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# INTO THE ABYSS: DELEUZE

*Alistair Welchman*

## Introduction

Gilles Deleuze was born in 1925, and killed himself seventy years later. He taught philosophy at Lyon, and then – after the institutional fragmentation that was the government’s response to the student-driven quasi-revolution of 1968 – at the University of Paris VIII (Vincennes). Although his work is only now coming to prominence in the English-speaking world, he has achieved great notoriety in France: he is widely credited with inaugurating the post-structuralist movement with his 1962 *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, as well as with providing its definitive text, the 1972 *Anti-Oedipus* (co-written with Félix Guattari). His colleague and friend, Michel Foucault, has even suggested that ‘perhaps one day this century will be known as Deleuzian’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 165).

Deleuze’s written output can be untidily but functionally divided into three periods: first, an early phase (up to the late 1960s) of scholarly works that examine individual philosophers (Hume, Bergson, Kant, Nietzsche and Spinoza); second, a short middle period of two books – *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition* – published in the late 1960s and in which he achieved a genuine independence of thought and no longer expressed himself vicariously through commentary on other philosophers; and third, a late period, characterised by a collaborative writing technique, the most famous product of which is the two-volume *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

This taxonomy is untidy because Deleuze’s

breadth of interest and reference cannot be contained within a purely philosophical lexicon. In particular, he was a writer of unusual aesthetic sensitivity, and his work, across all the three time-periods, is strewn with texts concerning literature, art and film: a book on Proust written in the 1960s, but reworked several times; one on Kafka written between the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; a book on the Anglo-Irish painter Francis Bacon; and a two-volume interpretation of cinema. Moreover, there are late-period books written with Guattari that hark back to the more decorous style of the scholarly monographs (the reflective *What is Philosophy?* of 1991), and, in fact, the scholarly works themselves never really stopped: Deleuze published studies on Leibniz and Foucault as late as the 1980s. The groupings retain however a heuristic validity for a philosophical approach to Deleuze’s thought.

## The transcendental

A number of twentieth-century French thinkers have entertained unusually close intellectual relations with a prior German thinker; and Deleuze too can be helpfully considered to have such a special relationship, in his case with Kant. Even though he described his monograph on Kant as ‘a book on an enemy’ (Cressole, 1973, p. 110), Deleuze’s thought can nevertheless be, at least in a provisional way, helpfully represented as a kind of Kantianism.

Deleuze’s relation to Kant is ambivalent because Kant represented both what Deleuze most liked

about philosophy, as well as what he most disliked about it. He appreciates Kant's critical orientation, the fact that he did not merely assume things as given, but rather attempted to find out how they are produced. For Deleuze, Kant's discovery of the philosophical plane of the transcendental was foremost amongst his achievements. The transcendental enabled Kant to occupy a philosophical position outside of the dogmatic philosophies of his day – psychological empiricism and theological rationalism – and thereby to subject them to critique, bringing into question both a dogmatic faith in reason, God and logic (theological rationalism) *and* the equally dogmatic assumption that what is given directly in conscious human experience is the immutable baseline of philosophical inquiry (psychological empiricism).

However, Deleuze disliked the fact that Kant ends up defending (at a new and more complicated level) the very same dogmas he had set out to critique. In the case of rationalism, the avowed intent of Kant's works is to provide a more compelling legitimation for God and the immortal soul. In the case of empiricism, it is not so obvious, but Deleuze argues that Kant 'traces the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of a psychological consciousness' (Deleuze, 1968, p. 135) and therefore reproduces the unities of subject and object given in empirical consciousness (albeit at another level of complication).

According to Deleuze, the transcendental demands a way of thinking that is not modelled on the empirical (which is taken for granted or understood merely through common sense), but rather a way of thinking that subjects the limitations, illusions and complacencies of common sense to critique, attempting to find the conditions of production for what is usually simply taken as given. This critical motif of production pervades Deleuze's thought so that even at the end of his career he was able to define philosophy as 'the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts' (Deleuze, 1991, p. 2); philosophy for Deleuze must at all costs avoid the obvious, the banalities of common sense.

This means first of all that Deleuze refuses all ways of thinking still lodged in subjectivity or the cate-

gories of consciousness. Drawing upon Bergson's criticism of the possible as merely the shadow of the actual (see Deleuze, 1966), he sees all such phenomenologies as just sophistications of Kant's tendency to trace the transcendental from empirical psychology. Deleuze often repeats the slogan that the transcendental conditions of everyday experience, the conditions of its production, cannot resemble the everyday experience they produce: 'The mistake of all determinations of the transcendental as consciousness is to think of the transcendental as the image of, as resembling, what it is supposed to ground' (Deleuze, 1969, p. 105).

