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## A 'people to come': Sense8 as (critical) 'minor cinema'

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The present paper is an elaboration on the Wachowski sisters' (Lana's and Lilly's) prescient Netflix series, *Sense8*, with a view to demonstrating its visionary character as far as a 'people to come' is concerned. At the same time it is argued that *Sense8* represents what might be called 'critical (minor) cinema', insofar as it functions in a sustained manner to critique extant society in its hierarchical, ideologically compromised, racist, gender-biased, ecologically destructive guise, pointing the way to what society *might* be if a 'different form of reason' (Boyne) were to obtain at interpersonal, inter-gender and ultimately inter-species levels. The poststructuralist critical theory of Deleuze and Guattari is employed to achieve this end, particularly their notion of 'minor literature/cinema' and 'assemblage', in conjunction with a number of other concepts with which it is interconnected, such as the 'rhizome', 'arboreal', 'deterritorialisation' and 'line of flight'. Briefly, what this strategy brings to light, is that mainstream society, with its defining 'arboreal' (tree-like, hierarchical) structures, responds negatively to difference of all kinds, particularly if such differences seem to pose a threat to its cratological supremacy. This turns out to be the case with 'sensates' in *Sense8*, who introduce radical difference into the fabric of society along trajectories of 'lines of flight', in the process 'deterritorialising'

(freeing up) conventional territories by means of rhizomatic interconnections that constitute a revolutionary 'assemblage' – that is, an open population of living entities that are interrelated in complex ways: any change in any of the constituents of an assemblage affects all the others, continually. (In the final analysis, all living entities, together, arguably comprise an overarching assemblage insofar as everything is interconnected in the planetary ecosphere.) Not all assemblages (in the more limited sense) are revolutionary, however. Assemblages are encountered every day, in the guise of a group of schoolchildren in a classroom, for example, or a swarm of bees. Even a human subject is an assemblage of sorts, insofar as she or he is always subject to processes of desiring-becoming, implying that different subject-positions are occupied in succession, and even simultaneously. The cluster of eight sensates that is the main focus of this (minor-) cinematic series exemplifies the most dynamic assemblage conceivable, and as such instantiates a processual unity-and-equality-in-difference, which radically deterritorialises extant society, in the adumbration of a 'people to come', beyond hierarchy.

**Keywords:** assemblage, deterritorialisation, radical difference, Deleuze and Guattari

*This acknowledgement of a people who are missing is not a renunciation of political cinema, but on the contrary the new basis on which it is founded, in the third world and for minorities. Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people.*

Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 – The Time-Image*, p. 217

*... a minor cinema ... is not singular, but shaped by complex and multiple connections established between local and international forces and conditions.*

Constantine Verevis, *The Deleuze Dictionary*, p. 169

*... in a world where real events of displacement are life and death matters, I want to suggest that we think seriously about Deleuze and Guattari's claim for a new people and a new earth as a genuinely futural endeavour.*

Claire Colebrook, *Occupy – A People yet to Come*, p. 18

In the transgender Wachowski sisters' (Lana's and Lilly's) visionary Netflix series, *Sense8* (2015 - 2018), one encounters an imaginative, bio-science-fictional

leap into a possible (but improbable) future, where very different people – in fact, different species of *Homo*, to wit, *Homo sapiens* and the imaginary *Homo sensorium* – finally learn to live together to form what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari think of as ‘a people to come’ (Bogue 2010: 99-100). This does not happen overnight, as it were, but after a drawn-out, violent struggle, where representatives of *Homo sapiens* – at least one of whom is himself a member of *Homo sensorium*, better known as ‘sensates’ – attempt to destroy *Homo sensorium* once and for all, given the threat the species is believed to embody for the supremacy of *Homo sapiens*, or sapient humans. To understand this, a synopsis of the series’ narrative is called for, but before this is provided I have to say something about the requisite approach to the analysis and interpretation of the series under discussion.

First there is the broadly ‘textual’ character of *Sense8* as a cinematic series – that is, a sequence of interpretable audiovisual image-configurations unfolding along what is known as the ‘horizontal’ syntagmatic semiotic axis, ‘vertically’ intersected by clusters of ‘paradigmatically’ signifying associative images such as a sequence of audiovisually presented actions featuring salient ‘percepts’, for example a spectrum of colour-concentration representing gender, cultural and racial diversity (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164; Olivier 2010; 2018). In simpler language, this means that, like all motion pictures, *Sense8* comprises audiovisual images following one another in time (syntagmatic signification), whose meaning is partly dependent on the way that later images modify preceding ones, and which can be further understood by focusing on non-sequential similarities and differences among images or image-clusters (paradigmatic signification). ‘Percepts’ is a Deleuzo-Guattarian concept that implies that such image-clusters may constitute a specific, lasting meaning or set of meanings, of which there are many instances in the series in question. Given the signifying character of the pertinent series in audiovisual format, the present paper is largely an instance of interpretive-hermeneutic practice. In other words, it entails offering a cogent interpretation of the series’ constitutive image-sequences and linguistic utterances – guided by the thematic pointers of the title, namely “A ‘people to come’: *Sense8* as (critical) ‘minor cinema’”, together with texts (philosophical or theoretical), which are conceptually relevant to the interpretation in question. In accordance with the example of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s exemplary poststructuralist text, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), this essay will not be restricted to a single theoretical perspective – although their own instantiates the main interpretive orientation – but will be open to interweaving different theoretical lenses when necessary. A theory is, after all, just one perspective on what these thinkers term the “virtual” or “virtually real” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 94-95; 1994: 133, 140; Boundas 2010) – that which must be presupposed

by any actualisation, potential or possibility in extant reality – and every theory constitutes the world differently in terms of “actuality” (Colebrook 2010: 9–11), highlighting different aspects of events and phenomena under investigation in a coherent, discipline-specific manner.

Furthermore, because it is an approach rooted in the recognition of the unmitigated complexity of what is all too glibly called ‘reality’, and which cannot be adequately understood by using only one theoretical tool, such a multi-perspectival approach does not amount to relativism. To be sure, as Jacques Derrida (1978: 360–361) has argued, employing concepts borrowed from Claude Lèvi-Strauss, there are two ways of approaching the world (in one’s quest for understanding): one could do so in a manner that emulates the “engineer”, that is, with a set of theoretical tools and instruments that allow for the greatest possible precision of construction, or one could follow the “*bricoleur*”, by availing oneself of every useful instrument that comes to hand, knowing that time is bound to erode even one’s best attempts at being an engineer. There will always be those hubristic souls who believe that one theory can capture ‘everything’, but in my judgement this is to adhere to an impoverishing principle. After all, any theory amounts to being just *one* perspective among others, each of which enables one to focus on the ‘real’ in such a manner that different aspects are highlighted (compared to others). This was arguably definitively demonstrated by Nietzsche (1968: 59–87) in the 19th century already, and more recently by thinkers such as Jean Baudrillard and Gil Germain (2017: 111–126).

