ON THE NATURE OF CONCEPTS

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In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy, famously, as an activity that consists in "forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts."[1] But this definition of philosophy implies a rather singular "analytic of the concept" (to borrow Kant's phrase). Deleuze's "concept of the concept," as it were, differs significantly from previous notions of the concept. One of the problems it poses—which is the problem I would like to address today—lies in the fact that concepts, from a Deleuzian perspective, have no *identity* but only a *becoming*. This poses a particular problem in dealing with the status of Deleuze's own concepts.

In his preface to the Italian translation of *Logique du sens*, for example, Deleuze himself briefly charts out the becoming of the concept of intensity within his own work.[2] (1) In *Difference and Repetition*, he says, the concept of intensity was primarily related to the dimension of depth. (2) In *Logic of Sense*, everything changes: the concept of intensity is retained, but it is now related primarily to the dimension of surface: same concept, but different components. (3) In *Anti-Oedipus*, the concept enters yet another becoming that is related to neither depth nor surface: rising and falling intensities are now events that take place on a body without organs.[3] (4) One might add a fourth becoming to Deleuze's list: in *What is Philosophy?* the concept of intensity is used to describe the status of the components of concepts, which are determined as intensive rather than extensive (which is one way in which Deleuze distances himself from, say, Frege, for whom concepts are extensional). In other words, the concept of intensity does not stay the same even within Deleuze's own work; it undergoes internal mutations. The same is true of Deleuze's other concepts as well. The concept of affect, for example, first arises in Deleuze's work on Spinoza, where it designates the passage from one intensity to another in a finite mode, which is experienced as a joy or a sadness; in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What Is Philosophy?* however, the affect is no longer "the passage from one lived state to another," but has assumed an autonomous status—along with percepts—as a becoming that takes place between two multiplicities.[4]

To this, one must add the fact that Deleuze's concepts—like intensity or affect—themselves have a long "becoming" in the history of philosophy, which Deleuze relies on and appropriates, and into which Deleuze's own work on the concept is inserted. The concept of multiplicity, for instance, is first formulated mathematically by Bernard Riemann (and beyond that, is linked to Kant's concept of the "manifold"); both Bergson and Husserl pick up on Riemann's work, in different ways; and Deleuze first writes about the concept with regards to Bergson's distinction between two types of multiplicity—continuous and discrete. But here, too, the concept again gets modified within Deleuze's own work. The types of reductions that he analyses—not only from the continuous to the discrete, but from the problematic to the axiomatic, the intensive to the extensive, the nonmetric to the metric, the nondenumerable to the denumerable, the rhizomatic to the arborescent, the smooth to the striated, and so on—while interrelated, are not identical, and each would have to be analyzed on its own account. Indeed, on this score, one of the great texts in the history of philosophy is Kant's opening to the Transcendental Dialectic, where he explains why he is going to appropriate Plato's concept of Idea rather that coining his own term, since Plato was dealing with a problematic similar to the one Kant wants to deal with, although Plato had "not sufficiently determined his concept."[5] Deleuze does the exact same thing when, in *Difference and Repetition*, he in turn takes up Kant's theory of the Idea and modifies it in his own manner, claiming that Kant had not pushed to the limit the 'immanent' ambitions of his the-

ory of Ideas. One might way that the "becoming" of concepts *within* Deleuze's work is a continuation of the becoming within this history of philosophy.

As a final complication, Deleuze says that even he and Guattari "never did understand the 'body without organs' in quite the same way."[6] This is not a question of "authorial intention." If one considers Deleuze and Guattari's jointly authored books as belonging fully to the trajectory of Deleuze's writings, and equally fully to the trajectory of Guattari's writings, then one could take Deleuze's comment to imply that, even within a work like *Anti-Oedipus*, the concept of the "body without organs" has a different sense, a different "becoming," depending on whether one reads it in the context of Deleuze's trajectory or Guattari's trajectory. In other words, even *within* a single work or project, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts do not have an identity that would be reducible to a "definition." Indeed, Deleuze insists on this point. "Working together [with Guattari]," he says, "was never a homogenization, but a proliferation, an accumulation of bifurcations."[7] Moreover, if Deleuze entered into a "becoming-Guattari" in his jointly authored works, one could say that he did the same thing in even his monographs—where he entered into a becoming-Spinoza, or a becoming-Leibniz, and so on, such that, even in his solo works, Deleuze's concepts never lose this status of "becoming." As Deleuze liked to say, "I am nearly incapable of speaking in my own name [*en mon nom*]."[8] In this sense, Deleuze's critique of the identity of the self or ego has as its exact parallel a critique of the identity of concepts. If "experimentation on ourself is our only identity," as Deleuze says, then the same is true of concepts: their only identity lies in experimentation, that is, in their intrinsic variability and mutations.[9]

So this is the problem I would like to address today: the non-identity and becoming of Deleuze's concepts. There is a becoming of concepts not only within the entirety of Deleuze's corpus, but also in each book and in each concept, which is extended to and draws from the entire history of philosophy.

