



Colin Gordon

The subtracting machine

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Colin Gordon

By rights an introduction for British readers to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari should begin with an extended précis of their *Anti-Oedipus*, a book which, although published in France almost a decade ago, is still available in English translation only in America. I have neither the space nor the courage to undertake this task here. Instead, I would like to profit from the recent appearance of *Mille Plateaux*, the authors' formidable sequel to their earlier work, to suggest a slightly different route into their enterprise. To put it very simply: the *Anti-Oedipus* is, as its name indicates, and although it offers a great many other things besides, primarily a critique of psychoanalysis – or a proposal about how to get along, politically, intellectually, culturally, without psychoanalysis: a possibility which the authors seem, not without some reason, to have thought worth exploring in the Paris of *circa* 1970. Yet in Britain, if perhaps not in America, such a critique does appear (as is indeed often argued by the friends of psychoanalysis) to lack much of its point, in view of the fact that there is not in any serious sense such a thing as a psychoanalytic culture in this country. This is not to say that the dissemination of analytical thought and technique has not been quite widespread and prolonged here in such administrative areas as the child welfare and education services (rather more so than our theoreticians are sometimes inclined to notice). What Deleuze and Guattari have to say about child analysis makes interesting enough reading in the country of Melanie Klein and Anna Freud (1). Some of the institutional aspects of these matters are touched on elsewhere in this issue by Peter Miller and Graham Burchell; the best general discussion to date of the political issues posed by psychoanalysis and its institutions is still Robert Castel's book *Le psychanalyse* (2).

But in any case, if the *Anti-Oedipus* has largely to do with psychoanalysis, *Kafka* (1975) and *Mille Plateaux* (1980) deal with just about everything else, as their authors explain below. And in consequence of this it becomes more plausible to think, or so I hope to show, that their work can more fruitfully be understood as *philosophy* than

in terms of (anti-)psychoanalysis. But I should enter one reservation about my procedure here. Deleuze is a philosopher by profession, Guattari a psychiatrist (and a longstanding adherent of Lacan's *École freudienne*). Here I will be seeking to trace some of the threads that link their collaborative writings to Deleuze's earlier philosophy books. I think it is obvious, however, that Félix Guattari's experience and involvement (shared to some extent by Deleuze), with left-wing Communist groups in the 'fiftes and 'sixties, with the European anti-psychiatry network, and more recently with the Italian *autonome* movement, are of equal relevance for understanding the style and preoccupations of their joint work. These different movements and struggles remain difficult (especially in Britain) to retrace or analyse in detail. Their history needs writing, not least because its shadowy presence in the margins of a book like the *Anti-Oedipus* correlates with some of the blanks in our own political experience. I cannot hope to repair this deficiency here. But I would like to prevent the following discussion from occasioning a different kind of distortion (albeit not one that would particularly bother the authors themselves), by mentioning that some of the most original 'Deleuzian' philosophical ideas outlined below happen in fact to be due to Guattari.

Deleuze wrote the first versions of his philosophy in books about other philosophers: Hume (1954), Nietzsche (1962), Kant (1963), Bergson (1966), Spinoza (1968). (He also wrote during these years two studies of writers, *Proust and Signs* and *Presentation of Sacher-Masoch*; these are his only books so far translated into English.) His books on Hume, Kant and Bergson were short introductory manuals written for a series published by Presses Universitaires de France; *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* was Deleuze's major doctoral thesis. They are remarkable texts. Each of them consists of a spare, scrupulous exposition of a philosophical system, analysing it so as to bring out its internal architectonic construction. These are not so much dissections, still less diagnoses, as anatomies: Deleuze has an extraordinary gift for making a philosophy walk off the page, like a kind of abstract animal. "Real abstraction", he has said elsewhere, "means a non-organic life": systematicity in philosophy is a form of life, a mode of life. It is difficult to capture this effect in action, or show how it is produced; though one might say that Deleuze's expository technique works through a combination of qualities valorised in the later writings – sobriety, richness of life, imperceptibility. A characteristic stroke comes in the book on Kant (a philosopher more admired than loved by Deleuze), which shows how the Critical Philosophy's system of the faculties, with their interlocking legalistic powers and prerogatives, entails a moment of non-legislative free synthesis in their connected functioning, 'a free and undetermined accord'. Each of the other systems Deleuze studies is shown likewise to engender within itself some such point of topological extraversion towards an Outside – be this called Eternal Return, or association of ideas . . . And there is an answering double-sidedness in Deleuze's own *démarche*: faithfully and admirably as his texts execute their introductory function, they are at the same time a progressive delineation of their author's own vision of a creative style in philosophy: a canon of (sometimes surprising) transformations