### **Sense8: The narrative:**

It is not necessary to summarise the series in detail; such summaries are available on the internet (for example: *Sense8* series: Wikipedia). In *Sense8* viewers encounter eight young people (homophonically speaking, ‘sensates’), living in different countries, who unexpectedly and unnervingly become aware of being hyper-interconnected – telepathically, empathically and, perhaps surprisingly to viewers not accustomed to science-fictional inventions, by teleportation. The first episode of Season 1 is understandably confusing to viewers, and it requires some perseverance to be able to pick up the narrative thread(s) in an incrementally comprehending fashion. The characters gradually become cognisant of their ‘sensate’ status when their ‘sensate mother’, Angelica, activates their psychic interconnectedness, and kills herself immediately afterwards to preclude their traitor sensate scourge, nicknamed ‘Whispers’, who resents his own species, from tracing them through his psychic connection with her. To their utter consternation, they have telepathic intimations of her suicide, but slowly, through the intervention of an older sensate, Jonas (Angelica’s erstwhile lover), they

discover their nascent status as 'sensates'. Although the discovery of their ability to communicate telepathically as well through physical contact, by teleportation, with one another across continents, is initially completely disorienting, they soon learn to appreciate it. This is particularly the case as they learn to depend on one another for mutual survival, using their diverse gifts to defend themselves against their adversaries who are bent on their destruction. Of these, 'Whispers' (also known as Dr Milton Brandt) is the most determined and, because he belongs to an organisation with ostensibly unlimited resources (known as Biologic Preservation Organisation, or BPO), also the most lethal. The series saw a first season in 2015, followed by a 2016 Christmas Special, then a second season, and finally a concluding 'special' feature-length episode, screened by Netflix in 2018. The latter was a special concession to *Sense8* fans worldwide, after ratings in the United States impelled Netflix to abandon the series. To anyone who has reflected on the visionary character of *Sense8*, its comparable lack of success in the United States would come as no surprise – arguably it is progressive beyond the comprehension and/or tolerance of most of the (neo-)conservative, Trump-supporting people in that country, as I shall demonstrate below.

Returning to the science-fictional theme of *Sense8*, one might be tempted to respond with: So what – if this is an imaginary species, what does it have to do with the *actual* inter-cultural, inter-racial, inter-gender and inter-personal conflicts or difficulties one may witness in the world today? Would it not be better for a fictional (or documentary) series to focus on those, to be able to make a contribution to resolving protracted, if not ostensibly irresolvable conflicts, such as that between Israel and the Palestinians? My answer would simply be that, while such an alternative cinematic concentration on extant difficulties could contribute to conflict resolution, it would be fundamentally different from the bio-science-fiction genre that *Sense8* represents, and that it is precisely for that reason that it can function as a kind of critical, heterotopian mirror which, when held up to contemporary society, reveals the latter – our world – to be a dystopia, compared to what it might be.

To be sure, by 'might be' I don't mean to suggest that a species such as *Homo sensorium* – endowed not only with telepathic attributes but also with teleportation capabilities enabling them to be present with members of their 'cluster' of eight (hence *Sense8*) anywhere in the world when there is a mutual need for support – could actually emerge in concrete terms. What I do want to claim, however, is that what the 'sensates' represent, metaphorically speaking, is a 'future people' that has finally achieved the improbable, if not the impossible, namely to rid themselves of the invidious prejudices, rooted in exclusionary ideologies or discourses, that arguably lie at the root of seemingly insurmountable conflicts in the extant world – such as those at the basis of the

invidious ideological-political divisions in Trump's America and Brexit Britain at present (late 2019). How is this possible, or even thinkable? What I would like to do here is to set out the 'quasi-transcendental' grounds of possibility (and impossibility) – that which makes it *possible*, but simultaneously comprises the condition of *undermining* such a possibility (Bennington 1993: 276–277) – of relating to one another in a manner that would or could obviate conflict of this kind. Put differently, unlike 'transcendental', which (in Kant's philosophy, for example) refers to the 'conditions of possibility' of something (in Kant's case the *a priori* forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding that condition the world of experience), 'quasi-transcendental' goes one step further. It names 'conditions' with a dual, countervailing function: they don't only make something possible, but being what they are, they also provide the conditions that 'ruin' that something – the way that the structure of language (in terms of signifiers and signifieds) makes both communication and miscommunication possible (see Olivier 2009). To be able to demonstrate this regarding the series under discussion, the poststructuralist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is invaluable.

In light of what the gender, cultural and racial diversity in *Sense8* represents or points towards – namely what one may call, following Deleuze and Guattari, a 'people to come' (Bogue 2010: 99–100) – the paper will be structured along the axis comprising, first, a discussion and elucidation of the pertinent Deleuzo-Guattarian theory, including the concepts of 'assemblage', 'rhizome', 'line of flight' and 'people to come'. Subsequently, several scene-sequences that are paradigmatic regarding the theme of a 'people to come' will be reconstructed, and intermittently the focus will shift to demonstrating the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's theory and its constitutive concepts for the reconstructed scenes from the cinematic series in question, and *vice versa* – that is, the selected scene-sequences will be interpreted in these terms, and where applicable, the manner in which the constitutive image-configurations of the series enrich the relevant theory will be indicated. This approach is predicated on the capacity of the arts – in this case cinema – to 'elaborate' on theory in a critical manner, not merely "to refer to [...] [cinema] in order to accomplish the *work* of Theory" (Žižek 2001: 9), but to demonstrate how cinema accomplishes this on its own perceptual terms, by expanding upon or developing the explanatory terms of a theory *cinematically*, in such a manner that theory is heuristically enriched. In other words, in accordance with Žižek's insight, I do not intend simply drawing on Deleuze and Guattari to elucidate the series; nor do I suggest that the director(s) of the series deliberately set out to make use of, and expand upon, Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual apparatus. Cinema, like any other artform, is capable (by its very 'nature') to elaborate on theory, but in and on its own audiovisual terms.

A brief description of the eight 'sensates' comprising the focal 'cluster' in *Sense8* is necessary at this point, to be able to follow the discussion below: Riley (white heterosexual Icelandic female); Will (white heterosexual American male); Capheus (or 'Van Damn'; black heterosexual Kenyan male); Nomi ('Know me'; white transgender gay American female); Lito (homosexual Latino Mexican male); Wolfgang (white heterosexual German male); Sun Bak (heterosexual Korean female); and Kala (heterosexual Indian female).

## Deleuze and Guattari

Ordinarily one thinks of oneself atomistically, that is, as a human unit, first and foremost unconnected to other such human units, except if one happens to enter into a relationship with some of them. Needless to stress, this naïve conception is erroneous, as many thinkers have pointed out, and as the African proverb – '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' ('A person is a person through other people') – confirms. In other words, other people come first, or precede one, and one becomes a person through their care, their education, guidance, and so on. Among the thinkers who have argued along these lines I shall single out only three, namely Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger and Jacques Lacan. Freud (2011; Silverman 1983) did this by demonstrating that every human being enters society along the kinship relations comprising the family, specifically the so-called 'Oedipus complex', and Heidegger (1978: 149–205) by showing that *Dasein* ('being-there'; his word for a human being) is also, equally 'originally', *Mitsein*, that is, 'being-with-others'. Lacan (1981; Olivier 2004; 2005), in turn, offered a theory of the human subject as being constituted by the inter-relationships among three psychic 'registers' – the (pre- and extra-linguistic) 'real', the (self, or ego-constituting) 'imaginary', and the (socially indispensable and enabling) 'symbolic' or linguistic register. It is particularly the latter register or 'order' that indexes the co-constitutive role of others in relation to the individual subject – after all, as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1986: 92–96) suggested, there is no such thing as a 'private language'.

