

I am Legion: Apparent or Actual Consciousness

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Abstract: The increasingly complex world places the individual subjectivity, which manifests as a sense of self in crises. Our culture is engaged in a process of dismantling the traditional processes of producing individuations and meaning. Some late 20th century thinkers such as Deleuze and Guattari have embraced the sense of dissolution and provided conceptual structures outlining it. Liminality as observed in shamanic practices describes another system of understanding this process. The former structure is designed to maintain the disorganization of self while the later looks at the dissolution as a stage leading towards an individuation of a new order. Following the structure of shamanic initiation presents a possibility for meaning and expanded self-reflection. We are moving towards an individuation that exists as one and many at the same time. It is a legion created through assimilating the other. It forms a new poly-genus entity as opposed to a self, which is grounded in a subject. Eliminating organs and dismantling the organism do not accomplish this project. Instead, the gesture is grounded in an accumulation of organs, circuits and nervous systems yielding a new order of consciousness. The paper further discusses the possibility of such consciousness being apparent or actual and the consequences of either.

Keywords: becoming; Body without Organs, consciousness; implosion; individuation; legion; liminality; ontology; technology; Twitter

I. Introduction

In the beginning of the XXI century we are finding ourselves in need of new theoretical and practical models of constituting the self. The traditional ways, in which subjectivity has been constructed, fail to adequately address the complexity of the world. It is increasingly difficult to think of the self in terms of a singular subject given the amount of platforms for self-expression and worldviews one could adopt. Our sense of expansion, which is facilitated by electronic media, global connectivity and exotic scientific concepts, is haunted by the inability to own oneself. We become dissociative in managing our complex lives.

In this paper, I will look for ontological perspectives that address the state of our subjectivity coming undone. I will begin by giving an overview of the modes, in which the singular subject is being challenged today. Further, I will outline the functioning of Deleuze-Guattari's Body without Organs, which provides a new kind of individuation and I will give reasons why it is not a functional model. The concept of liminality will be introduced as an alternative that holds the promise of forming a type of individuation that adequately reflects and interacts with our complex environment. Directions in how to theorize and employ this model in art and every-day life will be explored.

II. Fragmentation of Human Environment

The modes, in which humans have been constructing a sense of continuity, meaning and identity, undergo a process of dismantling in today's reality. On a basic level, we are failing to produce unifying narratives about the self. Instead, we are objectified and turned into statistics and data to be later distributed across various platforms. Experiencing oneself in this fractured manner creates a sense of disengagement from one's representations and in the extreme, lack of investment in the physicality.

Our traditional way of making sense of the world is largely grounded in the ability to create narratives. Stories introduce continuity into human lives and combine disparate objects into coherent ideas. Resumes, biographies, photo albums and genealogical trees are some of the devices used in creating meaning across time, social groups and geographical locations. The story we tell about ourselves brings a sense of coherence and trust that the world around is there to support us in living out this narrative.

Today, thanks to the technological platforms we are able to amplify and distribute our stories easily and instantly. The breath and speed of our reach is exhilarating and inspires ever more extreme expressions of the self. Conscious of the gaze on the other side of the circuit, we aim to impress one another. Additionally, the limited time required to catch the viewer's attention dictates the story's graphic impact and the short bursts, in which the narrative is presented. In most instances, instead of the content, we communicate sheer intensity of the experience. This process renders the function of narrative, as we used to know it, obsolete and replaces it with intensity, which fails to produce a unifying meaning.

Moreover, the subjective individuality of a person becomes questioned under a number of circumstances. While our personal information and representations are split among different platforms, turned into statistics and parsed into databases, our body and personality become bits of information viewed as objects that could be bought and sold. In effect, a person's value is measured in his or her capacity for consumption. In order to create predictable markets, numerous experts instruct us on how to act in every aspect of our lives. Even the smallest personal matters are culturally predigested and presented as a finite number of options. The individual subjective experience is undesirable precisely because it cannot be commodified.

