the verb *to be* is a joker or a blank domino, as well.”

Serres (1995/1982, p.22) connects the multiple to the possible: “The raucous, anarchic, noisy, variegated, tiger-stripped, zebra-streaked, jumbled-up, mixed-up multiple, criss-crossed by myriad colors and myriad shades, is possibility itself. It is a set of possible things, it may be *the* set of possible things.” It goes beyond the status quo, beyond the idea that the world is a construction, perfect architecture. Finished, but impossible to move. A matter of fact. Moving nor possibility. What we need is the souplesse of a footprint, of a runner, of a dancer. A philosopher is the guard of the possible, that is their care and passion, “to protect to the utmost the possible, he (?) tends the possible like a small child, he broods over it like a newborn babe, he is the guardian of the seed. The philosopher is the shepherd who tends the mixed flock of possibles on the highlands, heavy ewes and shuddering bulls, the philosopher is a gardener, he crosses and multiplies varieties, (...) the philosopher is the shepherd of the multiplicities” (Serres, 1995/1982, p.23). A philosopher is looking out for unpredictable and vulnerable conditions, with it’s own position moving along, unstable, mobile, and precarious. Everything that is necessary to make the multiple possible and to multiply the possible. I say, “There are other possible worlds, I know other possible meanings, we can invent other forms of time” (Serres, 1995/1982, p.25).

Connecting to this philosophical work, we see a first side-path, a qualification of alterity as becoming, as multiplicity. Becoming means then escaping from accepted codings and keeping open possibilities. Multiplicity is connected to the possible where to become is not to attain a specific form but the ability to take any value. A becoming is like an indeterminate person, a blank domino. It implies also questioning the ever-emerging fixations that we ourselves and others are ready to use. Instead of ‘seeing things’, we hear waves. Rather than looking for the coherence of one’s life story, it requires stepping aside, and, even, doubting one’s name.

### **Becoming other, becoming anonymous**

Identity thinking is all about being ‘someone.’ It tries to give names to all that what one is or, rather, should be: an ideal worker with this and that feature, with all the expected and

usual categories, and, now also, on top of that, all new features, from female sensitivity to exotic cultural backgrounds. Against this race of 'unicity' - to which identity and being-thinking lead - one could suggest becoming other is a matter of becoming anonymous. From the above quotes by Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, and Serres, we retain the idea that becoming is not the architectural activity of building or constructing identities, of ever becoming more out-spoken and developed as a person. It is a step back, more modest. A step aside, also. It is the paradox that to be a person one has to become impersonal, anonymous. One is open for the streams rather than that one tries to order or to stop them. Energy streams anyway and living is becoming -intensive. It is about becoming indiscernible, a blade of grass between the grass. The concept that Deleuze and Guattari use for this 'becoming-person' is 'haecité' translated as haecceity. This 'this-ness' is a form of individuation that is different from that of person, a subject, or a thing. Such as with a season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date, it is with a human not about *the* life, but *a* life, a set of accelerations and slownesses. Instead of subjectivity where one always draws lines and becomes visible, individuation via haecceity is an alter-nating between movement and rest: "you have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, a life - a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack. Or at least you can have it, you can reach it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980, p.262). Instead of having a personality as in a Western culture, an option is offered here of becoming individual among collective streams, as a form of anonymity.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987/1980, p.263) give the example of Virginia Woolf, who in her life and work (what a distinction), always inscribed becomings: "Virginia Woolf's walk through the crowd, among the taxis. Taking a walk is a haecceity; never will Mrs. Dalloway say to herself, I am this, I am that, he is this, he is that. And she felt very young; at the same time unspeakably aged. She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on ... She always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Haecceity, fog, glare. A haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome." This becoming-in-between, in between times, sexes and elements is strikingly illustrated in her novel, *Orlando*, conceived itself as an in-between, as a writer's holiday. Orlando is both male and female, both in the 18<sup>th</sup> as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only at the end, Orlando freezes into a 'human *being*', but it makes her turn pale: "for what more terrifying revelation



can there be than it is the present moment? That we survive the shock at all is only possible because the past shelters us on one side and the future on another” (Woolf, 1998). Only then, some centuries later, she can no longer resist being, being a person *with* qualities (Steyaert, 1998).