operated on philosophy's textbook vocation. His contemporary, the novelist Michel Tournier has evoked the talent which Deleuze already displayed in their *lycée* days during the early 1940s: "A power of translation, transposition: the whole wornout school philosophy went through him and came out unrecognisable, with an air of freshness, undigestedness, raw newness, utterly startling and discomfiting our weakness and laziness" (3).

One could take as an illustration the quintessentially 'school-philosophy' theme of *empiricism*. In his *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet, Deleuze writes: "Empiricism is often defined as the doctrine that the intelligible 'comes' from the sensible, that whatever belongs to the understanding comes initially from the senses. But that is the point of view of the history of philosophy: it has a gift for stifling all life by its pursuit or positing of some first abstract principle. Whenever one believes in some first great principle, one will only produce gross, sterile dualisms. Philosophers happily let themselves get sucked into the game, arguing over what the first principle should be (Being, the Self, the Concrete? . . .). But it's really hardly worth bothering to invoke the concrete richness of the sensible, if you are only going to make it into another abstract principle. Actually the first principle is always a mask, a simple image, it doesn't even exist, things only start to stir and animate themselves at the level of the second, third or fourth principles – which are no longer even principles. Things only begin to live at the middle. In this respect, what was it that the empiricists found, not in their heads, but in the world, something that was a kind of vital discovery, a certitude of life, something that changes one's manner of life if one truly grasps it? It isn't at all the question 'does the intelligible come from the sensible?', but a quite different question, that of relations. *Relations are exterior to their terms* (. . .) Relations are what is in the middle of things: this is how and where they exist. This exteriority of relations isn't a principle, but a protest of life against principles. And indeed, if one sees something like this which traverses life and yet repulses thought, then one must force thought to think it, one must make it into thought's hallucinatory point, an experimentation that does violence to thought. The empiricists aren't theoreticians, but experimenters: they never interpret, they have no principles" (4). And in *Différence et Répétition* (1968): "Empiricism is in no sense a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the maddest creation of concepts ever seen or contemplated . . . Only the empiricist can say: concepts are things themselves, but things in their free, savage state, beyond the clutch of 'anthropological predicates'." (5)

Deleuze saw his collaboration with Guattari as offering a way to turn these precepts into performance: "It isn't enough just to cry, long live the multiple. One has to *make* the multiple." Critics who find their propensity to invent concepts irritating are prompt (not having read Deleuze) to dismiss the whole venture as so much decadent post-1968 novelty-mongering. But the project had been maturing for a long time, certainly as far back as the Preface Deleuze wrote in 1946 to a rather curious work of nineteenth-century medical philosophy entitled *Studies on mathesis, or Anarchy and hierarchy of the sciences*, whose theme he stated as follows: "Beyond a

psychology disincarnated into thought and a physiology mineralised in matter, mathesis can be realised only in the true medicine where life is defined as knowledge of life, and knowledge as life of knowledge. Hence the motto [of the *Studies*]: *Scientia vitae in vita scientiae*" (6).