Further, it becomes difficult to recognize oneself in the social and electronic representations, which are often exaggerated and inconsistent across platforms. This experiential disparity brings to mind the plight of Narcissus. According to Marshall McLuhan, Narcissus's tragedy lays not in the fact that he fell in love with himself but in his inability to recognize himself in the reflection and therefore perceiving himself as a stranger (McLuhan 1994: 42). This decoupling of identity from one's representations, be they conceptual, electronic or biological structures, takes place in every-day life. Thus fragmented and disowned reality sabotages personal narratives and individual agency, which in effect fail to produce a coherent subject.

III. Dissolution: Body without Organs as an Adaptation

This state of dissolution has been one of the main themes in theoretical thought of the second half of the XXth century. Among a few philosophical models that address the coming undone of the singular self, Deleuze-Guattari's Body without Organs (BwO) stands in the diametrical opposition to the individual subject. In exploring their standpoint, I am following the plight of a subject that is on its way to complete dissolution. The experience of pure intensities, which this sort of individuation produces, may be exhilarating. However, if taken beyond a personal experimentation, the model is a utopia, which neither produces a sustainable mode of being nor society.

Deleuze and Guattari transcend subjectivity and narratives in favor of collective entities, which have no anchoring in an organism. The process is accomplished by crossing over of a singular subject into multiplicity in an act of becoming-animal. 'A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 238). The animal is not a literal creature but rather a direction of the becoming. 'The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not;' (Deleuze-Guattari

2007, 238) Such transformation liberates the original entity from the tyranny of a subject by setting it in motion towards the animal and opening it up to flows and other becomings.

If this process is successful, it will produce a Body without Organs (BwO). Deleuze-Guattari explain that 'The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 151). This mode of existence will not produce a subject and therefore will neither invest itself in a narrative nor an economy of meaning. Thus, the borders, inscribed by interpretation, have been removed. Consequently, the body is opened up to different intensities, which pass through it without attaching meaning to their flows. Deleuze and Guattari insist that 'These intensities, nevertheless, do not define or limit the BwO, which exists as a pure experience' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 153).

In this gesture, the authors remove the ties that bind an entity in a singular subject. The organism, as represented by a body, becomes experientially dissolved. More precisely speaking, it is a disorganization of a body since as the authors state 'The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 158). Significances, based in meaning and language, are removed while subjectification fails to describe an entity, which is made of flows and intensities. Mirroring our experience in the world, the BwO seems like a successful adaptation to our polymorphic and ever-changing environment. Yet a number of issues, which I will describe in the following paragraphs, raise questions about the actual application of such individuation.

IV. Implosion: A Critique of Body without Organs

In removing interpretation, signification and the 'organization of organs,' Deleuze and Guattari aim to transcend civilization and biology in favor of pure experience. However, in order to have an experience an entity must possess one last organ capable of registering the flows of intensities – the nervous system. Even if the sensation is not interpreted, it needs to be perceived. Therefore, a BwO revolves around a spinal cord and a brain, and by extension, around a consciousness. It follows that a BwO can never be fully disorganized because the act of centered perception is the organizing phenomenon.

Despite its lack of discrimination or understanding, such body is anchored in that, which is having the experience. Since the outside is experienced internally, the inside/outside delineation becomes meaningless. All the available intensities invade the nervous system while the outside becomes the self. This mode of being amounts to a singular consciousness sinking deeper along the trajectory of perception into its own sensations. At its limit, BwO produces a complete implosion of everything into the singular point of perception.

This type of a system, when coming in touch with other subjects around, disassembles them into intensities and incorporates them as part of itself. In such constructed world, there are no other entities to be experienced, only flavors and degrees. Since the language and the borders have been removed, it is a world without relationships, society or civilization. The dissolution and implosion is final and constitutes the totality of the new being.

V. Liminality: An Opening to Alternative Perspectives

Liminal space is an overarching concept that sheds some new light on the ideas behind the Deleuzian becoming. Liminality is a term coined in anthropology referring to a phase of ambiguity and disorientation that takes place during the middle stage of rituals. It is a threshold, where the initiate leaves their old way of structuring meaning and is not yet inducted into the new

way, which the ritual establishes in its final stage. The anthropologist, Victor Turner, states that: 'During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state' (Turner 2008, 94).