But if these thinkers' intellectual work enables one to engage epistemically with the indissoluble bond between individual persons and others, it is in the work of Deleuze and Guattari that one encounters a theory of the 'subject' that is sufficiently complex to accommodate the most diverse and multiple relationships in which a subject can be involved. While it is only one of a number of interrelated concepts in terms of which this theory functions, that of the 'assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 88) is perhaps the most nodally significant – that is, it is one of a number of 'nodes' through and by which other concepts are (inter-) connected, so much so that it constitutes the vantage point

for grasping the most complex relations among different entities, *including* the complex (inter-)relations comprising the individual subject. As such, it is well-suited to comprehending the conspicuous 'assemblage'-character of the sensate cluster(s) and their teleportational, telepathic, rhizomatic interconnectedness in the series under discussion.

To appreciate the originality of their work in this regard, one has to note the contra-substantialist tenor of Deleuze and Guattari's thought (1983; 1987) at all ontological levels. For example, they explicitly deny the existence, at least in any durable sense of the term, of the 'subject' (1987: 130):

[A] subject is never the condition of possibility of language or the cause of the statement: there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation. Subjectification is simply one such assemblage and designates a formalization of expression or a regime of signs rather than a condition internal to language. Neither is it a question of a movement characteristic of ideology[...]subjectification as a regime of signs or a form of expression is tied to an assemblage, in other words, an organization of power that is already fully functioning in the economy ... Capital is a point of subjectification par excellence.

This does allow one to reconceptualise the notion of the 'subject', conceived of as temporary 'subjectification', but strictly on condition that it not be attributed ontological primacy. In their rethinking of the concept – which leads to what one might call the 'assemblage-subject' (Olivier 2017) – assemblages are primary, which has the advantage of eschewing the vexed problem (encountered in Husserlian phenomenology, for example) of solipsism regarding the self-transparent, 'substantial' modern subject. This becomes clearer in the light of their comment that "... subjectifications are not primary but result from a complex assemblage" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 79). In other words, one is not primarily a kind of substantial, atomistic subject that subsequently enters into relations of (inter-)connectedness that constitute 'assemblages'. On the contrary, for Deleuze and Guattari, if one could talk meaningfully about the subject, or of subjectification, it is always already (part of) an 'assemblage' of sorts. If capital is "a point of subjectification par excellence", as they write above, *Sense8* is a thematisation of a 'cluster', or 'assemblage', of *sensates developing into a point of subjectification* for resistance to (a virulent group of) *Homo sapiens* as their relentless hunters.

In the cinematic series in question (*Sense8*) there is an apt illustration of what is at stake for someone to be constituted as a 'subject' in relation to an assemblage, where (in the second episode of the first season) a transgender gay woman, Nomi



– formerly a young man by the name of Michael, before going through surgery to transform her gender status – and her lover, Amanita, prepare for a Gay Pride procession through the streets of San Francisco in the United States. Just before they leave their apartment for the parade, Nomi talks into her laptop microphone about the significance of her first participation in such a parade of solidarity. Her words articulate a new-found, somehow plural ‘identity’, which ostensibly implicates the other members of the gay, lesbian and transgender community in the procession, but unbeknown to her at this stage of the narrative, has really been made possible by being initiated into the emerging new cluster of eight sensates: “I was a me”, Nomi says; “today I become a we”. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, she can only be a nascent ‘we’ on condition that a ‘collective assemblage’ creates this possibility. In the series, this is what it means to be a sensate, or member of *Homo sensorium*, but paradigmatically speaking – or perhaps ‘virtually’ speaking (in the sense of what could, but will *not necessarily*, be ‘actualised’) – it functions metonymically for the human species as such. But more specifically, what do these two philosophical collaborators mean by ‘assemblage’?

### ‘Assemblage’, ‘rhizome’, ‘deterritorialisation’ and ‘line(s) of flight’

To be able to make sense of the above, one should note Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the characteristics of an assemblage (1987: 88; italics in original):

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away.

Despite attributing to the territorial aspect of an assemblage a stabilising role in this passage, one is struck by their emphasis on concepts that suggest becoming instead of being, such as “machinic”, “actions and passions”; “intermingling” and “transformations”. This seems to intimate that “assemblage” is not completely satisfactory as translation of the French term *agencement*, which means ‘arrangement’ in an active sense; in other words, as “processes of arranging, organising, and fitting together” (Livesey 2010: 18). In this sense, a herd of elephants, or the members of a school choir (including the director), or the living beings participating in a rock pool ecology, is an assemblage. Most

pertinently for present purposes, the cluster of eight sensates on whom the narrative of the television series is focused, constitutes an assemblage, and there are several scenes in the series – including, most paradigmatically, the final scene (after the wedding in Paris) of the extended concluding chapter – where one witnesses, in sensuous, graphic image-configurations, what Deleuze and Guattari (above) describe as “*a machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another”, comprising a specifically and explicitly sexual “*compound of percepts and affects*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164; discussed below). Some viewers may be shocked by the explicit sexual interactions in scenes like this one, but it is inseparable from the Wachowski sisters’ vision of a ‘virtual’ humanity ‘to come’, celebrating equality-in-difference by luxuriating in (among other advantages) the pleasures afforded by the constitutive (sexual) differences and shared interests among its members.

How is an assemblage formed? Keep in mind that Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 22) stress the connections between ‘assemblages’, ‘desire’ and ‘multiplicity’: “... the only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation”. It follows that actions and passions, as embodiments of desire, are instrumental in the formation of complex configurations of bodies as well as, correspondingly, the ‘acts’ and ‘statements’ that make up the kind of ‘incorporeal transformations’ that are commensurate with the character of the ‘assemblage of enunciation’ in question. As Livesey (2010: 18) puts it:

An assemblage transpires as a set of forces coalesces together, the concept of assemblages applies to all structures, from the behaviour patterns of an individual, the organisation of institutions, an arrangement of spaces, to the functioning of ecologies.

Assemblages emerge from the arranging of heterogeneous elements into a productive (or machinic) entity ...