The critical and productive bite of this argument – that the transcendental does not resemble the empirical – is rather sharper than its bald statement might lead one to believe. It is a very radical thought. The empirical realm that Kant sought to underwrite is not only constituted by the stable psychological subjectivity of personal identity but also by a reflected world of individuated stable objects which is both grasped and made possible through the application of concepts or general terms. It follows that the transcendental, if it is to be thought of as properly distinct from the empirical, cannot be composed of individuals (stable individuated objects), nor of persons (subjective unities mirroring the stability of the world of objects) nor of categorical concepts (ensuring smooth transition between stable subjects and the world of stable objects). The transcendental must, therefore, be 'essentially pre-individual, non-personal and a-conceptual' (*ibid.*, p. 52).

Deleuze's philosophical prime directive is to avoid the vulgarity and hubris of assuming that the cosmos is made in our own image, that it is in any way intended for us, or that we occupy a privileged position within it. The idea of the transcendental responds to this injunction, because, for Deleuze, the transcendental must not resemble what it conditions. Starting from what is most familiar therefore – consciousness and a world constituted in accordance with consciousness – Deleuze does not follow the reassuring parallels between transcendental and empirical along which we are guided by Kant and phenomenology, but instead journeys into the unknown.

**Disjunction**

The above formulation of the transcendental is, however, merely negative: *pre-individual*, *non-personal* and *a-conceptual*. A positive thought consonant with Deleuze's intellectual demands is required. In the *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze outlines a first attempt at providing such a positive understanding. The book is organised by a three-way distinction. He starts by introducing a term to describe the false dichotomy whose rejection will open the space for his third term. He calls such false dichotomies 'exclusive disjunctions': they are demands of common sense that present us with pre-given alternatives from which to choose: *either* this *or* that. One compelling instance of an exclusive disjunction is between *either* pure chaos *or* an agent that organises chaos from on high or transcendently:

What is common to metaphysics and to transcendental philosophy is, above all, the alternative that they impose on us: *either* an undifferentiated ground, a groundlessness, formless non-being, an abyss without differences and without properties – *or* a supremely individuated Being, an intensely personalised Form. Without this Being or this Form, you'll only have chaos. (Deleuze, 1969, pp. 105–6)

Deleuze often presents this alternative in spatial terms: *either* a bottomless depth of chaos *or* an agent of order coming from on high. This false demand is as much political as it is epistemological: there must be order, otherwise we will all be in the abyss. At this point in his career, Deleuze's way out of this disjunction is to negotiate *between* the heights and the depths, along the surface. In other words, he rejects the opposition, and attempts to find another term hidden by the exclusive nature of the terms. He writes:

The transcendental field is no more individual than personal – and no more general than universal. Is this to say that it is a groundlessness with neither shape nor difference, a schizophrenic abyss? Everything suggests not. (*ibid.*, p. 99)

The surface Deleuze discovers operating between the false opposition of pure chaos and pure organisation is

the surface of sense. The vocabulary of surfaces had been a popular trope for many in the structural movement, and at this point, therefore, he finds a sort of *rapprochement* with structuralism. But even here – where he might be most easily mistaken for a follower of Parisian intellectual fashion – he still manifests considerable conceptual originality: the 'structures' that he alludes to owe as much to a reading of Russell's paradoxes, the playfulness of Lewis Carroll and the pre-Socratics as they do to the more canonical structural analyses of Lévi-Strauss.

In fact, even within the French academic matrix, Deleuze's thought of the schizoid abyss signals a close alliance with one of the more deviant avatars of structuralism: Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan – and Melanie Klein, who was a major influence on him – enabled Deleuze to add a highly suggestive genetic or historical dimension often absent from the more dominant forms of structuralism itself. The schizophrenic abyss corresponds to Klein's analysis of the first stage of pre-Oedipal sexuality during which the child makes no distinction between itself and the world, and inhabits a domain constituted only by partial and not completed objects. Furthermore, Deleuze conceives of the transcendent heights as depressive, in accordance with Klein's second stage, during which the child first encounters a completed object (the mother's breast). The three-way distinction proposed by Deleuze distinguishes between transcendent agents of organisation (associated philosophically with Plato and Kant, spatially with height and psychoanalytically with depression); chaos (associated philosophically with the Pre-Socratics, Schelling and Schopenhauer, spatially with depth and psychoanalytically with schizophrenia); and Deleuze's new concept of sense (associated philosophically with the Stoics, spatially with the surface and psychoanalytically with perversion).

Deleuze's first positive answer to the question 'What is the transcendental field?' is therefore pre-emptive. Simply because this field is pre-individual, non-personal and a-conceptual, and simply because one rejects the domination of a transcendent Platonic form or a Kantian transcendental category of consciousness, does not mean that all that is left is the schizoid abyss. There is another alternative: the surface on which sense develops autonomously.

It must be added that Deleuze evinces here some fear of this abyss. He argues for instance, that:

sense itself [has] a fragility that can make it topple over into non-sense, the relations of the logical proposition risk losing all measure, signification, manifestation and designation risk sinking into the undifferentiated abyss of a groundlessness that entails only the pulsation of a monstrous body. This is why, beyond the tertiary order of the proposition and even beyond the secondary order of sense, we anticipate a terrible primary order wherein language as a whole becomes enfolded. (ibid., p. 120)

This is somewhat ironic because Deleuze's later development, and especially his work with Guattari (as the title *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* obviously suggests), might easily be described as a fall into precisely this schizophrenic abyss of primary libidinal process.