Philosophy as Creation

Now this is exactly what one would expect, theoretically, from a philosopher like Deleuze. If Deleuze's philosophy is a philosophy of difference, then this differential status must be reflected in his own concepts, which cannot have an identity of their own without belying the entire nature of his project. But how is one to understand this becoming of concepts, and Deleuze's definition of philosophy as the *creation* of concepts?

Deleuze's definition of philosophy as the creation of concepts has three important consequences. First, it defines philosophy in terms of an activity that has traditionally been aligned with art, namely, the activity of *creation*. For Deleuze, philosophers are as creative as artists—the difference being that what they create happens to be concepts rather than paintings, or sculptures, or films, or novels. In Deleuze's language, philosophers create *concepts* whereas artists create sensible aggregates of *percepts* or *affects*. Deleuze's approach to the question "What is philosophy?" has the advantage of characterizing philosophy in terms of a well-defined occupation or a precise *activity*, rather than simply an *attitude*—for instance, knowing yourself, or wondering why there is something rather than nothing, or taking nothing to be self-evident, and so on. "To create concepts," Deleuze writes, "is, at the very least, to *do* something."[10] This is why conceptual creations bear the signature of the philosopher who created them, just as works of art bear the signature of the artist. In painting, we speak of Van Gogh's sunflowers or Jasper John's flags, just as in philosophy one speaks of Descartes' cogito, or Leibniz's monads, or Nietzsche's will to power—or in medicine, one speaks of Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's disease. In these cases, the proper name refers less to the person than to the work of art or to the concept itself—the proper name is here used to indicate *a non-personal mode of individuation*.[11] In this sense, it would be possible to do a history of philosophy along the lines of an art history, that is, in terms of its great products or masterworks. From this point of view, Descartes' *cogito* and Plato's

Idea would be the philosophical parallels to Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa or Michelangelo's Last Judgment—the great philosophical masterworks, signed by their creators.

Second, Deleuze's definition of philosophy as the creation of concepts not only implies that philosophers are as creative as artists; more importantly, perhaps, it also implies that artists are as much "thinkers" as are philosophers—they simply think in terms of percepts and affects rather than concepts: painters think in terms of lines and colors, just as musicians think in sounds, writers think in words, filmmakers think in images, and so on. The idea that thought is necessarily propositional, or representational, or linguistic, or even conceptual is completely foreign to Deleuze. He writes, "There are other ways of thinking and creating, other modes of ideation that, like scientific thought, do not have to pass through concepts."[12] When sculptors mold a piece of clay, or painters apply colors or lines, or filmmakers set up a shot, there is a process of thought involved; it is simply that that process of thought does not take place in a conceptual medium; nor even through the application of concepts upon that sensible medium (Kant). Rather, it is a type of thinking that takes place directly in and through a sensible medium.

A third consequence follows from this. Neither of these activities—art or philosophy—has any priority over the other. Creating a concept is neither more difficult nor more abstract than creating new visual, sonorous, or verbal combinations in art; conversely, it is no easier to read an image, painting, or novel than it is to comprehend a concept. Philosophy, for Deleuze, can never be undertaken independently of art (or for that matter science or politics, and so on). It always enters into relations of mutual resonance and exchange with these other domains, though for reasons that are always internal to philosophy itself. This is why Deleuze could constantly insist that, when he wrote on the arts, or on science, or on medicine, or on psychiatry, he did so *as a philosopher*, and that his writings in all these domains must be read as as works of "philosophy, nothing but philosophy, in the traditional sense of the word."[13] Thus, in his studies of the arts, Deleuze's aim, as a philosopher, was to *create the concepts* that correspond to the sensible aggregates created by artists or authors. In his book on Francis Bacon, *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze creates a series of philosophical concepts, each of which, he says, relates to a particular aspect of Bacon's paintings, but which also find a place in "a general logic of sensation." In a similar manner, Deleuze insisted that his two-volume *Cinema* book can be read as "a book of logic, a logic of the cinema" that sets out "to isolate certain cinematographic concepts," concepts which are specific to the cinema, but which can only be formed philosophically.[14]

It is these three rubrics, then, that seem to sum up the way Deleuze characterizes the relationship between philosophy and art—or more generally, between philosophy and the act of creation. First, philosophers are as creative as artists (they create concepts); second, artists and authors are as much thinkers as are philosophers (they simply think in a non-conceptual *material* or *matter*); and third, neither activity has any priority whatsoever over the other (philosophers can create concepts about art, just as artists and authors can create in conjunction with philosophical concepts—as, for instance, in so-called conceptual art).