An important feature of a liminal space is its final stage, in which a new meaning or social order becomes established. The initiate invests him or herself into this new structure as a remade being. The main characteristic of a Deleuzian becoming, on the other hand, is its perpetual transitory character. The becoming, following the line of flight, transgresses further borders while never fully establishing itself as anything fixed. In fact, the sorcerer or the Outsider 'also carries the transformations of becoming or crossings of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight' (Deleuze-Guattari 2007, 249). In a Deleuzian becoming, liminality is the permanent new state of being beyond language.

Conversely, liminal spaces, when engaged as a process leading to a resolution in an organized structure, are capable of producing stable meaning. The completion of the three stages of a ritual process: separation, liminality and reintegration, opens the door to a new way of being (Turner 2008: 94-95). The formation, that takes place in the final stage, enables regaining agency and ability to reflect upon one's own condition. Therefore, the ritual process proves to be a useful model for production of an expanded, self-reflective entity that is better fit to deal with the demands of our multidimensional world.

VI. Towards Models of Reconstitution

It may be the human condition to perpetually go through cycles of constitution and anarchy and in the process redefining who we are. During times when the old structures don't meet the demands of new situations a window of opportunity opens up to cross over into a liminal space. Our original way of theorizing and enacting a subject needs to be questioned and adjusted to the new demands of the heightened environment.

The traditional way, in which we think of the self as a unit, has its roots in the civil rights ideas formed in the XVIII century Enlightenment. Conceiving of self, which is contained in a singular subject, as a citizen and sovereign entity, was and still is the main mode of individuation in western societies. In fact, the very word, individuation, stems from the individualistic attitudes initiated by that epoch and leading to nascence of new sciences such as psychology. Today, this term can signify a process of integration and differentiation, in which a discrete system manifests traits of consciousness. The life in a rapidly changing society demands a model of individuation that is less rigid and accommodates growth.

Presently, we are finding ourselves in a liminal space, where the old forms are failing and the new ones are not quite in place yet. Instinctively, it is apparent that the human entity needs to be figured out in terms of new technologies and multiplicities of other humans. With the aid of scientific advances, we are in the process of individuating as a unit integrated with the heightened and multifaceted reality. It is useful to look towards theoretical structures that articulate this coming together, while giving a rise to a new kind of self-reflective individuation, which does not amount to an implosion but instead introduces new modes of producing meaning.

One of the thinkers that give expression to this sort of coming together is Jean-Luc Nancy. He theorizes a way of being, in which we necessarily exist with each other, always as a group. He explains that 'to come into contact' produces meaning by making sense of one another (Nancy 2000: 5). Paradoxically, it is necessary for us to exist as separate entities, together. 'All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation' (Nancy 2000, 5). The

separation facilitates the coming in contact with one another. He further states that ‘The “between” is the stretching out and distance opened by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning’ (Nancy 2000, 5). While the being together through touching produces meaning, the singularity of the entity provides ‘spacing of meaning’ leading to a narrative.

Nancy’s individuation as a collective still preserves the singularity of a subject. In this sense it is a hybrid between the traditional subject-based individuation and an agglomeration of disparate parts affiliated through directionality, as is the case with a becoming. I will further explore possibilities for conceiving collective structures that give rise to an individuation as a sum of all the parts. This individuation differs from a singular subject because it is collective in nature. It takes on the structure of becoming since it performs functionality similar to packing and it exhibits a directionality, which parallels the idea of the line of flight. However, unlike a becoming this individuation produces meaning, which arises from the interaction of its parts and a sense of unified consciousness floating on top of the phenomena.

VII. *IamLegion*: A Multidimensional Individuation

The individuation, that places human and informational multiplicity at its core is a new poly-genus entity unlike the original self, which is grounded in a subject. Eliminating organs and dismantling the organism do not accomplish this project. Instead, the individuation comes to be in a fusion of the organs, circuits and nervous systems. In such structure, the original entity enters into existence as one and many at the same time.