Like Quine, Deleuze thinks of logical operations – connection, conjunction and, here, disjunction – as synthetic or productive. However, he thinks they can be used in two ways. Exclusive disjunction (as we have seen) is his name for the uncritical use of disjunction: it presupposes a grid of dogmatically-asserted options that exhaust the entire field of possibilities, *either this or that*. On the other hand, he defines the critical operation of disjunction as *inclusive*: it affirms precisely the distance that separates the incompatible.

In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze rejects the exclusive disjunction between chaos and organisation, but only by positing a third option that is itself exclusive: *either* (chaos) . . . *or* (transcendent organisation) . . . *or* (sense). It is not clear that this escapes fully from the logic of exclusion that he is criticising. Indeed, his later works suggest a different solution, a fully-inclusive disjunction of chaos and organisation in which chaos composes its own organisation.

This may look like the very abyss that Deleuze (as well as Plato and Kant) wanted at all costs to avoid falling into; but it is not. His second solution involves completely rethinking chaos, so that it can be seen as something other than merely an intellectual and political threat legitimating a perpetual law-and-order crackdown. In a sense, his later

works fall into the trap of the abyss that he so carefully avoids here; but it turns out not to be a trap at all. Thus, by the time of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, we see that all the productive machinery that had, in *The Logic of Sense*, been associated with the third option of sense's surface – most notably the three productive syntheses – has migrated into the schizophrenic abyss itself. His point now is that the abyss – still impersonal and pre-individual – is not undifferentiated, but is itself a productive power; and agents of transcendent organisation are strictly redundant.

This new move is not entirely absent from *The Logic of Sense*. Deleuze acknowledged that sense has two separate origins: one – 'passive' (ibid., p. 117) or 'static genesis' (ibid., p. 109ff) – arising from a 'quasi-cause' (ibid., 94) operating on the same incorporeal level as sense itself; but the other – 'dynamic genesis' (ibid., p. 186ff) – being in the abyss itself. Deleuze's temporary alliance with psychoanalysis allows him, even at this stage, to contemplate, at the end of *The Logic of Sense*, a genetic or developmental account of the emergence of sense out of the abyss. This analysis of the dynamic genesis of sense therefore announces what was to become the central motif of his later work: the self-organisation of the chaotic abyss.

### Unilateral distinction

A notably less hostile characterisation of chaos is, in fact, presented in Deleuze's 1968 book, *Difference and Repetition*. There Deleuze thinks of chaos not as the undifferentiated, but as difference in itself. He is attracted to the ideas of difference and repetition because they have, in the history of philosophy, always been subordinated to identity, and have never actually been thought through themselves. Specific difference in Aristotle, for instance, works only in the service of the identity of the species thus differentiated, while repetition is merely the condition for the recognition of identity. Working through the ideas of difference and repetition in their own right reveals them, in fact, to be extremely subversive.

Difference is subordinated to identity when it remains dogmatically empirical or extrinsic; that is, when it is thought of as the difference *between*

two already constituted things. What, then, is the idea of difference as such, difference that does not distinguish anything, that is not just between other things? The first answer that Deleuze gives is that it is repetition, but a repetition peculiar to the existence of the object in intuition prior to conceptualisation:

Repetition appears as difference without a concept, repetition which indefinitely escapes continued conceptual difference. It expresses a power peculiar to the existent, a stubbornness of the existent in intuition which resists specification by concepts no matter how far it is taken. (Deleuze, 1968, pp. 13–14)

When something is repeated, there are clearly two things, and therefore a difference; but since *the same thing* is repeated, and since, by definition, two instances of the same thing share the same conceptual determination, then it follows that no possible conceptual specification can reach down into that difference. There is something going on in reality that conceptual grids cannot capture, 'the net is so loose that the largest fish pass through' (ibid., p. 68). In this definition, however, although difference and repetition begin to contest the dominance of identity, and although they thereby begin to open up a transcendental field that is not only traced from the empirical, they still nevertheless presuppose identity: *the same thing* is at issue.

Deleuze's next move is to suppose 'something that distinguishes itself – and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it' (ibid., p. 28). He goes on to define this as 'unilateral distinction'. One of its most important uses is to specify the relation between a rigorously thought-out transcendental ground and what it grounds. He goes on to say: '[the ground] is there, staring at us, but without eyes. The individual distinguishes itself from it, but it does not distinguish itself, continuing rather to cohabit with that which divorces itself from it' (ibid., p. 152). The idea is structurally similar to the earlier argument that difference is repetition, but without the identity conditions. One might think about it in terms of 'points of view' (although this would only be a way of talking; there could be nothing subjective about it). From the point of view of the ground, what it

grounds is only the ground repeating itself; it is only from the point of view of the grounded that the ground is differentiated from it. The ground is, in a sense, indifferent to what happens to it. But, as Deleuze argues, indifference has two faces:

the undifferentiated abyss, the black nothing, the indeterminate animal in which everything is dissolved – but also the white nothingness, the once more calm surface upon which float unconnected determinations like scattered members: a head without a neck, an arm without a shoulder, eyes without brows. (ibid., p. 28)