Concept Creation and Philosophy?

Now, it seems that Deleuze intended his theory of concepts to apply specifically to *philosophical* concepts (the concepts created by philosophers), rather than to concepts "in general" (everyday concepts such as chairs and pearls). "What suffices for 'current ideas' does not suffice for 'vital ideas'—those that must be created." Deleuze himself makes such a distinction in his book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* when he writes: "It is strange to deny the existence of the Baroque in the way one denies unicorns or red elephants. For in these cases the concept is given, whereas in the case of the Baroque it is a question of knowing if one can invent a concept capable (or not) of giving it an existence. Irregular pearls exist, but the Baroque has no reason to exist without a concept that forms this very reason."[15] In other words, concepts like the "Baroque" *create* their corresponding object, since

the object does not pre-exist the formation of the concept. As Deleuze and Guattari say in *What is Philosophy?*, the concept posits itself, and posits its object, at one and the same time; the concept, in short, is *self-referential*. This is not true of the concepts of ordinary language, which are used to *denote* already existing objects or classes of objects.

But this seems to indicate that philosophy is not in fact the only milieu of concept creation. For instance, the puzzle that Heinrich Wolfflin addressed in his *Principles of Art History*—which Deleuze appeals to frequently in his later writings—is the fact that all the works of art produced during the Baroque period look like..."Baroque" works of art. But the Baroque, as a period, like the Classic period that preceded it, does not exist apart from its concept, and what Wolfflin did, in his art history "without names," was to attempt isolate the components of the concepts of Classic art and Baroque art: the linear versus the painterly, plane versus recession, closed versus open form, clarity and chiaroscuro, and multiplicity versus unity.[16] Though Deleuze breaks with Wolfflin's analyses—in part because he insists on the role of the "fold" as a fundamental component of the concept of the Baroque—one can still see in Wolfflin's work in art history a vast effort at concept creation.[17]

Deleuze suggests that a similar concept creation takes place in medicine. If illnesses—such Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, or Asperger's symdrome—are named after doctors, it is not because the doctor "invented" the disease, but rather was able to "isolate" it: he or she distinguishes cases that had hitherto been confused by dissociating symptoms that were previously grouped together, and juxtaposing them with others that were previously dissociated, thereby constructing an original clinical concept for the disease or syndrome. The components of the concept are the *symptoms*, the signs of the illness, and the concept becomes the name of a *syndrome*, which marks the meeting place of these syndromes, their point of coincidence or convergence.[18] Even more incisively, perhaps, Arnold Davidson, in his well-known work on the emergence of the concept of "sexuality," has shown that, strictly speaking, there were no perverts or homosexuals prior to the nineteenth century, precisely because their concepts had not yet been formulated by Krafft-Ebbing and others.[19] Following Davidson's work, Ian Hacking has shown how the creation of concepts, particularly in the human sciences, can have the effect of "making up people," creating phenomena, or making possible new "modes of existence."[20] Here too, there is a becoming of concepts: homosexuality has ceased to be strictly a concept of perversion (except perhaps for fundamentalists and others); and there can often be overt political struggles around such concepts, such as the retrieval of once-derogatory terms such as "queer."

My point is simply that concept creation is not necessarily an exclusive concern of philosophy. Though Deleuze sometimes speaks in this manner, he nonetheless writes, "as long as there is a time and place for creating concepts, the operation that undertakes this will always be called philosophy, or will be indistinguishable from philosophy *even if it is called something else*."[21]

"Vital" Concepts: Singularities

What is important about concept creation, it seems to me, is less its specific relation to philosophy, even in Deleuze, than the fact that created concepts, in whatever domain they are created, must be understood as "singularities," in Deleuze's sense, rather than "universals." As Deleuze says in *Negotiations*, "there are two kinds of concepts: universals and singularities."[22] What is the difference between universals and singularities? Levi-Strauss once made a distinction between two types of propositions: only similar things can differ from each other (Aristotle), and only differences can resemble each other.[23] In the first proposition, resemblance between things is primary; in the second, things themselves differ, and they differ first of all from themselves. From this viewpoint, Deleuze suggests that the concept of a *straight line* is a universal, whereas the concept of the fold is a *singularity*. The concept of a *straight line* is a universal, because all straight lines resemble each other, and the concept can be defined axiomatically, as in Euclid. The concept of the *fold*, by contrast, is