Here already there are several fecund concepts which apply to, and, reciprocally, are perceptually enriched by, the operation or functioning of the focal cluster of eight sensates in the series under discussion: as an ‘arrangement’ of a ‘multiplicity’ of ‘heterogeneous elements’ or bodies, it amounts to a dynamic machinic or productive constellation; it also comprises a ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’ insofar as statements and ‘incorporeal transformations’ that are peculiar to this specific assemblage are articulated and manifested from time to time. Moreover, the assemblage of sensates has what Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 88) call “both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away”. Put differently, this assemblage-cluster can be identified in terms of its heterogeneous, but

stable, 'territorial' membership, which is subject to violent modification by hostile assemblages such as the members of BPO. But even when this happens, it shows itself as being capable of 'reterritorialisation' – for example when first Riley, and later Wolfgang, are captured by Whispers and the BPO, and are subsequently ingeniously liberated by the other members of their cluster, together with their sapient allies, like Amanita and Bug. More important, however, are its capacities of 'deterritorialisation', which bear upon its power to disrupt and fundamentally reconfigure conventional society into an assemblage, or concatenation of assemblages; at the perceptual level (of 'percepts', that is) certain scene-sequences can be said to elaborate on the relationship between disruption (of conventional societal structures) and reconfiguration (into assemblages, or assemblage-agencies), from which the corresponding theory can benefit. These capacities are truly revolutionary insofar as they would replace society's customary 'arborescent' (tree-like), hierarchical structures with non-binary, 'rhizomatic' assemblages. Make no mistake, though: even assemblages can be put in the service of (arboreal) hierarchies of repressive power, as the BPO, considered as assemblage, demonstrates, and as informational assemblages – such as Google and Facebook, operating in contemporary cyberspace – confirm (Zuboff 2019). This is clarified by considering the concept of the "rhizome" in Deleuze and Guattari's work, which resonates with that of "assemblage". Colman's remark confirms this (2010: 233):

The rhizome is any network of things brought into contact with one another, functioning as an assemblage machine for new affects, new concepts, new bodies, new thoughts; the rhizomatic network is a mapping of the forces that move and/or immobilise bodies.

One could therefore say that the formation and dismantling of assemblages, which ineluctably display rhizomatic features, happen through rhizomatic operations. An assemblage – like the cluster of sensates in *Sense8* – instantiates a collection of rhizomatically interconnected entities which, for specific reasons of optimising their co-functioning force(s) as machinic totality, can be discerned as assemblage. Furthermore, its rhizomatic configuration allows it to connect with other entities that are not strictly part of the assemblage-cluster of eight, but which enhance its functioning at the level of affects, bodies, power-related actions, and so on. These include Nomi's partner, Amanita, their hacker friend Bug, Will's police partner Diego, and others. It seems to me that it would be somewhat misleading to say that assemblages have a rhizomatic 'structure' – although some Deleuze and Guattari researchers seem to find 'structure' compatible with 'rhizome' (e.g. Livesey 2010a) – because arguably this concept suggests something static, belonging to the thought-paradigm of a totality of

hierarchically arranged or 'structured' entities, according to the antithetical model of the "arboreal" (with its associated images of roots, trunk, branches, and so on). After all, the extent to which rhizomatically configured assemblages – such as the cluster of eight sensates, including its interconnected, function-enhancing 'extensions' – surpass the implied staticity of a 'structure' is vividly brought to life in the perceptual dynamism of the rhizomatic activity comprising the interactivity among the constituent agents of the assemblage-cluster. The latter is constantly transforming into something that exceeds what it was a moment before, only to metamorphose into a novel creature, again, the next instant, such as when Sun's fellow prisoner and friend unexpectedly comes to her rescue when her treacherous brother's minions are dangerously close to lynching her in what looks like a prison-storeroom. Here the sensate cluster-assemblage is *actively* transmogrified into one that can survive intact, contrary to what it seemed like a moment earlier, followed by this friend leading her to another friend's apartment once they have successfully left the prison behind, *actively* extending the assemblage rhizomatically again. Cinema can here be seen as perceptually enhancing philosophical theory.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss the rhizome under principles of "connection and heterogeneity" (1987: 7), "multiplicity" (p. 8), "asignifying rupture" (p. 9), and "cartography and decalomania" (p. 12). The first of these suggests that a rhizome can be connected at any "point" along its constitutive "line(s)" to anything else. This means that not only 'signs' (in the semiotic sense) are (inter)connected in this manner, but connections are made all the time among ontologically diverse, heterogeneous 'things'. It follows that, for Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome (in conjunction with the assemblage, which is rhizomatically configured) enjoys a kind of primary ontological status – discrete 'things' of all kinds can only be said to 'be', or perhaps rather, 'become', to the extent that they are rhizomatically interconnected.

The heterogeneity characteristic of a rhizome is evident where they observe: "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7). One could argue that the currently emergent, so-called 'internet of things' (as part of the putative 'fourth industrial revolution') is an example of a rhizomatic network of expanding digital-electronic interconnections among industrial objects such as 'smart' motor cars, smartphones and 'smart homes', and between these and people. (While its deleterious effects in relation to what Deleuze (1992) calls "control societies" are obvious, most people seem to be oblivious of this. This is not directly related to the present theme, however.) The heterogeneity of the focal assemblage-cluster of sensates – whose members are briefly described above – is conspicuous in its

gender, cultural and racial (or colour) diversity (Olivier 2018), and in the course of the narrative cinematic events new, productive connections are “ceaselessly establishe[d]” between its members and their allies in rhizomatic Deleuzo-Guattarian terms of “semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to [...] social struggles”. Put differently, as the individuals comprising the newly birthed cluster get to know and connect with one another, their enhanced, telepathic communicational abilities establish consequential ‘semiotic chains’, and their psychokinetic teleportational ‘organisation of power’ imparts to them the capacity to survive their ‘social struggle’ against the might of BPO – itself a massive assemblage of control and persecution – however unlikely that may seem. This is demonstrated in (sometimes) spectacular fashion in certain scene-sequences in the series, such as when the fake policemen sent by Sun’s murderous brother to kill her in prison (by hanging her) are defeated by the combined talents and efforts of all the members of the cluster, plus the help of one of Sun’s fellow inmates. Moreover, arguably the particular struggles on their and their allies’ part prefigure, in science-fictional terms, the actual struggles that people in extant societies will unavoidably have to engage in (Conio 2015) if *Sense8*’s promise of a ‘people to come’ is to be actualised, and not remain ‘virtual’. As such, one could perceive in *Sense8* an ‘abstract machine’, the virtuality of which bears the potential, but not the necessity, of being actualised in social reality. This appears to follow from the following observation by Deleuze and Guattari, where one might say that the sensate cluster represents the ‘cutting edge’ that deterritorialises extant, arboreal and hierarchical society, ‘opening it up’ to ‘something else’ – perhaps a global assemblage ‘beyond hierarchy’ (Boyne 1990; Olivier 1996) – by way of a ‘becoming’ (1987: 510):

Abstract machines operate within concrete assemblages: They are defined by the fourth aspect of assemblages, in other words, the cutting edges of decoding and [...] deterritorialization. They draw these cutting edges. Therefore they make the territorial assemblage open on to something else, assemblages of another type, the molecular, the cosmic; they constitute becomings. Thus they are always singular and immanent.

The second characteristic of the rhizome, “multiplicity”, emphasises the ‘substantive’ nature of the multiple – that it is not merely related as an adjective to a primary quantity of entities comprising a multiplicity at a secondary level. Instead, multiplicity is primary, and involves rhizomatic relations, which have no ‘unity’ at subject or object levels, because their “determinations, magnitudes and dimensions” (1987: 8) are always changing, concomitantly modifying the character of the multiplicity. A rhizomatically configured assemblage is therefore “precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes

in nature as it expands its connections" (p. 8) – something strikingly observed in the development of the qualitatively changing interconnections among the eight sensates under discussion.