An example might be this: humanity has traditionally tried to differentiate itself specifically from the rest of nature (as having a soul, a mind, being capable of language, of culture, etc.). But from the point of view of nature, humanity is just another part of nature. The important thing is that, when the grounded differentiates itself, it does so empirically, using an extrinsic concept of difference; but the ground itself is difference itself, intrinsic or intensive difference. Deleuze is now not afraid of naming this ground of difference, chaos, or the 'chaosmos' (ibid., p. 299). Unilateral difference completes his thought of the inclusive disjunction of chaos and its immanent organisation.

### Desiring-production

With the publication in 1972 of the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus*, all hesitations on Deleuze's part – hesitations, as it were, on the edge of the abyss – were swept aside. He no longer worked alone, but in collaboration with the radical psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. He had already observed in *The Logic of Sense* that 'it takes two to be mad, you're always mad when there's two of you' (Deleuze, 1969, p. 79); and it is certainly true for Deleuze and Guattari: their collectively authored texts, although still absolutely philosophically rigorous, could no longer be read as simply intellectual works, even in the broader sense that 'intellectual' has in France. *Anti-Oedipus* succeeded in doing the impossible – profoundly shocking a French intellectual audience who, since 1945 at least, had positively thrived on maximally unorthodox works of concep-

tual *brío*. There is something to offend everyone in *Anti-Oedipus*: Freudians are the object of a massive and scornful polemic, but Marxists get hardly less aggressive treatment; phenomenology is abused and then ignored; and structuralism is equated with despotism. Its style is intensive, inspired and irresponsible, observing no academic speed limits or disciplinary territories.

There are many ways to approach *Anti-Oedipus*: as a sustained and often vitriolic attack on psychoanalysis; as the accomplishment of the Marx-Freud synthesis that had been the elusive goal of radical intellectuals in both France and Germany for half a century; as a critique of the concept of ideology; as a universal history; as a novel account of capitalism; as a polemic against the role of French Communist party in the events of May 1968; or even as a highly original intervention in contemporary biology. However, it remains, above all, a powerful work of philosophy. For Deleuze and Guattari, a detailed critique of real social practices – an account of their mode of production – could only be organised with newly-constructed concepts. The philosophical task of *Anti-Oedipus* is the construction of just these new concepts, and, once again, this philosophical base is Kantian in orientation. Deleuze and Guattari explained themselves thus:

We make use of Kantian terminology for a simple reason. In what he termed the critical revolution, Kant intended to discover criteria immanent to understanding so as to distinguish the legitimate and the illegitimate uses of the synthesis of consciousness. In the name of *transcendental* philosophy (immanence of criteria), he therefore denounced the transcendent use of synthesis such as appeared in metaphysics. In like fashion we are compelled to say that psychoanalysis has its metaphysics – its name is Oedipus. And that a revolution – this time materialist – can proceed only by way of a critique of Oedipus, by denouncing the illegitimate use of the syntheses of the unconscious as found in Oedipal psychoanalysis, so as to rediscover a transcendental unconscious defined by the immanence of its criteria, and a corresponding practice that we shall call schizoanalysis. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p. 75)

The basic point of *Anti-Oedipus* – and one that marks a conceptual as well as a political advance on his earlier work – is that social production is the direct result of an *illegitimate use* of the syntheses of the transcendental unconscious. Social production is the production, consumption, distribution and allocation of stable commodity-objects to secured subjects; that is, what Deleuze had previously called the empirical, but now with greater attention paid to its politically repressive characteristics. This marks an advance because the transcendental is no longer thought of as simply the way the empirical is produced, but as a critique that attacks the empirical as a paralogism, a transcendental illusion. One of the most compelling results of this extreme form of critique is that it gives Deleuze's philosophical concepts serious political weight.

True to the attempt to synthesise Marx (production) and Freud (desire), one of the most important terms in *Anti-Oedipus* is **desiring-production**. Desiring-production is not merely an amalgam of the Freudian desire and Marxist production (Deleuze and Guattari often polemic against such anaemic strategies for erecting a Marx-Freud parallel); it is also the result of rigorous critique of both desire and production.

Freud and Marx acquired the crucial thoughts of (respectively) desire and production from the margins of traditional philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari argued that the canonical approaches to both desire and production have been uncritically dogmatic and idealist. Desire has been thought of as fundamentally organised around the notion of lack: to desire something, you must lack it (see, for a canonical instance, Plato's *Symposium* 200a ff.). Equally, production has been thought of as basically transitive, involving agents of production, a raw material upon which they operate, and with an end product separate from the process of production itself.