Becoming other in the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari is then not a contribution to some identity theory but a way to conceive the becoming of minorities as a becoming-minority. In *Mille Plateaux*, they refer to the context of black people. Being black is not a feature one has (for once and for all), but it is a ‘this’, that is becoming, with new expressions and actions, different intensities, it is a ‘this’ and then it is a ‘that’, not just a this or that, but a this and that and that; every person is a life, not a this or that, not a this and that, but a this and and and and. A repeating with difference. An open series. They say it paradoxically, even a black has to become black: “One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized. Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980, p.291). It is a process with lines of flight, through which fixing blackness escapes, through what Deleuze and Guattari phrase as deterritorialization, an opening up of overcodings. This is often difficult for minority groups, namely that their struggle becomes a form of overcoding, there is only ‘the black cause.’ In this context, Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p.11) formulate a suggestion for minorities: “We have to counter people who think ‘I’m this, I’m that’, [...] by thinking in strange, fluid, unusual terms. I don’t know what I am - I’d have to investigate and experiment with so many things in a non-narcissistic, non-oedipal way - no gay can ever definitely say ‘I’m gay’: It’s not a question of being this or that sort of human, but of becoming inhuman, of a universal animal becoming - not seeing yourself as some dumb animal, but unraveling your body’s human organization, exploring this or that zone of bodily intensity, with everyone discovering their own particular zones, and the groups, populations, species that inhabit them.” Availability instead of ideality.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings are molecular, not a matter of molar subjects. Becoming-woman is not an issue of a clearly defined molar entity (such as that woman), but of disappearing in the molecular collectivities (a woman among women). The molar woman is too much the recognizable woman with her forms and organs. Becoming-woman is not imitating that image - endlessly reproduced in language and image, in daily

meetings and in media - or trying to transform oneself towards that image. This doesn't mean that, in order to regain their own organism, their own history and their subjectivity, women should not follow a molar politics. It is the sound of 'we women' through which one emerges (textually) as woman. But there is another step required, if one wants to avoid drying up: a molecular politics. Virginia Woolf was alert to such a molecular level when she responded appalled when being asked if she was writing 'as a woman.' Rather, "writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987/1980, p.276). Becoming-woman is then that the becoming itself is woman, just as it is not the child that is becoming, but becoming itself that is child. A girl is thus the becoming-woman of every sex. One steals particles, speeds and slownesses; from the streams of sexuality to become a woman.

Becoming anonymous, as second qualification of alterity, then refers to the modesty, the impersonal way of becoming. Anonymity means a becoming without a totalitarian definition of the I. Instead of having a personality - a molar entity, this qualification stresses the option of becoming individual among collectives, experimenting with many things in a non-narcissistic way. It goes against the dictatorship of having an identity. Becoming other implies becoming anonymous, exploring the multiple possibilities without idealizing or choosing the safety of one specific form.

### **Safe, social-cultural, spaces**

If becoming other requires the step of a molecular politics, the question is how this collective process can be approached. Through connecting with the writings of Patricia Hill Collins in her book *Black feminist thought*, the concept of 'safe spaces' came forth. Collins considers a Black feminist 'standpoint' a specialized thought, produced by African-American women intellectuals. This standpoint has several dimensions including "the presence of characteristic core themes, the diversity of experiences ... the varying expressions... regarding the core themes and their experiences with them, and the interdependence of Black women's experiences, consciousness and actions." (Collins, 1991, p.32). Collins considers developing knowledge of the self as essential to Black

women's survival. Unlike white women's images attached to the cult of true womanhood, the controlling images applied to Black women are so uniformly negative that they almost necessitate resistance if Black women are to have positive self-images. Challenging these controlling images and replacing them by a Black women's standpoint is according to Collins an essential component in resisting systems of race, gender and class oppression. She identifies at least three safe spaces in which efforts to find a voice have occurred: Black women's relationships with one another, the Black women's blues tradition, and the voices of Black women writers.

A first safe space is formed by Black women's relationships with one another. As mothers, daughters, sisters and friends, African-American women affirm one another. The mother-daughter relationship is a fundamental relationship in the life of Black women. Mothers teach their daughters to survive in the interlocking structures of race, gender and class oppression while simultaneously rejecting and transcending these same structures. They show their children varying combinations of behaviors as ensuring their survival through protecting them in dangerous environments as well as helping them to go further than they themselves were allowed to go. 'Motherhood' has thus specific connotations in the lives of Black women. Mothering is not only an activity of biological mothers or 'bloodmothers,' it is also practiced by 'othermothers.' Grandmothers, sisters, aunts or cousins take on, temporary or long-term, childcare responsibilities for one another's' children. This brings along well-organized, resilient and women-centered networks. Sisterhood is another important relationship, referring to the supportive feeling of loyalty and connectedness among one another, due to the shared feeling of oppression.