a singularity, because folds vary, every fold is different, all folding proceeds by differentiation. No two things are folded in the same way, no two rocks, no two pieces of paper, and there is no general rule saying the same thing will always fold in the same way. In this sense, there are folds everywhere, but the fold is not a universal. Rather, it is a "differentiator," a "differential." The concept of the fold is always a singularity, and it can only gain terrain by varying within itself, by bifurcating, by metamorphosing. All folds differ from each other, and differ from themselves. "One only has to comprehend mountains—and above all, to see and touch mountains—from the viewpoint of their foldings for them to lose their solidity, and for their millennia to once again become what they are: not permanences, but *time in the pure* state."[24]

This, then, is the initial answer to the problem of the incessant "becoming" of Deleuze's concepts: the aim of Deleuze's analytic of concepts is to introduce *the pure form of time* into concepts, in the form of what he calls "continuous variation" or "pure variability."[25] "The aim," he says, "is not to rediscover the eternal or the universal, but to find the conditions under which something new is produced (*creativeness*)."[26] This is why the concept of the fold as a singularity is linked to Levi-Strauss's second proposition: all folds differ, and this difference is primary, but they are, secondarily, made to resemble each other in the concept. As Deleuze says elsewhere, "it is not at all a matter of bringing things together under one and the same concept [universals], but rather of relating each concept to the variables that determine its mutations [singularities]."[27]

The Form of the Question

Now to be sure, this analytic of concepts entails a break with the traditional manner of thinking about concepts that has existed since Plato, and I would like to try to indicate the nature of this break under two brief rubrics.

First, as Heidegger showed, in Plato, the discovery of the Idea, of the concept, corresponded to a certain way of posing questions. In Plato, this questioning appears primarily in the form, "What is . . .?" [*ti estin?*]: What is courage? What is piety? What is justice?[28] Plato wanted to oppose this major form of the question to all other forms—such as "Who?" "Which one?" "How many?" "How?" "Where?" "When?" "In which case?" "From what point of view?"—which are criticized as being minor and vulgar questions of opinion that express confused ways of thinking. When Socrates, for instance, asks "What is beauty?" his opponents almost always seem to answer by citing "the one that is beautiful"—and Socrates triumphs: one cannot reply to the question "What is beauty?" by citing examples of the beautiful, by noting *who* is beautiful ("a young virgin"), just as one cannot answer the question "What is justice?" by pointing to *where* or *when* there is justice, and one cannot reach the essence of the dyad by explaining *how* "two" is obtained, and so on. To the question "What is beauty?" one must not point to beautiful things, which are only beautiful accidentally and according to becoming, but to Beauty itself, which is nothing but beautiful, that which is beautiful in its being and essence. The question "What is . . .?" thus presupposes a particular way of thinking that points one in the direction of essence; it is for Socrates *the* question of essence, the *only* question capable of discovering the concept.[29] This is where Deleuze's work implies a certain reversal of Platonism. For while it is certainly a blunder to cite an example of something beautiful when asked "What is beauty?", it is less certain that the question "What is . . .?" is a legitimate and well-posed question, *even and above all for discovering essence.*

Second, Deleuze suggests that the very question "What is . . .?" presupposes an entire prephilosophical (and dogmatic) "image of thought" that can be summarized in several interrelated postulates: (1) it presumes that thinking is the voluntary and natural exercise of a faculty, and that the thinker possesses a natural love or desire for the truth, a *philia* (the philosopher as the friend or lover of wisdom, who ascends to the Idea, in dialogue with others, through his submission to the "What is . . .?" question); (2) we fall into "error," we are diverted from the truth, by external forces that are foreign to the nature of

thought and distract the mind from its natural vocation (the body, the passions); therefore (3) what we need in order to think truthfully is a "method" that will ward off error and bring us back to the truthful nature of thought itself. Against this more or less Greek image of thought, Deleuze will oppose the possibility of a thought "without image": (1) thinking is never the product of a voluntary disposition, but rather the result of forces that act upon us from the outside: we search for truth, we begin to think, only when compelled to do so, when we undergo a violence that impels us to such a search and wrests us from our natural stupor; (2) the negative of thought is not error, which is a mere empirical fact, but rather those more profound enemies that prevent the genesis of thought: convention, opinion, clichés, stupidity; (3) finally, what leads us to the truth is not "method" but rather "constraint" and "chance": no method can determine in advance what compels us to think, it is rather the fortuitousness of the encounter that guarantees the necessity of what it forces us to think. *Who* is it that searches for the truth? It is not the *friend*, exercising a natural desire for the truth in dialogue with others, but rather the *jealous lover*, under the pressure of his beloved's lies, and the anguish they inflict. The jealous lover is forced to confront a problem, whose coordinates are derived precisely from the questions Plato rejected: What happened? When? Where? How?