The division of desire and production into a subject and an object separates both desire from production, and also desiring-production from what it can do. This analysis is structurally similar to Deleuze's earlier account of Nietzsche's argument that active force is separated from what it can do by the reactive forces of monotheistic religion (Deleuze, 1962, p. 57). Again following Nietzsche's



thought quite closely (see *ibid.*, pp. 55f.), Deleuze suggests that the separation is predicated on the intervention of a certain idealism. The distinction between the psychic presence of the object of desire and its real absence bifurcates the world along the same fissure as Christian otherworldliness; and the condensation of spontaneity into a unique agent of production allocates efficacy to subjectivity, purging matter of its activity. But Deleuze is not now merely concerned to show how this separation is produced, but also to show that it is produced *illegitimately*, on the basis of a paralogistic use of desiring-production.

Desiring-production is therefore a philosophically critical (intransitive), and hence materialist, use of desire and production; but it also serves to integrate the apparently incompatible terms used by Marx and Freud, and the philosophical argument is thereby actualised into a political one.

For Marx, the production processes of political economy are absolutely basic: desire can be acknowledged only as a secondary formation at the level of superstructure, not as base. His attempt to locate desire exclusively in the superstructure leads directly to a dualism, and hence to idealism. The major problem for Marxists in the twentieth century has been to explain how capital has succeeded in warding off proletarian revolution when, in Weimar Germany, for example, all the 'objective' conditions pointed towards it. Because desire cannot play a role in base-level explanation, the result has been widespread use of a concept of ideology that is not directly determined by the economic base (having instead a 'relative autonomy'). The masses are duped into misrecognising their 'objective' revolutionary situation by essentially ideal means; that is, ideas disconnected from the base, and therefore forming a dualism.

Inversely, for Freud, desire is the primary process, and can therefore only make mediated contact with the production of social and historical reality. Psychoanalytic desire is not completely removed from production, but where it is productive it is purely ideal, producing only fantasy and not reality, and in particular, producing only the family romances whose structure is most clearly revealed in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King*. Desire can only be displaced from its original objects (mummy and daddy) by means of sublimation; social, historical,

economic and political production is never a part of the libidinal base: there is always, according to the generalised reductionism of psychoanalysis, a daddy lurking underneath the foreman, the general, the political leader or the priest.

Deleuze and Guattari are particularly critical of psychoanalysis's treatment of schizophrenia. Delirium is, in contrast to neurotic obsessions, characteristically very heavily invested in social and historical reality. For psychoanalysis, however, the essential property of delirium is precisely the loss of reality. *Anti-Oedipus* argues that this is because the familial content of the neuroses is the only reality that psychoanalysis is prepared to acknowledge.

Desiring-production shows that desire itself is deliriously productive, directly investing social and historical reality with charges of libido, and, at the same time, shows that the productive base is itself suffused with desire. Desire is unconscious, prior to the constitution of discrete subjects and objects of desire; but it is not a stage on which a Greek drama is endlessly replayed, it is a productive factory machining reality.

Desiring-production is the libidinally-active critical philosophical and political base of *Anti-Oedipus*. It operates through legitimate use of the syntheses of production (inherited from the architectonic of *The Logic of Sense*), and represents a refinement of Deleuze's general strategy of accessing a genuine materialist transcendental; in this case, the transcendental unconscious as 'universal primary production' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p. 5). Its scope is, however, much wider than either Freud or Marx's terms, indeed it precedes (and succeeds) social production, and thereby human culture, as a whole. They describe It (the French, *le Ça*, translating Freud's term *das Es*, usually rendered as Id) like this in the opening passage of *Anti-Oedipus*:

It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts. It breathes, It heats, It eats. It shits and fucks. What a mistake ever to have said *the It*. Everywhere *It* is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. (*ibid.*, p. 1)

The key to *Anti-Oedipus* is that social production is an illegitimate use of the productive syntheses; that is to say, the repression of desiring-production. At its most philosophical level, Deleuze and Guattari's definition of illegitimacy is Kantian: a synthesis is used illegitimately if the criteria for its application are transcendent. This is actually a familiar Deleuzian argument. Criteria are transcendent when the use of a synthesis of production presupposes other unproduced (and therefore merely given) products. The connective synthesis of desiring-production, for example, is thought illegitimate when a pre-given ego, determined with respect to sex, generation and vital state, is connected with a unified object of desire.

But again, this philosophical argument is actualised into a socio-political argument, one grounded in a Marxist account of exploitation. Marx's argument, very briefly, is that human labour is always what is actually productive, but that, under certain historical conditions, accumulations of dead labour-power (capital), appear – through a kind of transcendental illusion – to take on an autonomous productive capacity. Deleuze and Guattari's argument is, as noted above, wider than Marx's, but it shares the same structure. Under certain conditions (those of social history in general), the auto-productive regime of desiring-production (analogous to labour) generates a moment of anti-production (analogous to capital) on which the productive forces fall back, and which therefore appears to appropriate production to itself (see, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 9–16). Social production represents an illegitimate use of the syntheses because it always presupposes and represses the prior activity of desiring-production.