African-American music as art has provided Black women a second safe space to find a voice. Music has played a central role in their lives, resulting in the ability to "create with their music an aesthetic community of resistance, which in turn encouraged and nurtured a political community of active struggle for freedom" (Davis, 1989, p. 201). Spirituals, blues, and the progressive rap all form part of a continuous struggle, which is at once aesthetic and political. For instance, blues recordings represented the first permanent documents expressing a Black women's standpoint, altering their illiterate condition. These songs can be seen as poetry, as expressions of ordinary Black women, rearticulated through the Afrocentric oral tradition. When Black women sing the blues, they sing their own

personalized, individualistic blues while simultaneously expressing the collective blues of African-American women. The texts resist the externally defined and controlling images of Black women and focus on their independence and self-respect.

The expression of a Black women's voice in the oral blues tradition is also being supplemented by a growing voice in a third location, the space created by Black women writers. Increased literacy has provided new opportunities for Black women to transform former institutional sites of domination such as research and literature into institutional sites of resistance. Since the seventies, a community of Black women writers explores new themes and old taboos such as Black women are not allowed to leave their children, to have interracial affairs, have lesbian relationships or be the victims of incest. Writing, and all its forms, literature, songs, essays, poems, . . . is a daily activity through which Black women articulate their self-defined views, be it with an intensive sense of community.

Collins' writings about safe spaces for Black women show us a valuable option of how becoming other can become possible. The safety of spaces can create a culture of resistance against the dominant ideology and allows the exploration of one's becoming. Collins further stresses the idea that regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. These safe spaces are further characterized by Black women's relationships with each other, their family and community. It is not through an increasing autonomy that Black women develop their standpoint but through their relationships and affiliation with each other. Rather than defining themselves in opposition to others, responsibility for and connectedness with each other provide possibilities for becoming other. Safe spaces, as third qualification, reflect a social-cultural process through which persons can develop a room of their own, a different voice.

### **Empty public spaces of interaction**

The qualification of safe spaces nurtures basically what Putnam (2000) calls bonding relationships. Some might object that these spaces contain only a limited interaction, don't address issues of power and difference, and will not be sufficient to bring about fundamental social change. The process of becoming will therefore also involve a process of democratising, or the possibility of developing bridging relationships. The duality of

domination and suppression might become reiterated in how we understand the workings of a democracy, not as a result but as a process, as a democratising.

While asking the question ‘how is democracy working?’ we relate to Giddens’ articulation (2000) of what can be experienced everywhere: there is a need for a second wave of democratizing that instigates the deadlock of democracy into a renewed, everyday practice: the democratizing of democracy. Democracy is then not a technical or procedural instrument but forms a social phenomenon that is invented again and again in everyday practices. This coincides with the second meaning that de Tocqueville proposes to address democracy: democracy as a form of life and a social texture instead of a political system and form of government (IJsseling, 1999). In the view of de Tocqueville, what matters in a democracy, is an ‘égalité des conditions’, an equality of chances and possibilities for everyone (IJsseling, 1999). This is how we can see whether democracy works: can everyone participate to societal life in a more or less equal way without ending up in collectivism? According to de Tocqueville, the danger that we all become ‘the same’ through social pressure and levelling can become dismantled through decentralisation. Such a decentralisation involves a maximal division of responsibilities, stimulation of community life, press freedom and religion. Though these conditions of decentralization can be acknowledged as relevant for the working of a democracy, one should not underestimate the issue of totalitarianism (Lefort, 1981). With Lefort (1981) and IJsseling (1999), we can make the democratizing of democracy more precise as it requires an empty space, limited power and heterogeneity.

Firstly, one should specify that democracy is not just a matter of more equality in terms of dividing and sharing power. Rather, it requires a fundamental change of power itself, as in a democracy power is not any longer embodied (IJsseling, 1999, p.138). Power in a democracy is not localized in a visible person like the king in a monarchy. A democracy creates an empty space, which constitutes democracy itself. While this empty space implies an open space, a dialogical conversation in an open space is not self-evident. There is always some improvisation necessary and a chance that things turn chaotic or unclear. The empty space is thus both the strength and the weakness of a democracy. There is a continuous tendency to ‘fill up’ this space, as can be noticed in the repeated calls for a strong or charismatic leader. Besides this tendency to embody the space through leaders,

there is a propensity towards indirect embodiment by privatizing the space, by media take-overs or by bickering party politics. Every time the empty space disappears, one can point at some form of totalitarianism, and a return to power in its old versions

Secondly, a democracy implies a change of one's practices. Voting (and its voicing) implies a necessary responsibility for everyone, meaning that one partly individuates through one's right or duty to vote. While voting, nobody is any better, or more accurately, nobody is able to overview the whole situation, and thus every vote (voice) is equal. Someone's power is always limited. There is no ultimate (divine or supreme) authority. One is literally sharing power, a practice that cannot without some form of dialogue. When some are longing for total power, when others cannot let go of power, or when still others think they have a better overview than others (e.g. experts), then a democratic system starts to waver, and slips back into totalitarianism. Democracy is thus always paradoxical: one always needs to convince others to gain a place, but this can only be done when one allows simultaneously that these others have an opinion and a responsibility. The rhetorical game of politics can thus never end up in a win-loss debate, which is many times just what people see happening. What counts in a democracy is the maximal inclusion of (different) points of view (as long as an opinion doesn't want to exclude other one's). Democracy without opposition is not a democracy.