We could perhaps summarize these two rubrics by considering Deleuze's somewhat surprising claim that he considers himself to be a "pure metaphysician." He has little interest in the Heideggerian and Derridean themes of the "overcoming of metaphysics." If the old metaphysics is a bad one, he says, then we simply need to construct a new metaphysics; in this sense, he says he considered himself one of the most naïve philosophers of his generation. But this is a slightly feigned move on Deleuze's part. For if one asks him what the nature of his metaphysics is, what the nature of ultimate reality is, what the nature of Being itself is, his response is: Being is a problem. Being always presents itself to us under a problematic form, as a series of problematizations. Whence the two dense chapters at the heart of *Difference and Repetition*: chapter four ("The Ideal Synthesis of Difference") analyses the ideal and intelligible nature of the problems that constitute Being itself; chapter five ("The Asymmetrical Synthesis of the Sensible") analyses the way these problems are given us—under the form of an intensity that does violence to thought.

Endo-Consistency and Exo-Consistency: Deleuze's Analytic of Concepts

The actual analytic of concepts presented in *What is Philosophy?*—under the rubrics of endo-consistency and exo-consistency—attempts to being together these two complementary aspects of Deleuzian concepts: while they do not have an *identity*, they must have a *consistency*, but this consistency must have as its necessary complement the internal *variability* of the concept.[30] The aim of the analytic is to insert into concepts a structure that is problematic, differential, and temporal. For Deleuze, no concept is ever simple; not only does it refer to other concepts (its exo-consistency), but each concept also has its own internal components (which in turn can themselves be considered as concepts). A concept is therefore always a multiplicity: it is composed of a finite number of distinct, heterogeneous, and nonetheless inseparable components; it is the point of coincidence, condensation, or accumulation of these component elements, which it renders consistent *in itself*; and this internal consistency in turn is defined by the zones of proximity [*voisinage*] or indiscernability that it creates between these components.

Descartes' concept of the "cogito," for instance, has three components, namely, thinking, doubting, and being: "I (who doubt) think, and therefore I am (a thinking being)." But like hypertext, such a concept is an open-ended multiplicities that contains the potential for "bridges" that provide links or crossroads to other concepts. For Descartes, the "idea of infinity" is the bridge leading from the concept of *cogito* to the concept of God, a new concept that has three components forming the "proofs" for the existence of God. In turn, "the third proof (ontologi-

cal) assures the closure of the concept but also throws out a new bridge or branches off to a concept of extended being [the World], insofar as it guarantees the objective truth value of our other clear and distinct ideas."[31] When Kant came along and "criticized" the Cartesian *cogito*, he did so in the name of a new problematic field: Descartes could not say under what *form* the "I think" is capable of determining the "I am," and this determinable form is precisely the form of *time*. In this way, Kant introduced a new component into the Cartesian *cogito*, which accounts for the fact that concepts possess an *internal* history, a potential for transmutation into other concepts, which constitutes the history of philosophy. "The history of philosophy," writes Deleuze, means that we evaluate not only the historical novelty of the concepts created by the philosopher, but also the power of their becoming when they pass into one another."[32] It is through this kind of analysis that one can account for the various kinds of conceptual becomings that one finds in Deleuze's work, with which we began.

The Universal Thought-Flow

But rather than analyzing Deleuze's analytic of concepts, which has been the subject of considerable discussion, I would like to conclude by turning to a slightly more obscure and metaphysical topic in Deleuze's work, which concerns the *real* genesis of concepts, and the *real* origin of thinking. These concluding comments were generated by reading the following passage from one of Deleuze's Leibniz seminars:

> What is given, quite possibly, one could always call a flow. It is flows that are given. . . . Imagine the universal thought flow as a kind of interior monologue, the interior monologue of everyone who thinks. . . . The concept is a system of singularities extracted [*prélevé*] from a thought flow. . . . One can also conceive of a continuous acoustic flow that traverses the world and that even encompasses silence (perhaps that is only an idea, but it matters little if this idea is justified). A musician is someone who extracts something from this flow.[33]

I would simply like to make three remarks about this passage.