Illegitimate use of the syntheses is therefore not only a philosophical problem, but also a real social one; and, correlatively, critique is not just an intellectual process, but a revolutionary social process. In general, *Anti-Oedipus* shows that the primary function of the social 'has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channelled, regulated' (*ibid.*, 1972, p. 33). Damming up the flow represses the transcendental unconscious, and institutes the breaks in

desiring-production that constitute global persons, subjects, objects and statistical entities as such. The philosophical problem of *Anti-Oedipus* is: how this can come about *from* desiring-production; that is, how can desiring-production desire its own repression? However, this philosophical problem is also a directly political problem: how does desire desire its own repression? or, in Spinoza's formulation, much favoured by Deleuze and Guattari: "Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Desiring-production is auto-production, it produces its own condition and conditions of reproduction, but it is also auto-repressive. It produces its own condition or whole as what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the body without organs'. This difficult term (taken from Artaud) represents a moment of anti-production within production itself. Although it is strictly immanent, produced as just another part alongside all the other parts of production, it nevertheless momentarily suppresses the production process and constitutes a primary repression within which the productive forces are redistributed. Primary repression makes it possible for aggregates of desiring-production to break off from primary production and constitute secondary production. Secondary or social production substitutes a *socius* (like the body of capital) for the body without organs that appropriates social production so that it (rather than desiring-production) appears to be the motor of social activity. This enables Deleuze and Guattari to maintain a conflictual monism; that is, to respond to the existence of social and psychic conflict without lapsing – like Marx and Freud – into dualism or idealism.

Desire is therefore able, under certain conditions, to invest both the aggregates of social production (Deleuze and Guattari call such aggregates of desire *molar*) and desiring-production itself (at a level they call *molecular*). Investment in desiring-production is revolutionary; desiring-production is revolution. If social production in general codes the flows of desire and represses primary production, then social history is driven by a kind of return of the repressed, the explosion of revolutionary desiring-production back into the social. This is particularly clear in their account of capitalism, which, uniquely among social

systems, is not predicated on a coding of flows, but on a massive decoding. Capitalism does to stable sociality what critique does to stable (dogmatic) conceptuality: it systematically eradicates. (This is not to say that capitalism is not repressive; in fact, the endemic instability of its decoding, its relative proximity to desiring-production as the limit of all social production, makes its repressive mechanisms all the more intense.) Nevertheless, the decoding functions of capital are the social conditions for the production of *Anti-Oedipus* as a critical machine.

Investment in the molar aggregates of social production is reactionary, constituting and defending stable units or territories of desire, but revolution is always virtually present because the stable aggregates of territorial desire are directly composed out of the deterritorialising flows of desiring-production that territories repress. It is nevertheless always fragile because desiring-production is at the limit of social production as a whole, breaking down all forms of social coding and precipitating society into the schizophrenic abyss: revolution is incapable of being institutionalised.

Deleuze and Guattari are, in this respect, extremely critical of the rôle of the French Communist Party (PCF) in the events of May 1968. Taken entirely by surprise by the spontaneous nature of the coalition between students and workers, the PCF revealed its deeply reactionary belief that it was the only group with the right to revolution, and eventually sided with de Gaulle. The conscious investments of the PCF, operating at the level of the social, may have been revolutionary; but at the unconscious level they were still heavily and reactionarily invested in the social as such (overthrowing the state maybe, but to replace it with another state equally coding the flows of desiring-production). Deleuze and Guattari were the first to take seriously the new social movements that emerged out of 1968, and *Anti-Oedipus* still stands as one of the most sustained philosophical responses to them.

### A new materialism

*Anti-Oedipus* enjoyed some success in France (albeit mostly a *succès de scandale*), but the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *A Thousand Plateaus*

was greeted with a more muted reception. It is easy to see why; it is an extremely odd text. While *Anti-Oedipus* was doubtless unusual, its main intellectual co-ordinates were nevertheless familiar (Marx, Freud, Kant), even if Deleuze and Guattari's orientation towards them was largely critical. Its range of reference was also unusually broad, but it had systematic pretensions – undertaking a 'universal history' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, p. 139) – and it had, in Kant, a philosophical backbone, even if its use of him was supple and eccentric. None of this is true of *A Thousand Plateaus*. It has no particularly privileged intellectual point of orientation, it takes materials from anywhere it can get them (philosophers are mentioned, of course, but in the same breath as novelists, fictional characters, scientists or itinerant journeymen) and it has no unilinear development, in fact, no development at all. Several terms from *Anti-Oedipus* find their way into *A Thousand Plateaus*, less on the basis of continuity than because *Anti-Oedipus* was just another source of material.

Deleuze himself describes the difference between the two books by saying that *Anti-Oedipus* was concerned with 'a familiar, recognised domain: the unconscious . . . Whereas *A Thousand Plateaus* is more complicated because it tries to invent its domains.' (Deleuze, 1980b, p. 99). Part of the difficulty of *A Thousand Plateaus* comes from the seriousness with which Deleuze and Guattari put these new domains into effect within the book itself. For example, a critical stance towards the notion of authorship has become common in post-structuralist writing, but *A Thousand Plateaus* is unique in effecting this thought, right from the outset:

A book has neither subject nor object; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate a beneficent God to explain geological movements. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 3)

This geological account of construction – which, like the machines of *Anti-Oedipus*, is to be taken literally and not as any kind of literary trope – also determines

the infrastructure of the text. It is not divided into chapters but into plateaus.