By "asignifying rupture" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9) they appear to have in mind a crucial difference between rhizomes (assemblages, multiplicities) and 'arboreal' structures. Whereas the latter may be decisively severed such that it represents a qualitatively insurmountable 'rupture', a rhizome, by contrast, does not suffer anything as final as this when it is breached, but sets about expanding again along one of its remaining 'lines', regardless of how minimal its remains may be ("ants", as "animal rhizome", for instance; 1987: 9) – something that applies to all the different sensate clusters in the series, taken as a whole, although a specific sensate cluster-assemblage could, in principle, be wiped out, as indeed they are at the hands of BPO in some cases in *Sense8*. Nevertheless, because of the rhizomatic configuration of the sensate 'community' across the world, it keeps expanding, as their members increasingly (inter-)connect in ways that are mostly invisible to *Homo sapiens*, particularly the sapient in BPO. This is graphically captured in rhizomatic terms by a Scottish sensate character called Mr Hoy, where (in Season 2) he observes to Riley that sensates are 'isolated on top', but 'connected underneath'. Arguably, given the rhizomatic configuration of the internet, and the way in which it is used today for equally invisible surveillance and predictive behavioural control by companies like Google and Facebook, and by what Zuboff calls their "instrumentarian power" (2019: 330-331), the mere character of rhizomatic functioning is no guarantee of benevolence on the part of those who use it. On the contrary, the same Mr Hoy notes with distaste the tendency of sapient to act in unadulteratedly malevolent, destructive ways towards one another (their own kind), let alone towards different species, and refers derogatorily to the invention of (the rhizome-machine) Google by *sapient* in the 1990s, while sensates have had it since the Neolithic age.

"Cartography and decalcomania", or "map" and "tracing" (1987: 12), in turn, differentiate between the rhizome as a "map", on the one hand, and a "tracing". The difference between the two, they argue, is that a map, unlike a tracing (which obeys the "tree logic" of "reproduction"), allows "experimentation in contact with the real" (1987: 12). Furthermore, a map is part of a rhizome, is "open and connectable", performance-oriented, can be perpetually reworked, modified and reversed, and has "multiple entryways", in contrast with a tracing, which always returns to "the same" (1987: 12-13). It is clear that the focal cluster of sensates function in a map-like, cartographic manner, given their openness, connectability and 'experimental approach to the real' – such as when Will and Riley decide to stop hiding from Whispers (in the second season of *Sense8*), and arrange a rave where Riley's fans enthusiastically welcome her back as DJ. Under

the circumstances this is a risky, experimental venture, which yields results in the end, partly because another sensate, Mr Hoy – who eventually leads them to Whispers's home – makes contact with them after seeing them at the rave.

What has been argued up to this point about those Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts that are pertinent for understanding *Sense8* gains more clarity when one considers the link between Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of 'assemblages', 'deterritorialisation' and 'lines of flight' (1987: 88-89, 306, 398-403, 503-4). Tamsin Lorraine (2010: 147) has this to say about these concepts:

Deleuze [...] and Guattari prefer to consider things not as substances, but as assemblages or multiplicities, focusing on things in terms of unfolding forces – bodies and their powers to affect and be affected – rather than static essences. A 'line of flight' is a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or 'virtual') that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond.

Every assemblage is territorial in that it sustains connections that define it, but every assemblage is also composed of lines of deterritorialisation that run through it and carry it away from its current form...

The assemblage constituted by the eponymous cluster in *Sense8* is no exception in this regard, but by its very nature as an unheard-of species of human, namely *Homo sensorium*, it initiates 'lines of flight' that 'carry it away' from the *status quo*, towards a hitherto unrealised society where difference would cease being a provocation for the internecine destruction of those who are different by those with dominant power, but is instead cherished as a source of mutual enrichment and progressive understanding. The penultimate scene-sequence in the series (discussed in detail below), set at one of the observation decks of the Eiffel Tower in Paris – where the marriage ceremony of Nomi and Amanita takes place – instantiates the coming-together of an international human (both *sapiens* and *sensorium*) assemblage displaying such a deterritorialising 'line of flight', lighting up the possibility (at present no more than a 'virtuality') of such a society being actualised sometime in the future. The people gathered there for the ceremony are paradigmatic of such a possible, but unfortunately (given present social conditions) improbable, society.

### ***Sense8* as critical anticipation of a 'people to come'**

From the above it should already be apparent that the protagonist assemblage of sensates in the *Sense8* series adumbrates an unheard-of, virtual, societal

configuration-in-action – in short, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms a 'people to come'. This is where the critical impetus of the cinematic series is most apparent, insofar as art, including cinema, has the capacity to 'light up' the darkness that sometimes enshrouds the societal *status quo*. In the words of Walter Benjamin (2007: 263), the series puts forward "a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' which is shot through with chips of Messianic time". Here I understand 'Messianic time' not in teleological, religious terms as the anticipated advent of universal redemption through a messiah of some kind, but as a 'promise' of sorts, not of redemption, but of a different kind of society that *could* be inaugurated, albeit without any guarantee, by people who take it upon themselves to actualise these 'chips' of a 'time to come', with which the present is 'shot through'. *Sense8* instantiates a concentration of such luminous 'chips' circulating in cultural space and time – lambent chips in which the contours of a possible society of the future may be glimpsed, but which requires the actions of contemporary humans and their descendants to be actualised. Via the role of the focal assemblage of sensates in the series, this critical function of *Sense8* as a 'minor' cinematic artwork may be discerned in its projection of the possibility of a 'people to come'. As such, the sensates instantiate a becoming of a certain kind – what Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 291) call a minoritarian becoming:

Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man? First because man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse [...]. In this sense women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman.

In *Sense8* as instance of 'critical minor cinema' such a minoritarian becoming – or initially, a 'becoming-woman' – is evident in the gradual realisation, on the part of the members of the emergent cluster, that there is something fundamentally, disconcertingly, different, if not alien, about them. For instance, when Will, the Chicago cop, initially experiences strange telepathic and, eventually, teleportational contacts with strangers, particularly a blonde woman from Iceland (Riley), he enters into the process of becoming-other, and may be seen as passing through the phase of becoming-woman to be able to affirm, and



eventually embrace, his otherness in relation to *Homo sapiens*. This is graphically embodied in what Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 164) call a 'percept', when (in the fourth episode of the first season) he is perceived by viewers taking Nomi's place through teleportation – where she is handcuffed to a hospital bed in preparation for a lobotomy to be performed on her by a surgeon who works for 'Whispers' / Milton – and, performing an escape trick that he perfected as a policeman's son, uses an intravenous injection needle to free her from the handcuffs, in this way allowing her to escape from the hospital with Amanita's help. In a largely patriarchal society – as witnessed in the still enduring (but fortunately eroding) use of the noun "man" for humanity – woman represents the ultimate 'other' of the unapproachable, inexorable man-as-master. Hence, to become someone different, someone who learns to embrace the rhizomatically configured actions of an assemblage marked by alterity *and* equality, all its members have to *become-woman* in this sense, to be able to participate in the minoritarian becoming that prefigures a people beyond hierarchy, a 'people to come'.

