
Introduction

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It is customary to introduce a book of this sort by offering a brief overview of its essays and articles. I hope the reader will forgive me for straying from this convention – conventions being, after all, somewhat beside the point in a book about Deleuze. (A quick glance at each chapter’s opening will prove sufficient to glean its gist and will hopefully serve to pique your interest as well.) Instead, I want to provide an introduction which is, one might say, apologetic rather than synoptic. Specifically, I want to stumble in the general direction of explaining why I think this volume is relevant, timely, and at least marginally important. Why Deleuze? Why ethics? Why now, and why ought we to care?

Ten years into the Deleuzian century, and fifteen since *la mort de la même*, few would disagree that the world as we know it is sinking into an economic, political, social, and ethical abyss of previously unimaginable depths. Back in the halcyon days when that world was still in its infancy, Deleuze was widely heralded as a visionary who would help us demystify the web of global technological and financial networks which was, at that time, just starting to be spun. Since then, the prophecies have largely come to pass; everyone from Žižek to Badiou is fond of saying that the conceptual and methodological tools with which we make sense of this age are Deleuzian tools. But make sense *in what sense*? Even a cursory glance at the literature reveals that Deleuze has long been and continues to be viewed chiefly as a metaphysician and a historian of philosophy – that is, as an analyst, rather than a critic, of the systems by and through which we organize and are organized in turn. For many, therefore, the Deleuzian tool is a lens, not a hammer.

That lens is sharp, to be sure, and no one doubts that Deleuze (and Guattari) have made profound contributions as analysts. But some would argue that this is *all* they have done, or that this is *all* they ever aspired to do, or that this is *all* they were ever capable of doing – in

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other words, that the Deleuzian-Guattarian project is not, or never was, or never could be, *critical*, let alone *ethico-normative*, in nature. Our view, as evidenced by the very existence of this volume, is different. We contend that there *is* a deeply ethico-normative dimension to Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy but that it has tended to be ignored, overlooked, downplayed, and misunderstood in the literature. This book makes a preliminary contribution to the task of uncovering and elucidating that dimension, not only for the sake of enriching Deleuze-Guattari scholarship, but also in the hope of promoting a more engaged philosophical practice based in, and responding to, Deleuzian-Guattarian ethics.

In the aftermath of the notorious “Battle of Seattle” ten years ago, when “anti-globalization” was a new and meaningful addition to our vocabulary and phrases such as “Resistance is Global” and “Other Worlds Are Possible!” became the rallying cries of a nascent global justice movement, many looked to Deleuze (and Guattari) again – this time to make sense of what Girard might call globalization’s “monstrous double.” To many, Deleuze and Guattari were (and are) not only the theoretical voice of this movement, but its conscience as well. In defiant response to the TINA (“There is No Alternative”) doctrine of neoliberalism, Deleuze and Guattari offer a moral and political vision in which possibilities – multiplicities, differences, in short, *alternatives* – are infinitely augmented and expanded. Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy promised to be an anarchism for postmodernity.

Perhaps the global justice movement has not altogether failed, but it certainly has not come anywhere close to succeeding. Indeed, it is now buried so deeply underground that we are hard-pressed to recognize its contemporary relevance. The same is true, or so it is said, of Deleuze and Guattari with respect to moral and political concerns. Witness, again, the many critics who claim that Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy aspires, at best, to describe systems as they are and to enumerate the conditions of possibility for their transformation; or, at worst, adopts quietist or even collaborationist views towards the systems it exposes and, in all events, fails to take any firm position on how they “ought to be.” This is essentially the critique levelled by Boltanski and Chiapello, who argue that Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy is simply the most recent iteration of what they term “the spirit of capitalism,” the ideology which justifies and reinforces capitalist domination. (See Jeffrey Bell’s response on pp. 8–13.) Žižek, too, identifies a reactionary element in Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy while simultaneously acknowledging its important contributions to anti-capitalist resistance movements.

This bespeaks a troubled and conflicted philosophy which ultimately produces troubled and conflicted ideas.

At the same time, does it really come as a surprise that revolutionary Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy contains a lurking micro-fascism? After all, didn't Deleuze and Guattari warn that every avant-garde thought contains such a germinal possibility within itself? If so, Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy is no worse off than any of its peers and competitors. One might even argue that this is precisely what happened, in whole or in part, to the global justice movement itself – i.e., that a sizeable portion of it was captured by external reactionary forces and ultimately transformed and incorporated into said forces. The worry is that perhaps a similar fate has befallen Deleuzian-Guattarian philosophy. That with its arcane terminology and dense, complicated texts, it has become, at best, a harmless fetish of effete academics who use it to buttress their pseudo-radical posturing; at worst, a vanguardist discourse *par excellence* embodying the worst excesses of Marxist-Leninist technocracy. Twenty or thirty years ago, a kind of generic Derridean “deconstructo-speak” was the *lingua franca* of humanities departments throughout North America. This is slowly but surely being replaced (some would say already *has been* replaced) by a vulgar Deleuzian argot that is every bit as trite and pretentious as its predecessor. The crucial and tragic difference is that Derrida has never been championed as an intellectual hero of the radical Left to the same degree as Deleuze. The latter's thoughts have always tended to be seen, rightly or wrongly, as aligned with truly revolutionary possibilities and actions. For those who continue to share this vision, therefore, the academic domestication and fetishization of Deleuze (or, worse still, the accusation of Deleuzian-Guattarian vanguardism) is a cause of legitimate anxiety.

Fortunately Deleuze and Guattari themselves provide the critical apparatus necessary to carefully reflect on these issues, if not to altogether resolve them. Deleuze and Guattari, academics, intellectuals – all conceptual personae! They – *we* – play a role in the generation, operation, and transformation of other assemblages, other machines. The task, which is ultimately ethical in nature, is not to understand these things as they are but as they might be: the conditions of possibility for thinking, doing, and being otherwise. This, in turn, requires the radical pursuit of difference and the destabilization of identity. For every teacher, becoming-student! For every scholar, becoming-dilettante! For every beautiful soul, becoming-philistine! For every intellectual, becoming-dullard! And if you meet Deleuze and Guattari on the road, kill them! And though Deleuze and Guattari do not offer a “conventional”

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moral critique of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and other forms of oppression, this scarcely entails uncritical endorsement of or complicity with oppression. On the contrary, it is precisely by articulating ethics in terms of “lines of flight” – which are, *inter alia*, the conditions of possibility for revolutionary political, social, and economic transformation – that Deleuze and Guattari provide the grounds for a critique of capitalism that is arguably much more effective than anything on offer from traditional moral philosophy.

Perhaps the most tragic and frightening aspect of contemporary life is its systemic lack of imagination – the hopeless acquiescence of the powerless to those in power, coupled with the latter’s insistence that everything is the way it is because, in some sense, it could not be otherwise. For Deleuze and Guattari, the ethical question isn’t “What ought we to do?” but “What might we do?” or “What could we do?” The reason that we are living in decidedly evil times isn’t just that people aren’t asking the ethical question, but that they are routinely denied the ability to ask it or, worse, are placed in situations where the desire to ask it never emerges on its own. I think this volume will show that Deleuze and Guattari have much to say on the issue of ethics, and will have much to say in the future if given adequate opportunity. In order for their words to be even slightly helpful, however, we need to avoid relegating Deleuze and Guattari to the academic ghetto and reducing them to the playthings of professional wordsmiths. We must not ask, “What do Deleuze and Guattari say?” or even “What ought Deleuze and Guattari say?” but “What *could* Deleuze and Guattari say?”