Deleuze and Zhuangzi: Actualization and Counter-actualization

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Abstract

Deleuze has presented one of the richest ontologies in 20th century philosophy, and its conceptual machinery could be more fully used also in Sinology. This article focuses on two of his concepts: actualization and counter-actualization. Actualization proceeds from the virtual and through the intensive processes of individuation moves towards actual structures. Counter-actualization proceeds in the opposite direction, and starting from the actual, through creative involution discovers intensities and the virtual. It has the aspects of making a body without organs, creating intensities, and diversifying them. Actualization by differentiation is a common understanding of genetic processes in the Chinese tradition in general, and in the *Zhuangzi* in particular. In this article, Deleuze's concepts are used to (re)interpret the account of differentiation in the story of the death of Zhuangzi's wife, and the strange story from the chapter "Ultimate Joy" where "horses engender men." Counter-actualization by discarding, dismantling, forgetting, thawing of forms and reaching towards the intensive and the virtual, a merging with the Dao, is a recurrent theme in the Chinese Daoism, and it is shown on the example of Yan Hui's "sitting and forgetting," master swimmer of Lü, and the thought of death, how they project beyond the actualized rigid and metric forms toward a more intensive, plastic, and joyful existence.

Keywords: Deleuze, Zhuangzi, ontology, comparative philosophy, virtual, actual, intensities

Deleuze in Zhuangzi: aktualizacija in proti-aktualizacija

Izvleček

Deleuze je predstavil eno najbogatejših antologij filozofije 20. stoletja, katere konceptualen sistem bi se lahko obširneje uporabil pri sinologiji. Članek se osredotoča na dva od njegovih konceptov: aktualizacijo in proti- ali kontra-aktualizacijo. Aktualizacija izhaja iz virtualnega in se skozi intenzivne procese individuacije giblje proti dejanskim strukturam. Proti-aktualizacija poteka v nasprotni smeri in od dejanskega preko ustvarjalne involucije odkrije intenzivnosti in virtualno. Zavzema stališče oblikovanja telesa brez organov, ustvarjanja intenzivnosti in njihove diverzifikacije. Aktualizacija z diferenciacijo je splošno razumevanje genetskih procesov, navadno v kitajski tradiciji, zlasti pri *Zhuangziju*. V tem članku so uporabljeni Deleuzovi koncepti za (ponovno) razlago upoštevanja diferenciacije

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v zgodbi o smrti žene v *Zhuangziju* in čudne zgodbe iz poglavja »Največja radost«, v kateri »konji spočnejo ljudi«. Proti-aktualizacija je z odstranjevanjem, razstavljanjem, pozabljanjem, spreminjanjem oblik in doseganjem intenzivnega in virtualnega, združenega z Daojem, ponavljajoča se tema v kitajskem daoizmu, prikazana na primerih Yan Huijevega »sedenja v pozabi«, mojstra plavalca Lü, in misli o smrti, ki ponazarjajo preseganje aktualiziranih togih in metričnih oblik v primerjavi z bolj intenzivnim, nazornim in radostnim obstojem.

Ključne besede: Deleuze, Zhuangzi, ontologija, primerjalna filozofija, virtualen, dejanski, intenzivnosti

Introduction

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) was one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, but is still relatively little used in Sinology.[1] In his *Difference and Repetition* (published in 1968; see Deleuze 1994) he presents a rich ontology of actualization by differentiation which could be used as a machinery to be connected to other philosophical machines from the Chinese tradition,[2] where this kind of ontology is widespread. Another important topic in Deleuze concerns different methods of counter-actualization or counter-effectuation that work against the already actualized in order to make possible new actualizations. In the present article I shall interpret passages of *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of these two Deleuzian topics.

Deleuze's Ontology: Virtual, Intensive, Actual

Deleuze in his *Difference and Repetition* (1994) criticizes the Western metaphysical tradition based on identity, and instead proposes a philosophy of difference. His immanent ontology of the virtual and its actualization is one of the key elements of this philosophy.[3]

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1   See, for instance Silantsyeva 2016, Zhang and Tian 2018; a special issue of the journal *Deleuze Studies* (2013) was dedicated to China. It seems that more has been done in relation to Deleuze's aesthetics than to his ontology (see also, for instance, Bogue et al 2014). In the case of Japanese philosophy, see Ott and Allik (2010).

2   This approach is different from hermeneutic approach of interpretation. As Deleuze and Guattari say, "We will never ask what a book means, as a signifier or signified … we will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge" (1987, 4).

3   For the following discussion, see Deleuze (1994, 222–61) and DeLanda (2002). Deleuze usually changes his vocabulary from book to book, and these transformations can be regarded as an important part of his philosophical strategy (see DeLanda 2002, 157–80). Due to space limits, in this section I focus mainly on the conceptual network in the *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994), and on just a few central aspects of it.