For 'mathesis', read 'philosophy of immanence'. This is the whole question at stake in the *Anti-Oedipus*, *Kafka*, and *Mille Plateaux* – how is a philosophy of immanence possible? (Given that more is needed than a radical voluntarism; if one wants to subvert, one has to invent. A philosophy, 'the' philosophy of immanence being of its nature something that has to be continually remade.) A philosophy of immanence means, first and last, an *ethics*. Spinoza is the primary source. "Ethics, that is to say a typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morals, which always refers existence to the yardstick of transcendental values. For the opposition of values (Good/Evil) there is substituted the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good/bad)" (7). ("As Nietzsche will say, 'Beyond Good and Evil at least doesn't mean beyond the good and the bad.'") What differences are pertinent in ethics? For Deleuze and Guattari, as for Spinoza or Nietzsche, those which pertain to *capacity for activity*: good and bad mean the increase and decrease of that capacity. "The great question that poses itself for the finite mode [i.e. the human being] is thus: will one succeed in having active affects, and how? This is the ethical question in its strict sense". "In an ethical vision of the world, it is always a question of power and strength (*puissance*), and of nothing else". Spinozist ethics is a *physics*; "a [physical] relation cannot be separated from a power of affection: this is so much the case that Spinoza is able to treat two fundamental questions as equivalent: *what is the structure (fabrica) of a body? What is a body capable of?* The structure of a body is the relation that composes it. What a body is capable of is governed by the nature and limits of its power of being affected." (8) "All individuals exist in Nature as on a plan of consistence whose entire figure, variable at each moment, they go to compose. They affect one another in so far as the relation that constitutes each individual forms a degree of *puissance*, a power of being affected. Everything in the universe is encounters, happy or unhappy encounters. . . Hence Spinoza's question: *what is a body capable of?* what affects is it capable of? Affects are becomings: sometimes they weaken us to the extent they diminish our strength of action and decompose our relations (sadness), sometimes they make us stronger through augmenting our force, and make us enter into a vaster and higher individual (joy). Spinoza never ceases to be astonished at the body: not at having a body, but at what the body is capable of. Bodies are defined not by their genus and species, nor by their organs and functions, but by what they can do, the affects they are capable of, in passion as in action. You haven't defined an animal until you have made the list of its affects" (9).

It is from this Spinozist (and Nietzschean) starting-point that Deleuze and Guattari set out in the *Anti-Oedipus* to develop a particular conception of *desire*. A theory of desire, Deleuze writes, has to do with "the ensemble of affects which circulate and transform themselves within a symbiotic assemblage (*agencement*), defined by the co-functioning of its heterogeneous parts". The Spinozist force of this theory

becomes evident when one considers what conceptions of desire the authors' polemic in the *Anti-Oedipus* was directed *against*. Jacques Donzelot has pointed out two such theses propagated by the psychoanalytic institution, particularly its Lacanian wing. "The first claim is that desire is reactionary in its essence; it does not bear on the present, let alone on the future, but seeks a reactivation of the past. The analytical enterprise thus ranks as being, if not revolutionary, at least honourably progressive, since it is harnessed to a project for the maturation of desire. The second claim is that desire is a denegation of the Real, since all desire is desire of images – or worse still, of images of images. Desire thus keeps us perpetually dissociated from the Real. Only analysis has the competence and authority to unmask this 'impossible Real' which lies concealed behind the theatre of the imaginary" (10). All of which is frankly summed up in the Lacanian tag: the 'lack-of-being that life is' (*'manque-à-etre qu'est la vie'*).