First, it posits the existence of a universal thought flow in the universe. What does Deleuze mean by this? Not clear, but it seems to be of Spinozistic origin. Just as there is a continuous flow of matter in the universe, of which we ourselves are modifications, so there is a continuous flow of thought in the universe, of which we are likewise modifications. As Spinoza wrote, "I maintain [*statuo*] that there is in Nature an infinite power of thinking."[34] The thoughts that come and go in our heads, and of which we are neither the origin nor the author, are simply the products of this thought flow, or more precisely, the very movement of this universal flow of thought in the universe—a flow that is anonymous, impersonal, and indeterminate. Leibniz had already made this point against Descartes: it is illegitimate to say "I think, therefore I am," not because "I am" does not follow from "I think," but rather because, from the activity of thought, I can never derive an "I." At best, Descartes can claim, "there is thinking," "thought has taken place." Both Spinoza and Leibniz said that, just as there is a "mechanism" of the body, there is an "automatism" to thought: we are all "spiritual automatons" (both Spinoza and Leibniz appealed to this image): it is not *we* who think, but rather thought that takes place within us. Similarly, in one of his notebooks, Nietzsche wrote:

> A thought . . . comes up in me—where from? How? I simply don't know. It comes, independently of my will, usually surrounded and obscured by a mass of feelings, desires, aversions, and also other thoughts. . . . One pulls it [the thought] out of this mass, cleans it off, sets it on its feet, and then sees how it stands and how it walks—all of this in an astonishing *presto* and yet without any sense of hurry. Just *who* does all this—I have no idea, and I am surely more a spectator than originator of this process.[35]

Second, what then does it mean to say that a concept is a "system of singularities extracted from a thought flow"? To answer this question, we need to consider what we might call the "usual" status of the universal thought flow, and Deleuze has a word to describe it: stupidity. "*Stupidity* [*bêtise*]," Deleuze writes, "is a structure of

thought as such."[36] More to the point, to a certain degree, stupidity is the *basic* structure of the universal thought flow. The thoughts we think, the thoughts that pop into our mind every day, the thoughts that suddenly appear while we are daydreaming, and so on, are stupid thoughts, thoughts that have the structure of stupidity. They are not falsehoods, they are not errors, nor a tissue of errors; every thought may be true, but they are nonetheless stupidities. There is, no doubt, a certain provocation involved in Deleuze's use of this word, since other philosophers have made the same point while making use of seemingly less offensive terms. Heidegger spoke of "idle talk" or "idle chatter," and the fact that, most of the time, the thoughts that pass through our head are simply the thoughts of what "they" think, the thoughts of *Das Man*. Plato spoke about the reign of the *doxa* or the realm of opinion, and he saw the task of philosophy as precisely the attempt to break with the *doxa*, to extract oneself from opinion. Deleuze's point is exactly the same: the thoughts that pass through our heads, carried along by the universal thought flow, are stupid thoughts—thoughts that are determined, often, by the imbecilic culture that surrounds us. (Is this not the aim of marketing and advertising: to modify the thought-flow, to populate it with anonymous thoughts about getting the colors in your laundry brighter, or your teeth whiter than white, and so on?)

For Deleuze, the negative of thought, the misadventure that constantly threatens thought, is not *error* or *falsehood*, which can always be corrected, but stupidity. In fact and in principle, what prevents genuine thinking from ever taking place is nothing other than the flow of opinion, the *doxa*, the flow of convention, idle talk and idle chatter, the discourse of the "They" (what "they" say). Stupidity—and not error—is the true threat to thought, the *internal* threat to thought; it is what prevents new thought from ever taking place. As Heidegger said, "what is most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is the fact that *we are not yet thinking*."[37] On this score, Deleuze often likes to cite a phrase of Jean-Luc Godard, the French filmmaker: *pas une image juste . . . juste une image*; not a just image, just an image. What Godard seems to mean is this: given the fact that we are constantly besieged by images that are nothing but clichés, the task of the filmmaker is not to create just or moral or uplifting images, but rather to simply create an image *tout court*, that is, to manage to create an image that is not a cliché. That, in and of itself, is enough: to create even a single image that is not a cliché. The same is true in the realm of thought.