According to Deleuze, the virtual and actual are two sides of every being and every situation. The virtual side of a thing or event is its differential structure, and the actual thing or event is unfolded from it in the course of an intensive process of actualization.[4] We can analyse it in three stages:

1) Virtual. According to Deleuze, the virtual is made of differential relations and singular points (Deleuze 1994, 209–14).[5] Manuel DeLanda compares it to the notion of state space in dynamic systems theory, where each dimension represents one degree of freedom of the system (e.g. a pendulum has two degrees of freedom, position and momentum), and where the singular points or attractors sketch the tendencies of the system (2002, 13–15). It is important here that: (a) the virtual does not resemble the actual, (b) the virtual is not homogeneous and indistinct, but all made of virtual differences. These two characteristics are different from the Platonic tradition, where the thing is a copy of an idea, and resembles it, while the idea itself is something simple and identical.

2) Individuation and dramatization, or individualizing and intensive processes, or spatiotemporal dynamisms. The virtual landscape of attractors is resolved into trajectories through a series of symmetry breaking events, by which a thing or an event is being unfolded (DeLanda 2002, 18–22). It takes place on a "field of individuation," where—in the manner of Leibniz's monads—a certain region of the virtual is selected, developed and becomes clear, whereas all the other virtual relations and points remain enveloped. Every monad is a "point of view" on the whole world and its clear field of individuation envelops in itself all other monads or individuals, although in a confused manner (Deleuze 1994, 252–53). On that field of individuation, the differential relations and singular points are developed into trajectories of actualization that may imply all sorts of transformations, torsions, accelerations, and decelerations (ibid., 215). Embryogenesis is a good example of intensive and dramatic processes: the actualizing individual is initially in a very fluid and flexible state, it is covered by intensive axes and gradients, and

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4   There is a scholarly discussion about what is the preferred ontological level: some would stress the virtuality (Badiou 1999, 43–54; Ansell-Pearson 2002, 99, 111; Hallward 2006, 28) and see it as the source of activity; others stress the intensities (Hughes 2009, 142; Bowden 2017, 236; Lundy 2017, 183) and say that the virtual is just a structure that by itself does nothing. Be that as it may, this need not bother us here, since the general scheme of differentiation is always the same, from the virtual to the actual (and back).

5   In his account of later phases of actualization Deleuze mostly uses these two terms. To be more precise, there is a synthesis inside the virtual itself: differential elements > differential relations > singular points (Deleuze 2004; see Hughes 2009, 134–41, where it is analyzed in more detail).

along these lines, step by step, by gradual symmetry breakings, the foetus develops, its regions differentiate and some parts migrate into other parts, and their contacts induce further differentiations. It is a dramatic process and only a foetus, a larva, is able to undergo such transformations, which would kill any adult animal.

3) Actual. While the intensive morphogenetic or praxiogenetic process is all about relative positions and contacts, intensities, and the precise Euclidian dimensions and volumes are not so important (foetuses are able, especially in the early phases of development, to successfully deal with some very radical interventions, as Driesch demonstrated upon the embryos of sea urchins at the beginning of the 20th century), the outcome is a spatially differentiated and temporally ordered individual in a metric space-time (Deleuze 1994, 217–21, 249–51). The body parts of an animal are juxtaposed with each other, and its time is sequenced by certain measurable rhythms (heartbeat, breathing, circadian rhythm, etc.); it has become determined as to its qualities (species) and quantities (body parts). So, the actual thing or situation is an outcome of an intensive and dramatic process, whereby spatio-temporal distinctions are unfolded, and these trajectories in turn are based on a virtual landscape of differential relations and singular points.

Deleuze's Ontology: Counter-actualization

If we take humans or other living beings as an example (it can be generalized to other cases), it is clear that on the one hand the actual form does not exhaust the actualization (and the more complex the individual, the bigger this discrepancy is), but that there always remains, as long as the system endures, a certain reserve for further actualizations.[6] On the other hand, it is also clear that no actualized form is eternal (and again, the more complex the individual, the more vulnerable it is) and that it is prone to encounter a situation that drastically changes its way of actualization (and that in the case of a living being results in its death). This brings us to the second point of Deleuze's ontology I mentioned earlier, the counter-actualization,[7]

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6   "[D]ifference has never ceased to be in itself, to be implicated in itself even while it is explicated outside itself" (Deleuze 1994, 228).

7   This term translates the French *contre-effectuation* that Deleuze uses in *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 1990, 178–79), and arguably it should be translated as counter-effectuation, since a dominant theme in that book is the Stoic separation of causes and effects (see Shults 2014, 266, n44). But for our purposes here the term 'counter-actualization' serves well, because our discussion concerns rather the questions of actualization than the Stoic distinction and the problematics of *The Logic of Sense*.

and its two aspects: first, self-cultivation as countering the actualized forms and enlarging the reserve for further actualizations, and secondly, death itself as a natural counter-actualization.