What Deleuze and Guattari contend for their part is that desire, far from being the theatre of negativity, lack and interpretation, signifies a field of immanence, relation and production. The *Anti-Oedipus* "proposed to replace the theatrical or familial model of the unconscious with a more political model: the factory instead of the theatre. It was a sort of Russian-style 'constructivism'. Hence the notions of 'desiring production' and 'desiring machines'." (11) This removal of the theory of desire from the theatre of the family carries with it a socio-political reorientation in the understanding of the unconscious. The primitive ontogenetic axes of desire in the child are to be understood as first of all not parental but social and metaphysical. The unconscious is (if one may risk the phrase, not used by the authors) an 'exchange with nature': in Donzelot's words, "not the secret receptacle of a meaning to be deciphered, but the *state of co-extensiveness of man and nature*" (12). And the social order is not the sphere of sublimation attained through transcendence of biological instinct: desire and production make up a double-sided 'crowd' phenomenon (milieu and individual, singularities and multiplicities) in which the instinctual is always already social, and vice versa. The project outlined by the authors in the *Anti-Oedipus* is that of a political typology of formations of desire thus conceived, a theory of empirical discriminations – in other words, an ethics.

The authors take care however to make clear that such an investigation on its own cannot serve as a means to generate political programmes. Desires are not the same thing as interests, and analyses of desire are not a substitute for political practice. It would be unwise, moreover, to overstate the immediate political bearing of the discussions in these books (though one ought to mention, if only in passing, the remarkably rich and coherent outline suggested in the *Anti-Oedipus* for a general political history of human societies). It is perhaps a little surprising that their analysis of capitalism, which is arguably one of the more creative syntheses of its kind recently undertaken from within Marxist thought, should have been so thoroughly ignored. But of course 'desire' is a politically sensitive topic. "Always one comes back to Reich, with his innocent request for a preliminary distinction between desire and interest: 'the leadership can have no more pressing task, apart from precise

knowledge of the objective historical process, than that of understanding: (a) what progressive ideas and desires exist in each social stratum, profession, age and sex; (b) what desires, anxieties and ideas impede the development of the progressive aspect: *historical fixations*.' The leadership tends rather to reply: when I hear the word desire, I reach for my revolver" (13). Indeed. "The catch-word of desire has . . . been one of the slogans of the subjectivist *Schwärmerei* that followed disillusionment with the social revolt of 1968 – celebrated in such writings as Jean-Paul Dollé's *Désir et Révolution* and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, the expression of a dejected post-lapsarian anarchism. Intellectually, the category operates as a license for the exercise of any fantasy freed from the responsibility of cognitive controls . . . Politically, the notion of desire can lead with the greatest facility to hoary reaction and superstition (. . .) their possibility is inscribed in the metaphysical vacancy of the term itself – which can legitimate the desire for death and destruction, just as much as the desire for life and liberty, as its origins in Nietzsche make clear" (14). It is of course true that the word 'desire' can be made to mean different things and serve different political uses. But, as the historian Paul Veyne has pointed out, it is not impossibly difficult to grasp philosophically what Deleuze and Guattari mean by it (Veyne is writing here in an essay on Michel Foucault's contribution to historiography, and in particular on the use of his recent ideas concerning government as a practice and a rationality for a historical understanding of the Roman imperial monarchy): "This desire is the most obvious thing in the world, so much so that no one notices it: it is the correlate of reification; walking is a desire, so is cossetting a child-people, so are sleeping and dying, even. Desire is the fact that mechanisms move, that assemblages function, that virtualities, even those of sleep, are realised rather than unrealised; 'every assemblage expresses and makes a desire in the act of constructing the plane that makes it possible'. *L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle*. If a certain male infant chanced to be born in the King's bedchamber, to be heir to his throne, then he will automatically interest himself in the business of kingship, won't want to give it up for anything – or rather, won't even consider the question whether he wants to be king; he is one, that's all there is to it – that's what desire is" (15). Monarchy: a body, a crown, a people; a plan, an activity, an assemblage: a desire. Desire in Deleuze and Guattari is *par excellence* a category of immanence, actualisation, effectuation. Desire is a question of practices. A desire is a practice. Desire is a relation of effectuation, not of satisfaction (unless perhaps in a Tarskian sense) (16). Hence the convergence of Deleuze and Guattari, on many essential points, with the problems of a historian like Veyne, and with Foucault's historical and theoretical investigations. I shall return to this latter intersection below.