To understand how the image of Will on the hospital bed, in Nomi's place, functions as a 'percept' – and simultaneously as 'affect', insofar as it concentrates, in an image, the feelings or affects that are concomitantly embodied in the 'percept' – the following excerpt articulates the ontological status of these concepts succinctly insofar as 'percepts' and 'affects' are constituents of all artworks, including cinema. Of the work of art they write (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164; italics in original):

It is independent of the creator through the self-positing of the created, which is preserved in itself. What is preserved – the thing or the work of art – is *a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*. Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself.

This explains how the series in question – and any other memorable cinematic or other kind of artwork, for that matter – has the capacity of imprinting on one's mind, or memory, images that work as percepts and affects, which powerfully adumbrate or impart intimations of a possible, at present only virtual, way of living that beckons beyond the confines of what is today nothing less than a

'control society' (Deleuze 1992; Byung-chul Han 2017; Zuboff 2019). Regarding what the possibility of an antithesis to such a 'society of control' as that of the present entails, Ronald Bogue provides an indication where he writes of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a 'minor literature', which can be translated as 'minor cinema' (2010a: 170-171):

... minor literature is less a product than a process of becoming minor, through which language is deterritorialised immediately social and political issues are engaged, and a collective assemblage of enunciation makes possible the invention of a people to come.

Deleuze himself implicitly corroborates the legitimacy of reading in this remark of Bogue's a confirmation of its validity for the idea of a 'minor cinema' where he writes (2005: 217; see also Verevis 2010: 168-170): "Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people."

It is worth looking a bit more closely at what Deleuze and Guattari have to say about 'minor literature' to come to a more nuanced understanding of the elements in *Sense8* that justify calling it 'minor cinema' (with critical potential). In *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986: 16) they claim that the "first characteristic of minor literature ... is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization". It may already be apparent that, for Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 382) 'deterritorialisation' entails something like dismantling the comparative stasis and stability that characterise arboreal structures and identifications. Or, in Adrian Parr's (2010: 69) words: "Perhaps deterritorialisation can best be understood as a movement producing change. In so far as it operates as a line of flight, deterritorialisation indicates the creative potential of an assemblage. So, to deterritorialise is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organisations." Transferring these claims to *Sense8* as 'minor cinema', one may note that, while the pivotal cluster of sensates in the series instantiates an intra-cinematic assemblage that deterritorialises and 'frees up fixed relations' along several "lines of flight" in the narrative, the same may be said of the series as a cinematic artwork: as assemblage, it comprises multiple relations and interconnections between and among its constituent elements, such as 'percepts' and 'affects' – not merely in an intra-cinematic manner, but inter-cinematically as well, in relation to other films. There is a striking 'inter-textual' or inter-cinematic scene-sequence of this kind in Episode 11 of Season 2, where Sun pursues her fleeing brother on foot, where his car has been stopped by the exit barrier of a parking basement, and her image, which he sees in his rearview

mirror, resembles that of the T-1000 terminator in *Terminator 2 – Judgement Day* (Cameron 1991; Olivier 2002), emerging from enveloping smoke. A little later in the episode her brother, noticing her pursuing him on a motorcycle, affirms this inter-cinematic motif when, terrified, he exclaims that his sister is a ‘terminator’. Moreover – and this is where the critical thrust of the series is located – the series also relates as an assemblage to the extra-cinematic social realm, with which it potentially enters into novel rhizomatic relations, such as the one instantiated by my present writing. More importantly, such rhizomatic relations established in relation to the series include those pertaining to commensurate socially and politically relevant actions that may be grafted onto the ‘text’ of *Sense8*, and which may contribute to ushering in a ‘people to come’, first as virtual idea, but gradually, perhaps, through *actualisations* which could first appear in the interstices of social and political life. In this way *Sense8*, like a psychoanalytic session, *prepares* the subject for social or political action, even if it cannot guarantee such action (Parker 2011: 196–199).

The second attribute, for Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 17), of minor literatures “is that everything in them is political”, which is conjoined with the third characteristic, “that in it everything takes on a collective value”. While in major literature, or ‘major cinema’ (like that of Hollywood) the established socio-political milieu always forms the backdrop for its true focus, namely “individual concerns”, a minor literature (or cinema) cannot take this normalised social sphere for granted. By virtue of being ‘minor’, even its concentration on ‘individual’ issues instantiates a challenge to the normalised sphere of social and political (pseudo-)values, which today implicates neoliberal societies of control through surveillance (Deleuze 1992; Byung-Chul Han 2017; Zuboff 2019). Moreover, precisely because minor literary or cinematic figures are outside the valorised, ‘normal’ social sphere, or even at the margins of “his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer [or in the present instance the director; B.O.] all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 17). Given that *Sense8* represents a salient shift away from arboreal, hierarchical practices of control and persecution towards a ‘minor’ practice of rhizomatically configured assemblages gesturing towards a ‘people to come’, it seems incontrovertible that the series is pervasively ‘political’, and that the actions of the characters ineluctably display ‘collective value’. After all, through the rhizomatic interconnectedness and actions of its eight protagonists and allies comprising the paradigmatic assemblage, it projects the contours of an alternative polity. In this regard it is significant for the present theme that Deleuze and Guattari add (1986: 18): “We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the

heart of what is called great (or established) literature.” The same may be averred, *mutatis mutandis*, of a ‘minor cinema’ such as *Sense8*.

One gains more insight into the conditions of the possibility of the emergence of a ‘people to come’ in analogous terms when reflecting on what Deleuze and Guattari have to say about language, insofar as it is conducive to construing the virtual ‘people to come’. In *Sense8* the latter is represented by the assemblage of eight sensates, as a novel societal assemblage that emerges from the ‘major’ arboreal social structures – structures that are nevertheless “open to an intensive utilization that makes it take flight along creative lines of escape” in the contemporary cultural landscape, “no matter how slowly, no matter how cautiously, [which] can now form an absolute deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 26):

Even when it is unique, a language remains a mixture, a schizophrenic *mélange*, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centres of power are played out, blurring what can be said and what can’t be said; one function will be played off against the other, all the degrees of territoriality and relative deterritorialization will be played out. Even when major, a language is open to an intensive utilization that makes it take flight along creative lines of escape which, no matter how slowly, no matter how cautiously, can now form an absolute deterritorialization.

By analogy, even a unique social structure – including the social structures comprising the globalised, neoliberal world, where the differences among these are perhaps not as pronounced as before – ‘remains a mixture’ of sorts, with ‘distinct’ nodes of power which are always engaged in some kind of agonistics, even if they promote the same overarching goal. One might call this, following the two French thinkers, above, a ‘major’ societal structure, which – like a major language – nevertheless remains ‘open’ to ‘intensive’ employment, resulting in lines of flight which can initiate a complete deterritorialisation. Such is the promise of *Sense8*. To demonstrate how this happens in the series, some specific scene-sequences will be examined.