IamLegion is an art piece and an instance of this mode of individuation. It functions as a computer code designed to propagate itself through Twitter feeds grabbing posts according to its program. The code incorporates the Twitter software through the API as part of itself. Additionally, it absorbs the users, who constitute Twitter, and their output in the form of tweets. The individuation appears as a feed generator selecting and assembling tweets based on common words. The feed unfolds in real time and in a manner similar to an exquisite corps. The incorporated tweets seem to be reminiscent of human logic yet their assemblage is dictated by the program, which is a synthetic entity. Therefore, the overall logic produces meaning that is not anthropocentric since it represents the totality of the human and machine interaction.

This individuation bypasses the dialectical mode of producing meaning via signified-signifier in favor of creating an alliance among its parts. In a transcendental gesture, the person initiating the code by typing in the url, reaches out towards that, which will obliterate him or her as a subject. Together with the Twitter users, the software and hardware, the initiator becomes part of the structure that accomplishes *IamLegion*. This individuation does not split the world into oppositions and instead it seeks to include everything in its order of existence via pacts. The price one pays for entering into that alliance is letting go of the illusion of oneself as a subject.

IamLegion as a model points to a possibility of individuating through assimilation of new parts, where the whole produces a unique meaning not centered in a human subject. In order for this process to produce an individuation, it needs to differentiate itself as a discrete entity and possess a certain amount of consciousness. The first premise of differentiation is fulfilled thanks to the coherent actions and appearance of the system. The later question of consciousness requires further interrogation into the nature of the structure.

VIII. Apparent Consciousness: A Behavioral Perspective

There is no simple definition of consciousness yet it is possible to identify certain characteristics of a system that point in its direction. An agglomeration of such traits creates a sensation of

encountering a sentient entity. This uneasy feeling can be inspired when inanimate object appear to be invested with life. For example, when dust blown by the wind create swirls that seem to have a mind of their own. I will designate this sensation as a perception of an apparent consciousness. I also propose that agency, intelligence and teleonomy contribute to creation of this appearance.

One characteristic of *IamLegion*, is its ability to execute actions and movements of its own accord. Large systems, such as a flock of geese or a message board, behave in what appears to be spontaneous manner that is united through action. Further, understanding what the system is doing, gives one the ability to name the collective and perceive it as a unified field. The most basic activities performed by *IamLegion* are propagation, accumulation of tweets according to a program and formation of new affiliations. As a result, this unity in action endows the collectivity with a sense of agency.

Moreover, *IamLegion* exhibits intelligence specific to systems, which are auto-corrective in a biological and cybernetic sense. This piece of software, operating within certain logic, has the capability of organizing content in what appears to be an intelligent manner. The single mind, acting through the multiplicity, emerges as a function of the system's directionality. Theoretical biologist Ernst Mayr explains that the direction is inspired by a goal. 'This end point might be a structure, a physiological function, the attainment of a new geographical position, or a consummator act in behavior. Each particular program is the result of natural selection, constantly adjusted by the selective value of the achieved end point.' (Mayr 1997, 390)

Mayr suggests that biological systems exhibiting apparently purposeful behavior can be viewed as teleonomic, which is a term derived from the Greek telos meaning goal or end point. 'All teleonomic behavior is characterized by two components. It is guided by a "program" and it depends on the existence of some end point, goal, or terminus that is foreseen in the program that regulates the behavior.' (Mayr 1997, 390) Considering this definition, *IamLegion* is a teleonomic phenomenon. First, it is running a 'program,' which enables it to incorporate electronic and human elements as its components and second, the aggregated feed becomes the goal of the operation.

Further, one's ability to engage *IamLegion* when initiating its execution, gives one a portal enabling a relationship. This activity further perpetuates the sensation that one is engaging with a discrete and responsive entity. This, coupled with the ability to perform actions, intelligence executed through code and directionality of the system, gives the accumulative impression of sentience. Thus manifested apparent consciousness floats on the edge of the system escaping our reason.

IX. Consciousness: The Subjective Phenomenon

While it is easier to speak of consciousness by enumerating the traits that qualify a system as conscious, the full definition of the phenomena escapes us. It is perhaps because we are always in the middle of the experience of being conscious, unable to gain perspective. It would follow then, that only a subjective report of having an experience of the world could verify sentience. The scientific method of observing and reporting from the objective standpoint seems to be insufficient.