In the counter-actualization by self-cultivation we may discern three aspects: making oneself a body without organs, letting intensities pass on it, and diversifying them; in other words, the movements of disarticulation, experimentation, and nomadism (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 159). (1) Body without organs (BwO) is a concept Deleuze worked out together with Félix Guattari in "Anti-Oedipus" (1983) and "A Thousand Plateaus" (1987). It means the body as an intensive,[8] and if an organism is a coagulation, hierarchization of energies and flows,[9] then the making of a BwO means a dismantling or a thawing up of those actualized parts, "revitalising" oneself (but retaining a little bit of the organism, because otherwise you would simply be killed[10]). (2) It is not enough to turn to the intensive aspect of the body, if nothing happens there, if intensities do not pass (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161). This might lead to catatonia. So, it is important to open the body to some connections, experiment, to open some channels; in Spinozist terms, to find out how my body matches other bodies, to create "common notions" (Deleuze 1981 and 1988, 54–58). (3) But even this may remain repetitive or a "cancerous" BwO (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 165), and therefore it is necessary to diversify those connections, to have adequate and flexible interactions with the world, being a nomad or "roaming freely," to use a phrase from Zhuangzi.

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8   "The BwO is the egg. […] The egg is the milieu of pure intensity, spatium not extension, Zero intensity as principle of production. […] [T]he egg always designates this intensive reality, which is not undifferentiated, but is where things and organs are distinguished solely by gradients, migrations, zones of proximity." (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 164)
    From a very different starting point, Merleau-Ponty's analysis in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1965 [1945]), as well as the contemporary theory of embodiment (see Shapiro 2011) also indicate this kind of an intensive sphere.

9   "The organism is not at all the body, the BwO; rather, it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 159).
    Zhuangzi's story of perforation of Hundun (Mair 1994, 71) could be seen as a preparation of an organism upon a body without organs.

10 "This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 161).

As Shults (2014, 135) says, counter-actualization is not a "mystical escape," but "a masterful intensification of intentional engagement in the world." If an individual has certain usual actualized ways of interacting with the surroundings (with certain forms of affecting it and being affected by it), then counter-actualization would mean to tear those forms apart and, so to say, thaw them up, the result of which would be a body more capable of affecting and being affected in more diverse ways (see Spinoza's *Ethics* 4.38, Spinoza 2002, 341), so that the individual "can escape from the sclerosis of *its* essence, *its* power, *its* capacity to be affected, without disappearing as *that* mode" (Philippe 1999, 61). Art is a very strong counter-actualizing agent (e.g. Jagodzinski 2013).

Concerning the "natural" process of de-actualization through death, Deleuze says (1994, 259) that on the one hand death means the dedifferentiation of "big differences" (i.e. juxtaposed, actual parts)—when an organism dies, its differentiated bodily parts fall apart; and on the other hand it means the liberation of small, i.e. intensive differences. One is the actual death that others can observe, the end of the organism, but the other death is a continuing transformation where intensities never equal to zero, and the "desiring machines do not die" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 330). In this second sense, death is never present, it is "*what is felt in every feeling, what never ceases and never finishes happening* in every becoming" (ibid., italics in the original). This intensive state of the individual is qualitatively different from the actualized state, because it is not subjected to the form of the "I" or the matter of the "self" (Sholtz 2016, 63–64).[11]

Actualization from the Virtual: the Death of Zhuangzi's Wife

Now I would like to map these two topics from Deleuze's philosophy to the *Zhuangzi*.[12] Let us first take a story where Zhuangzi explains to Hui Shi how he overcame the sorrow for his wife's death:

> When she first died, do you suppose that I was able not to feel the loss? I peered back into her beginnings; there was a time before there was a life. Not only was there no life, there was a time before there was a shape. Not only was there no shape, there was a time before there was energy.

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11   For more on Deleuze and death, see Adkins 2007, Baugh 2000, and Beaulieu and Ord 2017.

12   I add the usual caveat that I do not treat the authorship of *Zhuangzi* here and by the personal name of Zhuangzi I simply refer to the authors of the *Zhuangzi* and to the textual figure of the same name that appears in the text.