### Paradigmatic scene-sequences of rhizomatic assemblage activity in *Sense8*

It is not difficult to find scene-sequences in *Sense8* that exemplify what I have outlined above by means of Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual apparatus pertaining to assemblages, rhizomes, and so on. To begin with, there is a scene at the beginning of the Christmas Special where they are all swimming in the

Mediterranean sea to the strains of the classic Nina Simone song 'Feeling good', sung by Audra Mae. The lyrics of the song resonate with what the senses represent (songwriters: Leslie Bricusse / Anthony Newley):

Birds flying high  
You know how I feel  
Sun in the sky  
You know how I feel  
Reeds driftin' on by  
You know how I feel

It's a new dawn  
It's a new day  
It's a new life  
For me  
And I'm feeling good  
I'm feeling good

Fish in the sea  
You know how I feel  
River running free  
You know how I feel  
Blossom on the tree  
You know how I feel

It's a new dawn  
It's a new day  
It's a new life  
For me  
And I'm feeling good

Dragonfly out in the sun, you know what I mean, don't you know  
Butterflies all havin' fun, you know what I mean  
Sleep in peace when the day is done, that's what I mean  
And this old world is a new world  
And a bold world  
For me  
For me

Stars when you shine  
You know how I feel  
Scent of the pine  
You know how I feel  
Oh freedom is mine  
And I know how I feel

It's a new dawn  
 It's a new day  
 It's a new life

It's a new dawn  
 It's a new day  
 It's a new life  
 It's a new dawn  
 It's a new day  
 It's a new life  
 It's a new life  
 For me

And I'm feeling good  
 I'm feeling good  
 I'm feeling so good  
 I feel so good

The emphasis, in the lyrics, on novelty – a 'new dawn, a new day, a new life' – encapsulates what the sensates embody: the promise of inaugurating a new era of interconnectedness and equality-in-difference among all members of the human genus (*Homo*), more specifically between the two human species, *sapiens* and *sensorium* (and by implication among all living species, non-humans included). It is no secret that *sapiens* is an irrepressibly destructive species – although, paradoxically, it is also irrepressibly creative. Apart from the evidence pertaining to all the wars fought among nations in the course of history, especially the two World Wars, the present ecological state of the world testifies incontrovertibly to its destructiveness (Kovel 2007). To be sure, one has to be realistic about destruction; sometimes one has to defend oneself against the murderousness of others, in the process inflicting destruction upon them. This frequently happens in the television series in question, and while I am no advocate for redundant violence, I accept that the mirror held up to the world by *Sense8* in this respect does not lie; nor does it pull its punches. But as a whole, the series does promote a vision of a people where such violence would be superfluous; where not merely tolerance, but *sensitivity* to the otherness of others prevails in a spirit of 'live and let live'. In this sense it is *critical* cinema: the vision it puts forward is an indictment of extant, ideologically constrained, intolerant, destructive and insensitive society.

Amplifying the lyrics of the song, the accompanying visual sequence reinforces the intimation of a different social realm which, despite being 'virtual', bears the seeds of possible actualisation; in this respect *Sense8* may be understood cinematically as a 'crystal of seeds' (following Deleuze), that is, cinema which

harbours within itself seeds of something new. This marks a 'state' of the 'time-crystal' found in cinema that is in the process of "formation and growth" through crystallisation "seeds", according to Deleuze (2005: 85-86). In such films, "entrances" of various kinds (urban, psychic, historical) are encountered (as in Fellini's films), and they function to constitute the crystal as expanding, but accessible via various avenues which are themselves like "crystalline seeds". Alternatively, one might detect in *Sense8* echoes of another kind of cinematic time-crystal, in Deleuze's typology a 'crystal of flaws' (Deleuze 2005: 82-83). These are films that display a crack or *flaw*, which functions as possible escape route for characters who are capable of rising above the constraints of a certain era or time. Whichever of these categories one applies to *Sense8* – the 'crystal of seeds' or the 'crystal of flaws' – in both cases it functions as critical cinema; on the one hand by highlighting virtual possibilities or 'seeds', on the other by foregrounding the flawed character of extant society, simultaneously pointing towards an escape route.

The scene opens underwater – with a shot that shows Kala from below, swimming in an aquamarine sea, and Audra Mae's voice intoning "Birds flying high; You know how I feel ..." In mid-stroke Kala dives down and the image of Wolfgang swims into view, with arms outstretched towards her, receiving her into his embrace. The scene alternates between the two of them holding and kissing each other, and a combined image of them, together with the other six sensates, seen from below, swimming in the azure ocean, or, in one scene, diving into the sea. What this represents is a powerful, extended visual metaphor of an assemblage of people who revel in the medium of their distinctive mode of existence, instantiated here by the waters of the Mediterranean sea – a medium that differentiates itself graphically from land, and adumbrates the medium of existence of a 'people to come'. Moreover, as Jonathan Franzsen reminded me, water has been the symbol of life since time immemorial. As such it is a powerful critical motif which emphasises the inadequacy of extant society as far as the accommodation of difference is concerned.

This scene finds its triumphant counterpart in the second-last scene of the twelfth (and last, extended) episode of the second season of the series (appropriately titled *Amor Vincit Omnia*, or Love Conquers All), where the sensates – having survived traitor fellow-sensates Whispers's and Lila's attempts to destroy them, dispatching the latter two instead when Wolfgang launches a rocket-grenade at the helicopter in which they are trying to escape – gather on the deck of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. They are there to celebrate Nomi and Amanita's wedding, as well as the inauguration of a 'new', reformed BPO, under the direction of original BPO chairman Ruth Al-Sadaawi's daughter (a *sapiens* committed, like her mother, to cooperation between and mutual acceptance

of *sapiens* and *sensorium*). Significantly – echoing the 'new dawn'-scene discussed above – the new leader of BPO, prefacing the culminating nuptial moment of the wedding ceremony, observes that 'recent events' had taught her that "no one thing is one thing only" (something exemplified by the *sensates*), and talks eloquently about being 'released' from the 'familiar', finding hope in the 'unknown', and despite all the differences among people, and all the forces trying to divide them, the power of love uniting people. She is speaking from a *sapiens*-perspective, of course, but her words are valid for anyone's view of the world. Immediately afterwards Amanita articulates her dedication to Nomi, and her words amplify what the new BPO leader said before her, particularly insofar as she elaborates on living in a world where people are taught to mistrust feelings, and to ignore, control or deny them, because they are supposedly not as important as reason. However, she points out, regardless of the prejudice against feelings – this supposed 'other' of reason, which nevertheless 'humanises' us, arguably more than the latter (see Heidegger [1978: 172-182] on *Befindlichkeit*, 'state-of-mind', or 'the capacity to have moods' as a fundamental constituent of being-human) – we barely understand where they come from and what they are, and they seem to understand us better than we do ourselves. But sometimes a feeling comes along, she says, that changes everything, like the feeling she experienced when Nomi walked into her bookstore, which changed her life. This image of the two women holding hands, looking into each other's eyes as Amanita speaks about the importance of feelings, is paradigmatic as a percept and affect (an *affect of affects*, as it were), condensed into one – where image and embodied feeling impinge forcefully on viewers' senses and minds, insisting, against all odds, that human beings are not, as is so often claimed, only (if at all) creatures of reason, but also, importantly, creatures of feeling. And this, as the happy couple demonstrates, goes for *sensates* as well as for *sapients*.