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We live in a subculture of theoretical 'oughts' (and, of course, of 'ought nots') – we have all learned the hortatory "*il faudrait que . . .*", once beloved of the Althusser school ("Marxism still lacks a theory of . . ."). But just for this reason we are easily

liable, scandalised by the exoticism of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual impedimenta, to overlook the possibility that they may actually be attempting some of the tasks which have (in theory) been on our own agendas for some time. Paul Patton gives an inventory below of some of the authors' more unfamiliar pieces of intellectual equipment; we hope also to publish here in the near future more detailed explorations of some of their 'thousand plateaux'. Here I should like to offer only a few very informal reflections on the ethos and the kinds of conceptual criteria that orient Deleuze and Guattari's thinking and writing.

We know that our mouthpieces of leadership are well rehearsed in infernal visions of an unstrung libertarian anarchism bursting the barriers of 'cognitive controls'. We can still ask ourselves whether recent developments have substantiated any such alarming prognostications. The downfall of Man, Subject, History, Experience; the decentred anti-philosophies, deconstructions and symptomatology of the 'sixties and 'seventies; the returns to an unlegislated *a posteriori*, to the definite and particular, the heterogeneous, the specific and the multiple: one is tempted to see all these in retrospect as tributary streams (though not the only ones) to a Taylorised regime of critiques and metacritiques, effortlessly reproducible because purged of every inventive impulse. A similar consequence is possible with the well-known Deleuze-Foucault idea of theory as a 'tool-kit' – a notion easily turned round into a criterion of instrumental utility which serves to repress the unforeseen: the model tool modelled on the correct problem on which it may be correctly utilised. If their idea meant anything, it was that one might ask whether a new tool could not enable people (and not just its patent-holding inventor) to invent new tasks, new problems. And precisely here it is not possible to divorce the question of utility from questions of desire.

'Philosophy of immanence' might designate something we have been tending towards for some while. Eliminating hegemonic, transcendent categories, putting concepts on the same, sublunary plane as (not in the place of) things: these aims are not so new. The Escher-like thought-spaces of Foucault or of Deleuze and Guattari – historical *a priori*s, abstract machines, regimes of truth – all follow a long line of earlier initiatives in philosophy, inspired or provoked by the Kantian 'synthetic *a priori*', the project of thinking the conditions that make experience possible and things intelligible. Maimon, Nietzsche, Husserl, Bachelard, Sartre, Cavailles and Canguilhem have all in different ways been among those party to this concern. And the current has a second aspect, less often remarked on (except as a curiosity) and no doubt always closely tied to conjunctural phases in cultural politics: the idea that a de-transcendentalised philosophy might make possible a non-hierarchical discourse, one in which – to put it as naively as possible – one might think, on one unbroken plane, about 'everything'. Deleuze and Guattari remind one a little of Simone de Beauvoir's anecdote. "Aron said, pointing to his glass: 'You see, my dear fellow, if you are a phenomenologist, you can talk about this cocktail and make philosophy of it!' Sartre turned pale with emotion at this. Here was just the thing he had been looking to achieve for years . . ." (17). Perhaps Deleuze and Guattari have fulfilled,

by other means, a similar ambition with *Mille Plateaux*, a book which talks of many things – short stories, the face, birdsong, the State . . . Much of this was foreshadowed in the books Deleuze published in the late 'sixties, *Différence et Répétition* and *Logique du Sens*, where for the first time he set about philosophising on his own account. They trace on the one hand a complex conceptual process of partial crystallisations and provisional realignments, and on the other a spectacular explosion in the range of texts drawn on and materials treated (literary, musical and artistic, mathematical, biological, sociological, psychoanalytical . . .) New forms of content, new forms of expression: Deleuze wrote in *Différence et Répétition* that "A book of philosophy must be in part a very special sort of detective story, in part a sort of science-fiction"; he described *Logique du Sens* as "an attempt at a logical and psychoanalytical novel". As to the pleasures and difficulties afforded by this travogue of themes and disciplines (both here and in the later collaborative books), and the situation in which they place the non-polymath reader or reviewer, people will no doubt respond in different ways. But one can at least hardly begrudge the authors some tribute for the generosity of mind, the absence of polemical guile, the infectiousness of enthusiasm evident in their writings, and its effectiveness as an intellectual stimulant and advertiser. And if the *Anti-Oedipus* was seen when it appeared in 1972 as the first important philosophical fruit of May '68, *Mille Plateaux*, published today in a much less propitious climate, is a worthy memento of the ten years of Vincennes University (now razed by Mayor Chirac's bulldozers), in whose seedy premises many of its ideas were elaborated. This was one of the more acceptable faces of Parisian culture.