Which leads to the third and final question: Given the reign of stupidity in the realm of thought, and the reign of clichés in the realm of art (and even the reign of psychic clichés in our affective and perceptive life), what then is the process that constitutes a true act of creation? What exactly does Deleuze mean when he says that a concept is "a system of singularities extracted (*prélevé*) from a thought flow," or that a musician is someone who extracts singularities from "the continuous acoustic flow that traverses the world"? Here again, the key is the concept of singularity. In mathematics, the singular is distinguished from or opposed to the regular: the singular is precisely that which escapes [*sort*] the regularity of the rule—it is the production of the new (the point where a curve changes direction). More importantly, mathematicians tell us there are singularities that are remarkable, and there are singular points that are not remarkable, that are ordinary. In this sense, one could say that there are two poles of Deleuze's philosophy, which could be summarized in the phrases: "Everything is singular!" and "Everything is ordinary!" On the one hand, in Deleuze's ontology, every moment, every individual, every event is absolutely new and singular: Being is different, that is, it is the inexhaustible creation of difference, the constantly production of new, the incessant genesis of the singular. On the other hand, the ontological condition of difference is that, in being produced, singularities tend to become regularized, made ordinary, "normalized" (in Foucault's sense), and it is precisely this reduction of the singular to the ordinary that Deleuze calls the mechanism of capture: the inevitable processes of stratification, regularization, normalization—or perhaps what we might call "stupid-ization" in the realm of thought.

But this is why Deleuze says the distinction between the singular and the ordinary is much more important in philosophy than the distinction between the true and the false, since the distinction between the ordinary (what belongs to the rule) and the singular (what escapes the rule) is not always an easy distinction to make. If Being produces the singular under conditions that constantly reduce it to the regular or the ordinary, then the task of creation amounts to, on the one hand, a constant and ever-renewed struggle against the reign of clichés and the domain of stupidity, in order to, on the other hand, extract singularities from the thought-flow and make them *function* together. Like each of us, the philosopher—or the artist or the mathematician—begins with the multiplicities that have invented him or her as a formed subject, living in an actualized world, with an organic body, in a given political order, having learned a certain language. But at its highest point, both writing and thinking, as activities, consist in following the abstract movement of what Deleuze's calls a "line of flight," that extracts variable singularities from these multiplicities of lived experience—because they are already there, even if they have been rendered ordinary—and then makes them function as variables on an immanent "plane of composition." The task of the thinker—or the artist, or the scientist—is to establish non-preexistent relations between these variables in order to make them function together in a singular and non-homogeneous whole, and thus to participate in the construction of "new possibilities of life"—for instance, the invention of new compositions in language (through style and syntax, which break with the way our everyday idle chatter uses language), the formation of new blocks of sensation (through affects and percepts, which breaks with the reduction of our inner life to perceptual schemata and affective or psychic clichés), the production of new modes of existence (through intensities and becomings), or even the political constitution of a people (through speech acts and fabulation)—and at the limit, perhaps, the creation of a world (through singularities and events).

NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2, in which they quote Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §409: Philosophers "must no longer accept concepts as a gift, nor merely purify and polish them, but must first *make* and *create* them, present them and make them convincing."
2. Deleuze, "Author's Note for the Italian Edition of *Logic of Sense*," in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 65–66.
3. Deleuze, *Desert Islands, and Other Texts 1953–1974* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 261: "I've undergone a change. The surface-depth opposition no longer concerns me. What interests me now is the relationships between a full body, a body without organs, and flows that migrate."
4. "The affect is not the passage from one lived state to another but man's nonhuman becoming" (*What Is Philosophy?* 173).
5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), "The Ideas in General," A312–320/B368–377, 309–14.
6. Deleuze, "Letter to Uno: How Felix and I Worked Together," in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 238.
7. Ibid.
8. Deleuze, "Author's Note for the Italian Edition of *Logic of Sense*," in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 65.
9. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11.
10. *What is Philosophy?* 7.
11. "We dream sometimes of a history of philosophy that would list only the new concepts created by a great philosopher—his most essential and creative contribution." Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), ix.
12. *What is Philosophy?* 8.
13. Gilles Deleuze, "8 ans après: Entretien 1980" (interview with Catherine Clément), *L'arc* 49 (rev. ed., 1980): 99.

14. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barabara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix; *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 47. Strictly speaking, there is no "philosophy of art" in Deleuze: "art" is itself a concept, but a purely nominal one, since there necessarily exist diverse problems whose solutions are found in heterogeneous arts. Hermann Broch once wrote that "the sole *raison d'être* of the novel is to discover what only the novel can discover" [Quoted in Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 5, 36], and each of the arts, and each work of art, can be said to confront its own particular problems, utilizing its own particular material and techniques. The cinema, for instance, produces images that move, and that move in time, and it is these two aspects of film that Deleuze sets out to analyze in *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*: "What exactly does the cinema show us about space and time that the other arts don't show?" [*Negotiations*, 58]. As Jean-Luc Godard noted, a panoramic shot and a tracking shot give us two very different types of spaces: a panoramic shot is encompassing, it gives us a global vision, as in projective geometry; whereas a tracking shot constructs a line, it links up spaces and neighborhoods that in themselves can remain fragmentary and disconnected, more like a Riemannian geometry. Even the choice between a pan or a track is an activity of thought in filmmaking (Godard says: it is a *moral* choice).
15. Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), 47.
16. Heinrich Wolfflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, n.d.).
17. For a penetrating analysis of Wolfflin's work along these lines, see Arnold I. Davidson, "Styles of Reasoning: From the History of Art to the Epistemology of Science," in *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 125–41.
18. See Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 15–16.
19. Arnold I. Davidson, "Closing Up the Corpses: Diseases of Sexuality and the Emergence of the Psychiatric Style of Reasoning"; and "Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality," in *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1–65.
20. Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery, with Arnold I. Davidson, Ann Swidler, and Ian Watt, eds., *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 222–36; "The Invention of Split Personalities," in Alan Donagan, Anthony N. Perovich, Jr., and Michael V. Wedlin, eds., *Human Nature and Natural Knowledge* (Dordrecht, 1986), 63–85; "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers," *Humanities in Society* 5 (1982): 279–95.
21. *What Is Philosophy?* 9.
24. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 156–57.
23. Ibid., 156, translation modified.
24. Ibid., 157, translation modified. In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche considers the familiar example we have of becoming more reasonable, of "growing up." "Something that you formerly loved as a truth or probability," Nietzsche writes, "[now] strikes you as an error"; so you cast it off "and fancy that it represents a victory for your reason" (GS 307). But it is less a victory for reason, for *your* reason, than a shift in the relations among the drives. "Perhaps this error was as necessary for you then," Nietzsche continues, "when you were a different person—you are always a different person—as are all your present 'truths.' ... What killed that opinion for you was your new life [that is, a new drive] and not your reason: *you no longer need it*, and now it collapses and unreason crawls out of it into the light like a worm. When we criticize something, this is no arbitrary and impersonal event; it is, at least very often, evidence of vital energies in us that are growing and shedding a skin. We negate and must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm—something that we perhaps do not know or see as yet" (GS 307).
25. On this score, John Rajchman notes that Deleuze's "logic of multiplicities" must be contrasted with the logic of sets, and is therefore "prior" to "the logical connections of subject and predicate and the sets and functions that Gottlob Frege proposed to substitute for them." John Rajchman, "Introduction" to *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 11.
26. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, vii.
27. Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 31, translation modified.

28. On the question "What is . . .?" in Plato, see Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), esp. chapter 5, "Socratic Definition," 49–60.
29. Contemporary "antifoundationalism" implies, at the very least, the rejection of this Platonic form of questioning, of this search for a foundational essence. "I cannot characterize my standpoint better," wrote Wittgenstein, "than to say it is opposed to that which Socrates represents in the Platonic dialogues. For if asked what knowledge is (*Theatetus* 146a) I would list examples of knowledge, and add the words 'and the like'. . . whereas when Socrates asks the question 'What is knowledge?' he does not even regard it as a *preliminary* answer to enumerate cases of knowledge." Ludwig Wittgenstein, manuscript 302, §14, as quoted in Garth Hallett, *A Commentary to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 33–34; see also *Philosophical Investigations* §65. In general, however, Deleuze was hostile to Wittgenstein's philosophy, which he thought had had a pernicious effect on Anglo-American philosophy; see also the filmed discussion between Deleuze and Pierre-André Boutang, *Abécédaire*, "W as in Wittgenstein" (see note 9 above for the English translation).
30. Raymond Ballour nicely summarizes the tension inherent in Deleuze's analytic when he asks: "How can the concept be both what suspends, arrests, consists, and what flees, opens all lines of flight?" See Raymond Bellour, "Thinking, Recounting: The Cinema of Gilles Deleuze," trans. Melissa McMahon, in *Discourse* 20 (Fall 1998): 71.
31. *What is Philosophy?* 26. Paul Patton makes the comparison of Deleuzian concepts with hypertext documents in his review of *What is Philosophy?* in the *Times Literary Supplement* (23 June 1995): 10–12.
32. *What is Philosophy?* 32.
33. The following comments are taken from Deleuze's seminar of 15 April 1980, available on-line at http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=50&groupe=Leibniz&langue=2.
34. Spinoza, Letter 32, to Oldenburg, as cited in Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 87.
35. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 34 (= Notebook 38[1] = KSA 11:38[1]). See also Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 118: "It is not even clear that thought, in so far as it constitutes the dynamism peculiar to philosophical systems, may be related to a substantial, completed, and well-constituted subject, such as the Cartesian Cogito: thought is, rather, one of those terrible movements which can be sustained only under the conditions of a larval subject."
36. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983),105.
37. Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper, 1968), 64.

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