Mingled together in the tuft,[13] something altered, and there was the energy; by alteration in the energy there was the shape, by alteration of the shape there was the life. Now once more altered she has gone over to death. (Graham 1981, 123–24, translation modified)

是其始死也，我獨何能無概然！察其始而本無生，非徒無生也，而本無形，非徒無形也，而本無氣。雜乎芒芴之間，變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生，今又變而之死。 (18/46/15-19)[14]

In the description of the genesis of a being, *viz.* Zhuangzi's wife, four phases are distinguished: (1) tuft (*mangwu* 芒芴); (2) energy (*qi* 氣)[15]; (3) forms (*xing* 形); and (4) life (*sheng* 生). I propose that this kind of genesis can be (re)interpreted in parallel with Deleuze, as follows:

1) Tuft as the virtuality from where all beings are generated. Zhuangzi does not describe it in as great detail as Deleuze, who uses differential elements, differential relations and singular points to describe the virtual, but at the very least we can say that the tuft is not homogeneous but has some distinctions that have not been developed yet (since the following genesis proceeds from it), and that most probably it is not a transcendent, but immanent cause. And if we equate *qi* with the intensive, then the tuft is "upstream" from this.

2) Energy or *qi* as the phase of intensities, of individuation and dramatization. In different sources there are different accounts of *qi* as to its extension or differentiation: at the very least it has two aspects, *yin* 陰 and *yang*

13   What I translate as "tuft" is *mangwu* 芒芴. According to the International Encoded Han Character and Variants Database (*International…* 2018), *mang* 芒 means: tiny thorns on a nut or leaf; sharp-pointed; cutting-edge of a blade, and *wu* 芴 means a kind of turnip. Usually some substitute words are used by translators and interpreters. For us here the metaphor of a tuft of turnip's leaves suits well ("a bunch or collection of something, typically threads, grass, or hair, held or growing together at the base," i.e. turnip, where turnip would be the Dao and the "bunch" would be the things and events). Perhaps "brier," "thicket" or simply "minute" would also fit. Graham has "amorphous," but it has the drawback of introducing hylemorphic thinking. *Mangwu* is not a chaos before the implementation of forms like in Plato's *Timaeus*, but the very small, from which all big things are unfolded.

14   Reference according to *Zhuangzi Yinde* (Zhuangzi 1986): chapter number / page number / line numbers. The electronic text is from the Chinese Text Project at www.ctext.org.

15   *Qi* is often translated as life-breath, but as Edmund Ryden explains (Zhang 2002, 45–46), it is not limited to animate beings. Wing-tsit Chan translates it as "material force" (Chan 1963, 784), but it raises the question whether there are other forces than material. According the current understanding in physics matter and energy are equivalent, and in order to avoid the term "matter" here, which would again introduce hylemorphic thinking, we could simply use "energy."

陽；some texts talk about six *qi*'s[16]; and at the extreme *qi* is as many as there are things, in the sense that every individuated thing has a certain characteristic *qi* and can be seen as a "coagulation" of that *qi*. On the one hand the *qi* is more differentiated than the tuft, but on the other hand it is not yet the phase of the actualized, with the juxtaposition of elements: it is not possible to cut off a piece of *qi* (that is, the *qi* as it is in itself) in the way you can cut off a piece of wood from a stick, for instance. Or in other words, if you "divide" it, it changes its nature like an intensive quantity (Deleuze 1994, 238).

3) Forms and life as the level of actuality: the phase of distinguished things that are spatially juxtaposed and temporally sequenced.

Intensive Transformations in the *ji* 幾

In the *Zhuangzi* and also in other texts, there is the notion of "tiny" *ji* 幾 which could be (re)interpreted in terms of Deleuzian intensive differences. In chapter 19 "Ultimate Joy" (*zhile* 至樂) it is said that the "seeds [of beings] are tiny" (*zhong you ji* 種有幾). In fact, in the text there follows a row of transformations that on the level of actuality would seem utterly bizarre (cf. Goldin 2003, 226–27):

> When they are found in water they become filaments. When they are found at the border of water and land they become algae. When they germinate in elevated places they become plantain. When the plantain is found in fertile soil it becomes crow's foot. The crow's foot's roots become scarab grubs and its leaves become butterflies. The butterflies soon evolve into insects that are born beneath the stove. (Mair 1994, 172).
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> 得水則為𥧌，得水土之際則為蛙蠙之衣，生於陵屯則為陵舃，陵舃得鬱棲則為烏足，烏足之根為蠐螬，其葉為蝴蝶。(18/47/41-42)

The description goes on for a while, until it reaches the human ("horses engender men" *ma sheng ren* 馬生人), and at the end it is said:

> Humans again go back and enter the machine. All things come out of the machine, all go back into the machine. (Mair 1994, 173)
>
> 於機，皆入於機。(18/47/45-48/18/46)

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16   For instance, in Chapter 1 of Zhuangzi (1/2/21); the notion of the six *qi* is also used in the Chinese medicine.

The "machine" (*ji* 機) is related to the "tiny" (*ji* 幾). On the one hand all individuals come from an intensive state and go back to it after death or destruction; on the other hand, this sphere of intensities is literally a machine, something that produces all beings (cf. the intensive sphere of the "machinic," productive unconscious that is not theatrical or representative like the Freudian unconscious, Deleuze and Guattari 1983), or triggers their individuation (機 also means "trigger").