Finally, IJsseling (1999) remarks that according to Lefort (1981) democracy is not firstly a matter of equality, but of recognizing heterogeneity, non-unity, difference and indeterminacy. According to Lefort, "democracy is ultimately a system that can accept the other in oneself, as long as this doesn't imply the destruction of democracy itself" (IJsseling, 1999, p.140). Democratizing can only work with the acceptance of difference. A politics is always interweaving differ-ing viewpoints. This brings along some chaos, since there is no natural hierarchy among these views. The democratic experiment then is to give all views equal changes to enter (rhetorically) the public space. That this implies some kind of unity is according to IJsseling a kind of phantasm that always brings the danger of totalitarianism: "The phantasm of unity, that is somehow present in the thinking of every democrat, is on the one hand a condition to do actively and effectively politics, and it is on the other hand a big threat to every form of democracy and an important origin of every totalitarian system" (IJsseling, 1999, p.142).

Becoming other requires a process of democratising in which the public spaces are empty, open to different opinions and voices. The public spaces cannot be taken a-priori but are open to possibilities for experiments from the margin. This fourth qualification of alterity implies that parties can only 'occupy' the public space for just one moment and immediately empty it for others. As Bauman (1999; p.202) summarizes, living together in the world of differences means that we need to "understand each other in the Wittgensteinian sense of understanding - of 'knowing how to go on', ... but also how to go on in the face of others which may go on - have the right to go on - differently."

### **Conditions and Illustrations of an Alterity Politics**

Our purpose has been to qualify the concept of alterity in an open, multiplying way. The qualifications we developed are: (1) becoming other is a becoming, taking difference as multiplicity; (2) becoming other is a form of becoming anonymous, a life via haecicity; (3) becoming other requires aesthetic, social, cultural collectives, forming safe spaces; and (4) becoming other happens through the continuous emptying of public spaces, avoiding power-to-overtake. As a way to further reflect on the notion of alterity, we relate these qualifications to the four critical issues of the diversity literature as well as discuss them as conditions for what we can sum up as an alterity politics.

The reframing of 'diversity' along the qualifications of alterity is an inquiry to inscribe difference and otherness in a process of becoming rather than being. As a consequence, the discussion of a broad or narrow definition, or the question whether one should include many or few categories is not the point anymore. Defining is a form of representing, of being, making people always lacking an ideal, another. The point is to allow people's life to be connective, to participate in multiplicity, and to sneak out of the dualities into the middle, the in-between. The question is not to be or not to be, but to be and to ... Following the notion of alterity, the discussion whether identity is stable or dynamic can also be questioned. Of course, no identity is stable, but sometimes more stable than some relational perspectives suggest: categories can be hard-core. The point would rather be to step aside of these overcodings, and to go against the race of uniqueness and identification, focusing on

a becoming anonymous. Such a becoming, woven in speeds and slownesses, is a matter of becoming intensive, rather than a matter of stable or dynamic. The third debate issue on power and how to approach this notion, was addressed in our readings of democracy. Democracy requires a fundamental change of power itself, since power is no longer embodied. Crucial is then not (to say) that people 'have' power - some dominate and others are oppressed-, but that we acknowledge that becoming a person takes places in a public, empty space: difference and (a phantasm of) unity are here needingly connected. Finally, the discussion on the historical context of diversity was connected with a concrete illustration of such a historicity or historical dimension: safe spaces that are in-betweens where creativity and new (cultural, social, aesthetics) forms are forming one's becoming.

Our pragmatics raises then the question whether different actions are implied in these concepts of alterity. Does a politics, a diversity policy, based upon alterity also consists of different interventions? Such a question is a matter of Deleuzian pragmatics: does it work? And does it make a difference? We consider the four qualifications of alterities also as four conditions for an alterity politics and for diversity policies. By conditions, we mean possibilities to work from, *conditio sine qua non*, conditions which cannot work without each other, conditions without which nothing can work. While presenting the conditions of an alterity politics, we discuss some interventions that attend to these conditions.