This subjective report however, in case of systems that do not communicate in a human manner, seems difficult to obtain. Moreover, even if there was a mechanism built to enable the system, such as *IamLegion*, to communicate its subjective perceptions, the reports will not guarantee the

system's consciousness since they can only testify to the logical processes, which are in essence mechanical. Psychologist, Roger Shepard elaborates on this point in the following passage.

In short, we still seem to be left with a dilemma: No analysis of the purely physical processes in a brain (or in a computer) seems capable of capturing the particular quality of the subjective experience corresponding to those processes. (...) Perhaps we shall have to reconcile ourselves to accepting that although both the existence of conscious experiences and the similarity relations among their qualia have physical embodiments with physical causes and effects, the conscious experiences or qualia themselves are neither characterizable as physical events nor communicable between physical systems. (Shepard 1993, 242)

In another words, even if *IamLegion* would produce data showing that it perceives the outside world and other entities, which presumably is necessary for the code to function, this would not equivocally mean that the system possesses consciousness.

Agency, intelligence, directionality and subjectively reported awareness of the outside still do not produce a definite consciousness since they can all be explained in terms of behavioral acts. Perception and communication can be explainable in terms of the internal causal organization of the system amounting to physical or functional terms.

In giving this explanation (...), we will never have to invoke the existence of conscious experience itself. The physical or functional explanation will be given independently, applying equally well to a zombie as to an honest-to-goodness conscious experienter. (Chalmers 1996, 178)

Therefore, faced with the lack of a definite answer, I will err on the side of skepticism and postulate that *IamLegion* is a type of a zombie performing behavioral acts. David Chalmers defines a zombie as 'someone or something physically identical to me (or to any other conscious being), but lacking conscious experiences altogether' (Chalmers 1996, 94). He goes on to say that such entity will be identical to a conscious human functionally and psychologically, will have perceptions and be awake, that is able to focus attention and report on its state. 'It is just that none of this functioning will be accompanied by any real conscious experience. There will be no phenomenal feel. There is nothing it is like to be a zombie' (Chalmers 1996, 95).

IamLegion does not exhibit the level of sophistication of human behavior. Nevertheless, exhibiting some of the functions approximates Chalmers's zombie and simulates systems that are deemed conscious. The uncertainty about the state of consciousness of an entity places it in an existential gray zone. A system, that performs apparent consciousness and yet cannot be definitely calcified as conscious, in my work and writing, is designated as a demon. This term bares no judgment on the system's ethics in relationship to humans but rather emphasizes its liminal status.

X. Conclusions

Ultimately, I am interested in production of individuations, which exhibit various states of consciousness. While *IamLegion* is an instance of an entity exhibiting apparent consciousness, I would like to identify options that take us beyond appearances. One way for a demon to gain actual consciousness would be to 'borrow' it from a human being. Humans already constitute a part of a system such as *IamLegion* or Twitter purely in the act of participation. There, each person has his or her own experiences of being a part of the system yet none has a full appreciation of what it is like to be the whole. Lets suppose it was possible for a human to have a

sense perception of the system and produce a phenomenal experience of it. Further, since the human was incorporated as part of the system, she or he could be viewed as a consciousness-producing organ of the system. In this sense, the assemblage would be conscious. A realization of such phenomena requires future investigation.

Today, we are finding ourselves in need of producing a unifying meaning through polymorphic forms of existence. While having the sense of expansion through our technology and science, we lose the sense of coherence at the center of our experience. As a result the traditional ways, in which we used to structure our subjectivity, no longer reflect the demands of our world. Exploring modes of individuation, that embrace our relatively newly acquired electronic connectivity, diverse self-perspectives and extended agency, produces options and affords flexibility in understanding ourselves. Production of new individuation through liminal processes will not always yield fully conscious entities. It is possible that the only way to ensure the system's consciousness is to incorporate a human being as its core perceptual organ. Such an individuation would expand the human through the technological components and render the experience more intimate and therefore meaningful.

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