It is hard to see how this Zhuangzian description could make any sense on the level of actuality (whatever was the biological knowledge of the Ancients or however we interpreted the text, it must be excluded that the author intended to say that an actual horse engenders a human being). Its focus is on the level of intensities, and it can be understood in this way that the intensive *qi* solidifies or is gathered (*ju* 聚)[17] for a while, so that it becomes an actual qualified being with quantified parts, and that after this form of the individual is destroyed, the intensive factors are freed (just like Deleuze says of the "other side" of death (1994, 259, cf. Williams 2003, 9–11), and that they become available for new individuations. So, it is not the horse that produces man, but the intensive factors or *qi*, that are now in the form of an actual horse, and after the dissolution of this form may become part of a new actualization process that produces a human being. In Deleuze's terms the intensities imply each other and an individual envelops inside itself all other individuals, so that with a shift in the clear part, in the "viewpoint" or the individuation field, some other individual might be actualized.

And perhaps the best way to understand this is not as a relation of before and after in actuality, but as a description of the intensive as it is in itself. Different individuals interpenetrate each other already now. Deleuze says:

> [T]he ass and the wolf can be considered species only in relation to the fields of individuation which clearly express them. In the confused and in the enveloped, they play only the role of variables, of individual differences or composing souls. … We call individuating factors the ensemble of these enveloping and enveloped intensities, of these individuating and individual differences which ceaselessly interpenetrate one another throughout the fields of individuation. … [E]very individuating factor is already difference and difference of difference. It is constructed upon a fundamental disparity, and functions on the edges of that disparity as such. That is why these factors endlessly communicate

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17   "Human's birth is a gathering together of *qi*; if it gathers together, then there is life, if it scatters, then there is death" 人之生，氣之聚也，聚則為生，散則為死 (22/58/11). The idea of a genetic process as a gathering together of *qi* and destruction as a scattering of *qi* is common in the Chinese tradition.

with one another across fields of individuation, becoming enveloped in one another. (Deleuze 1994, 254, 257)

There is a self-cultivation practice (or "ascetism," Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 279) related to this fact of interpenetration of individualizations, and Deleuze later, in his work with Guattari, termed it "becoming-animal." This is not an imitation of an animal or an identification with it, but a "creative involution" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 273) where one so adjusts one's intensities that they come to the zone of proximity with another individuation.

This does not reveal itself as actually becoming an animal, but to some extent it liberates one's individuation and intensities from the yoke of one's self, from its identity and its imaginary variations, and puts one into better contact with the productive forces that produce that individual and that interpenetrate with the forces that produce other individuals. So, becoming-animal leads to becoming-imperceptible, which is its "cosmic formula" of becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 279). In the *Zhuangzi* there are some self-cultivators who have not been successful enough in their becoming-imperceptible and who attract students (Ch. 32, see Mair 1994, 324–26).

Counter-actualization: Making Oneself a Body without Organs, Creating Intensities, and Diversifying Them

This kind of creative involution is perhaps best exemplified in the *Zhuangzi* by the fictional story about Yan Hui, historically the favourite student of Confucius, who is "making progress": first he says that he has forgotten rites and music, but Confucius says it is not enough. Then he says he has forgotten humaneness and righteousness, but again it is not enough. The third time Yan Hui says:

> "I sit and forget."[18]
> "What do you mean, 'sit and forget'?" Confucius asked with surprise.
> "I slough off my limbs and trunk," said Yan Hui, "dim my intelligence, depart from my form, leave knowledge behind, and become integrated with the Great Interpenetration. This is what I mean by 'sit and forget'."
> "If you are integrated," said Confucius, "then you have no preferences. If you are transformed, then you have no more constants. It's you who is really the worthy one! Please permit me to follow after you." (Mair 1994, 63–64, translation modified)

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18   Livia Kohn (2010, 1) argues that it would be better to translate it as "oblivion" rather than forgetting.

曰：「回坐忘矣。」仲尼蹴然曰：「何謂坐忘？」顏回曰：「墮
肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通[19]，此謂坐忘。」仲尼曰：
「同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從　而後也。」
(6/19/89-93)

Yan Hui in his counter-actualization first discards the culturally central forms (rites and music, humaneness and righteousness) and then sloughs off his limbs and trunk, departs from his form and leaves knowledge behind. This is the part of disarticulation that occurs in making oneself a body without organs. Thus he attains the ontological level of the pure intensities, the "Great Interpenetration" (*datong* 大通).

Ordinary life becomes physically, psychically and culturally attached to certain forms, so that the body is able to perform a narrow set of movements and the psyche behaves like a mental automaton, giving certain responses to certain stimuli. So, the first phase of self-cultivation is to undo, forget, blur, tarry, to sit motionless. The meditation practice of "sitting and forgetting" thus enables the mind not to present the first response, but to open up to greater nuances and variation.