The term 'plateau' is imported from Gregory Bateson's study of Balinese culture and attests to the strength with which Deleuze and Guattari resist any Enlightenment progressivism, even in the construction of a book. Bateson detects a profoundly non-Western approach to conflict resolution amongst the Balinese, in which conflict traverses a series of flat plateau states rather than precipitating an explosive release of charge. The idea is clearly relevant for an understanding of a non-Western erotics that is diffuse rather than centred around orgasm. For Deleuze and Guattari, however, the term also resonates with their profoundly unteleological geologism in which organisation – in its widest possible extension – is composed of strata, plateaus and their complex topological interactions. This complexity leads them to suggest that the plateaus need not be read in any particular order (*ibid.*, p. 1).

Production was always a persistent problematic for Deleuze since his very earliest works. One might say that his major objection was to the paucity of productive schemas within standard philosophy and science. Either things are caused mechanically, or, if they are obviously too complex for that, then a form (for example, a beneficent God) is imposed upon a passive material substrate from outside. The imposition of form from outside is a major target of *A Thousand Plateaus*, and Deleuze and Guattari's response to it is elaborated most carefully in the plateau that takes up the question of geology most explicitly: 'The Geology of Morals'. This plateau represents the culmination of a trajectory in Deleuze's thought towards increasing the scope of the material base. In the middle-period works, dynamic genesis was mainly concerned with a psychoanalytical story of the emergence of organisation out of chaos. One of the main polemical points of *Anti-Oedipus* was to show that desire invests history, and therefore to give an historical account of the emergence of organisation. In *A Thousand Plateaus* the stakes are raised again, and 'the Geology of Morals' attempts an account of organisation that spans geological timescales. The plateau takes the form of a lecture, borrowing from and amalgamating H.P. Lovecraft and Conan Doyle's *Challenger* stories.

Professor Challenger argues that almost everything is actually too complex for the matter-form distinction to gain purchase. He proposes to replace it with a matrix of four (or five) terms: content/expression and form/substance (the fifth would be matter-flow underlying the other four, and out of which they emerge). Content/expression cannot be reduced to matter/form (or, indeed, to signified/signifier) because each of them has both form and substance (*ibid.*, p. 43). Moreover, content and expression are mutually irreducible and entertain no relations of representation or resemblance.

In the abstract, this terminological proliferation can seem like a baroque fiat (although the five-part matrix is, in fact, only the beginning of the proliferations on this plateau), but, outside philosophy, we are actually quite used to thinking like this. Professor Challenger gives a lucid instance of the operation of the matrix from cellular biology: organisms are composed of proteins (form of content) that are themselves composed of chains of amino acids (substance of content); but both of these are produced and reproduced by a completely different set of biomolecules, nucleic acids (DNA and RNA as forms of expression) which are themselves composed of already complicated components, nucleotides (substances of expression) that are different in nature from the amino acid substances of content. Expression (nucleotides and nucleic acid sequences) does not *form* or *resemble* content (proteins and amino acids) because they share nothing in common. Instead they enter into 'a state of unstable equilibrium, . . . reciprocal presupposition' (*ibid.*, p. 67) or feedback: at the molecular level, expression codes for content; but natural selection causes content at the level of molar population aggregates to recode expression. The mutual conditioning or double articulation of expression and content permits the formation of what Professor Challenger (as well as Deleuze and Guattari) call a stratum, a thickening of the matter-flow. Although, especially when talking about philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari do betray a certain preference for intuitions over concepts, this in no way entails a reluctance to engage in abstraction (or, for that matter, a predilection for the immediacy of human experience). In fact, they often critique the failure to abstract. 'Our criticism

of . . . linguistic models is not that they are too abstract, but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough' (ibid., p. 7). Linguistics is formalist but not abstract because it restricts its attention (as a condition of its constitution as a science) precisely to language, thereby ignoring or sidelining the informal or pragmatic aspects of language that make it mesh with systems of power (prescriptive laws of grammar, for instance, determine standard speakers and distribute dialects on the basis of a putative major language). Abstraction is pragmatics. Deleuze and Guattari call their mode of abstraction **machinic** in order to differentiate it from formalist, or merely conceptual, abstraction.