The notion of alterity and its qualifications offers policy makers (in its broadest sense: all of us) the crucial reminder that we need to approach the other from the position of the other and not from a dominant reality. We need to move away from the use of predetermined norms and ideals to which every person needs to conform. Instead, a response to the other that indicates that this other will be approached in his or her own variety, is necessary. Even more, a response to the other is needed which indicates the belief that everybody can make a surplus. A first condition in trying to implement this type of policy is to think persons as becoming. Becoming means a continuous experimenting without a final destination. One never will *be* a woman, a low educated person or a deaf-mute person but one is always part of a *becoming*. We recognize this thinking in projects oriented at the employment of lower educated persons in which the intervention of 'trajectory-support' is being used. The idea of trajectory-support is one of individual coaching which starts from the abilities and skills of the person. Instead of taking the norms or 'ideal' of higher educated persons, the coach



offers a mentoring where each participant can develop his or her trajectory from their own standards. Also, in the (earlier) examples of Black women, the idea is not to reach the musical or literary standards of established artists but rather to develop a language of their own following newly created visions that can even change the dominant standards.

Becoming also means becoming anonymous. Taking this as a condition of a policy, becoming anonymous implies that developing happens in a modest, humble way. Becoming a so-called minority is not so much a matter of trying to achieve the options determined by the center of the system, such as reaching higher hierarchical levels for women, or rights to marry for gay people. Of course, the norm-options should be available to each individual, but a policy of becoming woman or becoming gay means foremost creating spaces to discover their own particular zones. One disappears in the molecular collectives. In the examples of Black women, the collective is very crucial. It is not important that one person shines on the scene, it is a collective movement where individual versions disappear in the black and anonymous movement. A similar principle can be seen in gay and lesbian protests and prides. Though many gays and lesbians look for very individualized expressions as a way to become noticed in their otherness, they simultaneously thrive on becoming anonymous in a pride march, adding colour to the multi-coloured pride-flag; or they like to be 'just there' in anonymous bars or clubs, disappearing while feeling special.

The two other qualifications of alterity, safe spaces and empty public spaces, are two important conditions through which becoming anonymous can be made possible. Policy makers can first of all create the necessary safe space in which individuals can develop their own voice. Since safe spaces allow for the exploration of one's becoming and the nurturing of bonding relationships, it is a crucial condition for diversity policies to consider. For instance, in a project focused on recruiting and training migrant people for the catering, the HRM manager expressed the importance of these safety feelings as a continuous factor to consider. The safety referred here to practical arrangements so that all participants, most of them were political refugees, were able to attend the 3 week tailor-made training. Their short-term need for money in order to pay for transportation or to get through the weekend, their problems to get a bank account, their need for child care,... these might be considered 'just' practical problems but for these persons they were crucial questions to be solved before they could participate in the project and could contribute with their culinary

experience to a colourful cooking. Another example concerns language policies where there is a huge pressure for immigrants to learn the local language of their new 'home' country. Though this can be considered a reasonable request, one seldom hears simultaneously the confirmation that immigrants have the right to speak and develop their mother language. This language is their safe space to fall back upon as they are entering many new and uncertain spaces (not in the least the new language to learn). This language forms also the main connection to their history; from which one cannot cut off anybody as one's history forms a major potential for new openings and new becomings.

The other condition that makes a process of becoming possible, involves the creation of public spaces. A process of becoming requires a process of democratising or a process in which each party is allowed to enter the public arena, express their voice, and then empty the public space to make room for other voices. Policy makers then need to attend to this condition and ensure that individuals can express their experiments in a public space. An example of attending to this condition can be found in a project of a so-called concentration school, a school with more than 90% migrant pupils, trying to change its educational profile in order to attract Flemish pupils. After 2 years of preparing, visiting other schools to explore different educational projects, and building networks in the local community to support their project, the school organized a press conference. The press conference involved a school-song by the migrant pupils, a portrayal by the school principal, the presentation of the new educational profile by the teachers, and some stories told by local persons involved in some school activities. This press conference was for the school team a public forum through which they could express their intentions and planned activities. It was through making their project public - with mostly positive, some negative reactions - that they experienced renewed energy as well as a kind of permission to continue.

Following alterity and its qualifications, an alterity politics and the many more localized diversity policies are in the first place oriented towards making difference possible. Conditions need to be put in place through which otherness is not overruled by the norm but is allowed to develop its own variety of options. It is through safe spaces and public spaces that a difference, the other can explore its possibilities and express these to other parties. A minority can then make a surplus, maybe also for the dominant other, but in the first place for themselves, from their own perspectives.



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