On the other hand, in accordance with Deleuze-Guattari's warning, he retains "a little bit" of the organism and knowledge. He does not literally mutilate himself or become crazy, but simply is able to distance himself from the actualized forms of body and mind, and to experience the pure intensities. In this way those free intensities can be productive, and not destructive. This is the part of experimentation.

This kind of existence is described in several of the *Zhuangzi*'s stories about persons who have attained supreme mastery of an art: master butchers, swimmers, carpenters, cricket-catchers. These stories show how those masters have forgotten their actual form and are as if melted into a substance (flesh, water, timber) or, better, they show how those people have experimented and, in an interaction with a substance, environment or other beings, discovered the singularities of those substances, environments or beings, as well as the singularities of their own bodies, so that their performance becomes marvellous.

Let us take the example of the master swimmer:[20]

Confucius was viewing the Lü waterfall, which plummets several hundred feet, whitening the waters for forty miles around, impassable to fish

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19   On the example of "Huainanzi" Ch. 12, where the same story appears, many interpreters amend 大通 to 化通. In my citation I follow the received version.

20   Deleuze in his lectures on Spinoza (see Deleuze 1981) also brings the example of learning to swim. Billeter (2010), who makes an important case of such kind of learning processes, takes the example of learning to ride a bicycle. This accords with Deleuze's emphasis on "apprenticeship," in contrast to "learning" (Deleuze 1994, 164–67).

and turtles. And yet he saw and old man swimming there in the torrent. Thinking the man had attempted suicide due to some suffering in his life, Confucius sent his disciples to run along the bank and try to pull him out. But the old man emerged several hundred paces downstream, walking along the bank singing, his hair streaming down his back. Confucius hurried after him and said, "I thought you were a ghost, but now I see you are a man! Do you have a method that allows you to tread upon the waters?"

"No, I have no method," said the old man. "I got my start in the given, developed via my own inborn nature, and reached completion through fate. I enter into the navels of the whirlpools and emerge with the surging eddies. I just follow the course of the water itself, without making any private one of my own. This is how I tread the waters."

Confucius said, "What do you mean by getting your start in the given, developing via your own inborn nature, and reaching completion through fate?"

I was born on the land and thus I feel securely at home on the land. That's the given. I grew up with the water and thus I feel securely at home in the water. That's my own nature. And I am thus and so but without knowing how or why I am thus and so. That's fate. (Ziporyn 2009, 81)

孔子觀於呂梁，縣水三十仞，流沫四十里，黿鼉魚鱉之所不能游也。見一丈夫游之，以為有苦而欲死也，使弟子並流而拯之。數百步而出，被髮行歌而游於塘下。孔子從而問焉，曰：「吾以子為鬼，察子則人也。請問蹈水有道乎？」曰：「亡，吾無道。吾始乎故，長乎性，成乎命。與齊俱入，與汩偕出，從水之道而不為私焉。此吾所以蹈之也。」孔子曰：「何謂始乎故，長乎性，成乎命？」曰：「吾生於陵而安於陵，故也；長於水而安於水，性也；不知吾所以然而然，命也。」(19/50/49-54)

In the typical tripartite structure of these stories, the swimmer starts with his facticity, a certain already-actualized historical, geographical, cultural context. Then, in interaction with the water, he disarticulates this body and experiments with new assemblages, he learns how to match his body (its singularities, or in Spinoza's terms the specific relation of movement and rest that characterizes his body) with the body of the water and the stream (with their singularities). So, in this practice itself the swimmer counter-actualizes his form and reaches towards the intensive and the virtual differential relations and singular points expressed and developed by those intensities.

So, one important part of dismantling or thawing oneself in the process of counter-actualization is to attentively explore other things, bodies, environments, and to form assemblages with them, letting them to transform you. In this way one becomes a nomad that "swims," roams or rambles (*you* 游/遊), which means that the intensities pass freely on the body without organs.

The third aspect of counter-actualization that we mentioned earlier, that of diversification, is very often not focused on in such stories. This opens two contrary interpretations: according to the first, all those masters would be prisoners of their art, so that they are able to reach the intensive only in one very specific field, and that they would not be accomplished persons or "real men" (*zhen ren* 真人). The second is that through one specific art they have attained the principle of the movement towards the intensive and the virtual, so that one art would be sufficient. The second interpretation seems more plausible, since the first interpretation would rather correspond to what in the characters' own terminology is "to have a method" (*youdao* 有道) and to "know" (*zhi* 知). If you have a method and you know what you do, then you are still tied to certain actualized forms of objects and subjects, and there would be no real progress, because you would need to master an infinite amount of arts (and even then it would not be clear whether that would bring about some qualitative change). Those masters are precisely beyond methods and knowledge, they have really dismantled or thawed their body and subjectivity, so that their capacity to experiment extends well beyond their field of mastery, and they are capable of a real diversification in their intensities.