The above account of the five-fold matrix functions as an abstract machine for building strata, and, as such, it is capable of being implemented in a diverse range of concrete assemblages. Again, in plateau three (ibid., pp. 66–7), Professor Challenger demonstrates a completely different, social rather than cellular, implementation of the same five-way abstract machine, by way of a compelling reading of Foucault. In his history of the development of the prison system, Foucault makes a clear distinction between content and expression (as well as between form and substance). The form of content of the prison system is panoptic, involving a generalisable disciplinary function of control through a visual system in which the viewer can see but cannot be seen. The function is generalisable because it can be instantiated in a number of institutions other than prisons (hospitals, barracks, classrooms and, today, the increasing use of CCTV to police public spaces). The form of expression, however, does not have to do directly with the prison at all (it is certainly not a set of statements purporting to be *about* prisons). It concerns, rather, the development of a new concept of *delinquency* operating on a juridical substance of discursive sub-units concerning criminal infractions, etc (Foucault, 1975, pp. 255ff.). Expression does not represent content, but the two are mutually presupposing. It goes without saying that the same abstract machine is also effectuated in the production of sedimentary rocks. The social stratum whose formation Foucault analyses *really* is a stratum; that is to say, it is effected by the same machine.

Panopticism is extremely important for *A Thou-*

*sand Plateaus* in that it bears a close similarity to what Deleuze and Guattari call arborescence (tree-likeness). Both involve closing off lateral communications, and forcing contact to be mediated by a central authority. The architectural structure of Jeremy Bentham's original design for the Panopticon (and most prisons) involved the partitioning of inmates into closed cells that offered no opportunity for contact between neighbours. All communication must be mediated by a prison officer. Similarly, the structure of most bureaucratic organisations (until the 1980s at least) was modelled on that of an (inverted) tree, with inferiors reporting to superiors and not to other occupants of their level. Arborescent hierarchy is a common feature of stratic organisation. But the machinic assemblage that effects stratification 'faces the strata' only on one side, 'on the other side it faces something else, the body without organs or plane of consistency' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, p. 40). This is to say that there is something else besides the strata, arborescence, generalised panopticism and closed hierarchy: there is the matter-flow which is not arborescent but rhizomatic. Technically, a rhizome is a plant of the tuber or bulb type that reproduces by sending out shoots that consolidate into a new plant. Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term is considerably wider. The essential point of contrast with arborescence is, however, relatively simple: rhizomes exhibit lateral connectivity. Prisoners, for instance, are engaged in destratification with a rhizomatic tendency when they use the water-pipes between cells as a means of communication. Similarly, the genealogical tree of evolution becomes a rhizome when viruses transplant genetic codes between disparate terminal leaves of the tree, and evolutionary cousins (who are supposed to be related only by a common ancestor located higher up the tree) become, instead, directly connected. Because the strata are only thickenings of the matter-flow, they are always apt to become rhizomes, to destratify or (in the vocabulary of *Anti-Oedipus*) to deterritorialise.

Such a characterisation of a rhizome, while not false, is heavily oversimplified. Rhizomatic multiplicities are the successor concept to desiring-production and, ultimately, to Deleuze's early attempts to outline an impersonal material transcendental.

The unlimited connectivity of a rhizome must be thought of in this context as preceding any 'thing' that is to be connected, and as producing what is connected at the same time as producing the connections. Everything is still rigorously critical and impersonal. Nevertheless, with rhizomatics (the successor concept to schizoanalysis), Deleuze's thought itself starts to make some of its most interesting and unexpected connections.

When Deleuze and Guattari write that 'thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not rooted or ramified matter' or 'the brain is much more like grass [a rhizome] than a tree' (ibid., p. 15) they are converging with a recent and specific revolution in science and philosophy: the connectionist theory of mind. The change in orientation from expert systems-based artificial intelligence in the 1970s to a connectionist model is exactly a change from a stratified and arborescent model of the mind (involving a theorematized and explicitly tree-based model of knowledge) to a rhizomatic model (involving lateral connectivity unsupervised by a hierarchical authority). Nor is this just a chance encounter: Deleuze and Guattari develop a whole alternative model of science as such, a nomad or vagabond science (ibid., p. 361ff.), that converges with the increasing importance given today in science to complex and chaotic systems. Such systems have encouraged the thought that when matter is connected to itself in feedback loops, or mutually presupposing causal interactions, it exhibits an autonomous capacity to generate complex organisational states without the intervention of a formal component that would be responsible for organisa-

tion. This auto-generation is called a 'phase change' in contemporary science, and Deleuze and Guattari allude to the same property by arguing that a rhizomatic multiplicity 'necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connection' (ibid., p. 8). Such interactions are, in principle, beyond the scope of formal logical analysis (mutual presupposition expressed logically yields a dead-end paradox of self-reference).

It is not only the absence of formal tools that has inhibited nomad science. There is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a political pact between the State (as a rigidly stratified agent of order) and what they call Royal science (characterised by an exclusive emphasis on formalisation) which has made nomad science an eternally minor activity. Correlatively, rhizomatics is essentially subversive; a perpetual undermining of cognitive and political authority.

The convergence of Deleuze and Guattari's thought with contemporary scientific research programmes completely reconfigures the norms for connecting French with the thought of the English-speaking world. Such connections need no longer be dominated by concerns deriving from linguistic representation and feeding most directly into literary critical theory (not that these should be ignored), but can also be plugged into global scientific and technological preoccupations. Is not the internet, for instance, a rhizome? It is the success of this thread that promises to make good Foucault's evaluation of the long-term importance of the work of Deleuze (and Guattari).

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