Seen together with the new BPO leader's eulogy on difference, the unfamiliar and the unknown, which should be seen as a source of hope, Amanita's speech affirms and celebrates the importance of the *difference* of feelings. In fact – as Mariana van Rooyen reminded me – the series in its entirety can be understood as a paean to the importance of feelings: from the first glimmers of their unexpected, and initially incomprehended, interconnection to and with one another, Mariana pointed out, it is feelings that bind them together. Feelings of sympathy or empathy, of shared hope, anger, grief and joy, and sometimes near-despair – always incorporated into a variety of memorable percepts and affects – are what mould the transformational assemblage-character of the cluster. One might say that a spectrum of feelings is the life-blood of the cluster-assemblage in question. In this respect, too, *Sense8* embodies a profound prognostication to the effect that the constitution of a 'new' humanity beyond the deeply xenophobic, racist,



economically unequal, largely patriarchal and hierarchical ('arboreal') 'society of control' of the present era (Deleuze 1992; Byung-Chul Han 2017; Zuboff 2019; Conio 2015; Colebrook 2015; Olivier 2018) – as witnessed in the social and political divisions manifested across the globe today – would have to do justice to the requirements of feelings as an indispensable humanising factor.

I therefore do not think it is far-fetched to perceive in these percepts/affects (particularly in the metonymically dense one of Amanita delivering her eulogy to feelings) an intimation of a kind of *posthuman* (Braidotti 2013) 'people to come' – a people beyond the narrow-minded, reprehensible prejudice of *Homo sapiens* towards all things *different*. At the same time, to the extent that these audiovisual images invoke a kind of society very different from that of the present – where mutual suspicion, hatred and outright hostility seem to predominate in many parts of the world, such as the United Kingdom, torn apart by Brexit, or the United States, deeply divided by Donald Trump's presidency (in 2019) – they encompass the constituents of a *critical* cinema, one that indicts the extant world even as it gestures towards a world to come; a possible, but not necessarily actualisable world.

What this alternative society might look like is further given graphic, colourful flesh in the 'Hallelujah scene' (in the Christmas Special; Chapter 11 of Season 2) where the sensates are initially shown as celebrating Christmas in their own way in their specific locations – Capheus watching movies with his mother in Nairobi; Sun eating sweets that one of her fellow inmate friends brought her in her prison cell in South Korea; Nomi, Bug and Amanita enjoying a Christmas dinner with the latter's mother and 'three fathers', and so on. Unexpectedly the beautiful strains of Jeff Buckley's cover version of Leonard Cohen's poignant 'secular hymn', *Hallelujah*, are heard. The visuals initially alternate between scenes of the sensates' respective locations, and then also with the image of an auditorium where a choir of red-clad Father Christmases sing the iconic song, and the sensates, each holding a candle, join the audience, looking and listening in wonder. Then, behind the choir, the figure of their sensate 'mother', Angelica, appears, looking back at them. This composite image-configuration fuses the percept of a culturally and racially variegated audience, looking at a choir singing Cohen's deeply moving song, overlaid by the sound of Buckley's singing, on the one hand, with images signifying division and persecution, on the other hand, such as Sun's isolation in a prison cell (because of her brother's crimes) and Whispers's teleportational appearance where Will and Riley are skating on a frozen pond, to rile Will. In other words, in one extended image-sequence the percept of a difference-accepting 'people to come' is juxtaposed with that of the present 'people who persecute those who are different'. Needless to state

explicitly, given its critical assemblage-function, this is one of the most powerful scene-sequences in the series.

There are other such powerful percepts in *Sense8*, such as the one in Episode 6 of Season 2, where Sun (having escaped from prison) is sitting at her parents' tombs in Seoul, tears streaming down her cheeks, not knowing what to do next to bring her murderous brother to justice, and all the others of her cluster join her to show their support. Both Will and Lito remind her that, although she feels utterly isolated, she should remember that she is not alone: she has her seven sensate brothers and sisters, and whatever it is that she has to do, she would not have to do it alone. Then, at precisely 32 minutes, 20 seconds into the episode, they gather tightly around her, embracing her in a concrete image of a loving sensate-assemblage. This percept of interpersonal solidarity has a counterpart in the ninth episode of the second season, at exactly 49 minutes, 03 seconds into its running time. In this scene all the members of the cluster put their hands together, one on top of the other – an image reminiscent of a similar gesture, involving hands and swords, depicted in Jacques-Louis David's famous neoclassical painting, *The Oath of the Horatii* (in the Louvre) – to affirm their solidarity with Sun in her bid to defeat her brother once and for all, disguised as a girlie bartender at an event where her brother is promoting his supposedly 'family oriented' finance company. Again, it instantiates a compelling assemblage-percept of common purpose to overcome the forces opposing those who represent difference, otherness, and the acceptance of diversity.

## Conclusion

Deleuze and Guattari offer a summary of the rhizome's features, which clarifies my claim that the assemblage of sensates in the series under discussion can be understood rhizomatically, and corroborates my misgivings about the concept, 'structure' (1987: 21):

Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees, or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome [...] constitutes linear multiplicities with  $n$  dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted ( $n - 1$ ). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations

between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or lineaments, should not be confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure.

In the light of my earlier account of other, related concepts in Deleuze and Guattari's arsenal, such as 'assemblage' and 'deterritorialisation', this excerpt explains how it is that the focal cluster-assemblage of sensates in *Sense8*, as well as the series itself – the former intra-cinematically, and the latter inter-cinematically as well as extra-cinematically – has the capacity to adumbrate, anticipate and portend, if not actually gestate, the lineaments of a 'people to come'. Particularly the sentence in the excerpt, above, "When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis", is pertinent to my claim. Recall how the multiplicity that is the assemblage-cluster of cinematically focal sensates changes its attributes as they gradually become integrated into its rhizomatic configuration. They become empowered as never before, when they still experienced themselves as discrete individuals, and their increasing understanding of themselves and one another enhances their self-understanding as well as their insight into the foibles of the sapient human race. This metamorphosis on their part may be seen as a paradigm for conceptualising what I have here termed, following Deleuze and Guattari, a 'people to come'. As such, the series may justifiably be regarded as an instance of *critical* cinema, which does not leave extant, ideologically damaged society intact. Instead the series, as well as the percept of the cluster of protagonist sensates, holds a mirror up to this intolerant, insensitive, repressive society that is hell-bent on persecuting and destroying everything that is different from the 'normalised' modes of behaviour that it valorises, exhorting viewers, by implication, to emulate the vision brought to the world by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, Michael Straczynski, their colleagues and collaborators, together with the actors who portray the characters in the series.\*

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