Intensive Transformations: Death as Natural Counter-actualization

In chapter 6, "The Great Ancestral Teacher," Sir Plow goes to see his terminally ill friend,[21] Sir Come, and asks, what will the Creator soon make of him:

> Will He make you the liver of a rat, or the arm of an insect? (Mair 1994, 59)

> 以汝為鼠肝乎？以汝為蟲臂乎？(6/17/55)

The Creator is the Dao or the general transformation of things that is "upstream" of the actualized forms, in the intensive or the virtual. To a Western reader this terminology is easily misleading, as the Creator is one of the common names for God. And it is even true that in the *Zhuangzi* too the Creator does belong to the sphere of

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21   There is an extensive literature on Zhuangzi and death, e.g. Schwitzgebel 2017, Chai 2016, Farrugia 2015, Hoffert 2015, Budriūnaitė 2015, Fraser 2013, Berkson 2011, Galvany 2009, Olberding 2007, Ames 1999.

the numinous or spiritual (*shen* 神; it is another word for a small, marvellous, intensive factor), but it should not be considered as a transcendent agent: the numinosity belongs to the "upstream" levels of the intensive and the virtual themselves, not to something external to them. Zhuangzi's Creator is very much immanent, it denotes the creativity of the virtual and the intensive, while the virtual differences and singularities are all reciprocally determined, so the distribution of individualizations and the creation of things is an emergent property of the virtual.

In the *Zhuangzi,* being actualized in a form is compared to being tied by a cord, and death is the loosening of this cord, a liberation:

> This would be what the ancients called loosening the cord by which (the life) is suspended (Legge 1891a, 248).
>
> 此古之所謂縣解也(6/17/53)

> The ancients described (death) as the loosening of the cord on which God suspended (the life) (Legge 1891a, 201–2).
>
> 古者謂是帝之縣解 (3/8/18-19)

Death is like a return to home:

> look on death as going home (Legge 1891a, 386)
> 視死若生者 (17/44/63)

or even more precisely, the return to home of an orphan who early on in life lost his parents:

> How do I know that hating death is not like an orphan who has lost his parents as a small child and is not able to return home! (My translation)
>
> 予惡乎知惡死之非弱喪而不知歸者邪！ (2/6/79)

And death can even be a "perfect enjoyment." In Ch. 18 (whose title is "Ultimate joy" or "Perfect enjoyment") the skull tells Zhuangzi:

> In death there are not (the distinctions of) ruler above and minister below. There are none of the phenomena of the four seasons. Tranquil and at ease, our years are those of heaven and earth. No king in his court has greater enjoyment than we have. (Legge 1891b, 6)
>
> 髑髏曰：「死，無君於上，無臣於下，亦無四時之事，從然以天地為春秋，雖南面王樂，不能過也。」(18/47/26-27)

So, the distinctions of the actual world and society do not apply in the intensive netherworld.

The thought of this "natural" counter-actualization might also be considered a self-cultivation practice. There might even be some affinities between Zhuangzi and the "care of death" of Socrates/Plato, but there are also important differences. In both cases, this thought functions as a deterritorializing agent that distances us from our actual forms. But the philosophical and conceptual transposition is different: while in the Socratic tradition the body is the "tomb" of spirit (*sōma sēma*), like a container from which the spirit is freed at death,[22] in the Zhuangzian tradition the description is immanent: the body is not an external container, but the (temporary) solidification of intensive *qi*; death is the liberation of those same individuating factors that produced the body, their re-entry into a state of inter-penetration with other intensities. There is no "migration of souls" here (cf. Deleuze 1994, 254)—and we should take note of the question of Sir Plow above: it is not "as whom will you reincarnate," so that a ready-made individual (or rather, its soul) would "change body"; he does not mention whole organisms, but parts of an animal or an insect (liver, arm). So, the re-individuation can enter very different constellations or assemblages, and is not subjected to the principle of identity and the repetition of the same (transmigration of a soul). Persons do not survive; what lives, are the intensities. Persons are rather a principle of death and degradation (they impose a fixed form on intensities and thus make it vulnerable to destruction).

Deleuze (1994, 259) says that death rises from within, but comes from without, and there is something similar in the *Zhuangzi*. We cited above the first half and we repeat it here with what follows:

> This would be what the ancients called loosening the cord by which (the life) is suspended. But one hung up cannot loose himself—he is held fast by things. (Legge 1891a, 248, translation slightly modified)
>
> 此古之所謂縣解也，而不能自解者，物有結之。 (6/17/53)

When Zhuangzi glorifies transformation (even to the utmost of the grotesque, when a person becomes so hunched that his nose touches his navel; or to the fantastic when parts of body are imagined to transform into a rooster, crossbow or

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22   And because Zhuangzi does not have to fight against this kind of dualism, perhaps in his case a preparation of a body without organs is less dangerous: "the Daoist nomad is less prone to madness and excess because the Daoist nomad is not rebelling against an oppressive metaphysics" (Sigurdsson and Coutinho 2004, 71), although I believe there is always and everywhere a form of oppressive metaphysics, implicit already in the "common sense," so that the difference of difficulty would be rather a difference of degree.

wheel) and says that death is just one of the transformations, it is not just a resignation and acceptance of the inevitable, or an abstract thought of life and death alternating like morning and evening, but it is a glorification of the intensive, of intensive transformations lived in one's own body.

So, while for Socrates the thought of death helps to train the soul in rational knowledge and in grasping of intelligible ideas, in Zhuangzi it helps to learn how to be (relatively) free from and unattached to fixed forms in both body and mind.[23] Death is a major transformation, a discarding of our personal form and a return to the intensive, and it can teach us to comply with the lesser transformations in this life, letting go of the forms. This is the meaning of Zhuangzi's practice of "forgetting" or "sitting and forgetting." The objects of forgetting are the actual forms, and when they are forgotten, our intensive (un)ground shines through. This is a knowing with not-knowing: knowing belongs to the actual; not-knowing belongs to the intensive or to the virtual.

> They accepted (their life) and rejoiced in it; they forgot (all fear of death),
> and returned (to their state before life) (Legge 1891a, 238).

> 受而喜之，忘而復之。(6/15/11)

From the story of the death of Zhuangzi's wife we know that "before life" is the intensive, the *qi*, of which life is a certain transformation.

This thought of death is indeed a practice of counter-actualization; in the first chapter Zhuangzi criticizes those proto-Daoists who seek to prolong life, because by trying to free themselves in this way they still depend on something, on some actual things (certain tools and methods of practice), and in an even deeper sense, they are falsely attached to a particular actual form (the human form), whereas they should set themselves free for any transformation and plant themselves in the virtual, in the homeland where there are no actualized things (無何有之鄉, 1/3/46), in the "vast wilds of open nowhere" (廣莫之野, ibid., Ziporyn 2009, 8).

Conclusion. Mutual Benefit

In this paper I have tried to map to the *Zhuangzi* Deleuze's ontology of virtuality and its actualization, and the corresponding practice of counter-actualization. More broadly, this paper might give new conceptual tools for understanding the

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23   The latter—freeing from fixed forms in the mind—could be related to Deleuze's notion of counter-effectuation in thought (see Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 159–62).

Chinese tradition, and the preceding analysis of some parts of *Zhuangzi* is just a very brief foray into what could prompt more systematic explorations on the following ontological levels:

1) Deleuze's notion of virtuality and its related concepts might give new tools for understanding such basic concepts of Chinese philosophy as *dao* 道, *de* 德, *kong* 空, *xu* 虛, *wu* 無, *wei* 微, *ji* 幾, *li* 理 and others.

2) Deleuze's understanding of individuation might explain the mainstream Chinese view according to which this is the result of a gradual differentiation, separation, coagulation. This could lead to a better understanding in the common world philosophy of individuation beyond actual individuals and collectives. Deleuze's ontology of intensities might give new insights into the notion of *qi* that has until now been difficult to integrate into Western concepts and systems. Intensive interactions (like Deleuze's notion of assemblage) might help us to understand a large array of notions not only in the sphere of Chinese philosophy, but also in other domains (like painting, calligraphy, poetry, *wushu*, etc.), where the question of the perceiving subject and the perceived object, or artistic representation of things in the world, has never been central. Instead, they are concentrated on how to prepare intensities in the artwork or one's own body, so that the actual rigid form is, to an extent, melted, and we become able to make new contacts and connections with other beings and situations.

3) Deleuze's concept of actuality could explain the Chinese philosophers' attitude towards actual things. The main problem with the actual things is not that they would be an earthly burden on a heavenly spirit, something bad and sinful in their materiality. Instead, the problem lies in the very fact that they have a certain form—which on the one hand, yes, testifies to the virtual articulation of differences and the power of their intensive actualizations, but on the other also closes this same actualization, and starts to limit further actualizations.

4) The ambivalent role of actuality prompts practices of counter-actualization. The organ of this counter-actualization, or the place where it happens, is for many Chinese philosophers the heart/mind, *xin* 心. The notions of consciousness and mind are sensitive topics in the contemporary Continental philosophical tradition, because for a long time they were used as notions of the level of actuality (consciousness of a certain actual being, namely human) and in the dualistic context of body and mind. The Chinese tradition is not burdened with such concerns; the *xin* 心 is a highway to the intensive and the virtual. This is a vast field open for further research.

The connections outlined in this paper also make new assemblages for Deleuzian philosophy, and contribute to the emergent world philosophy.

Acknowledgments

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