Certainly it is a significant difference between France and Britain that it should be possible for ideas to circulate with comparative freedom between philosophers and writers, scientists or historians. It is indicative too that the communication between (say) aesthetic and political concerns within philosophy constitutes an 'exotic' trait of Continental thought which British observers never tire of pointing out to one another. But the fact that Deleuze and Guattari range in their philosophy over a multitude of literary and scientific themes is only really interesting in itself because of their vision of what literature and science *are*, as 'assemblages', forms of life which carry their own, immediately political desires, options and risks. And also because of their conception of what philosophy is. Asked what genre *Mille Plateaux* belongs to, Deleuze replies: "Philosophy, nothing but philosophy in the traditional sense of the word. When one asks what painting is, the answer is relatively simple. A painter is someone who creates in the order of lines and colours (even though lines and colours exist already in nature). Well, a philosopher is the same, someone who creates in the order of concepts, someone who invents new concepts. Here too, evidently there is thought outside philosophy, but not under this special form of concepts. Concepts are singularities that react back on ordinary life, on the flows of ordinary or everyday thought. There are a lot of essays in concepts in *Mille Plateaux*: rhizome, smooth space, haecceity, becoming-animal, abstract machine, diagram, etc. Guattari invents a lot of concepts, and I share his conception of philosophy (18)."

How, though, is it done? We saw above how the concept of desire operates for Deleuze and Guattari as part of a theory of practice or effectuation. Such a theory has to deal with the question of *conditions*; to examine the way the authors deal with this problem may help to illuminate some of the concepts they introduce. The first principle is not to conceive of a condition as a sort of higher counterpart of that which it conditions. As Deleuze writes in *Logique du Sens*, "The error of all specifications of the transcendental as consciousness consists in conceiving the transcendental in the image and resemblance of that for which it is supposed to provide the foundation . . . metaphysical and transcendental philosophies agree in conceiving determinable singularities only as already imprisoned in the mould of a supreme Ego, a higher I" (p.128). A requirement of this kind has been posed by modern writers in many different fields. Jean Cavailles in his logic of mathematical research argued, writes Michel Fichant, that "One has to renounce the primacy of the Cartesian *cogito* and recognise that 'what makes history is the subordination of the transcendental to its stages of actualisation'" (19). Deleuze cites Gilbert Simondon's criticism of theories of physical and biological individuation conceived in terms of 'hylomorphism' (substance as the realisation of a form in matter): the reduction of the understanding of a process of individuation to the image of the individuality it produces (20). The relation between condition and effectuation has to be seen not as an analogous superposition of forms, but as a connection established between heterogeneous segments, or across adjacent strata. Characteristically, the place of the 'subject' (if any) is said in the *Anti-Oedipus* to lie *alongside* 'its' machines; in *Kafka*, the seat of bureaucratic power is always to be sought in 'the office next door'. The analysis of conditions is conducted on a horizontal dimension; abstract relations become visible through the discrimination of empirical mixes in reality. This was the conception of philosophical 'intuition' which Deleuze found in Bergson: "One goes beyond experience, towards the conditions of experience (but these are not, in the Kantian manner, conditions for all possible experience, but the conditions of real experience)" (21). In this respect, Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* is, for Deleuze and Guattari, a textbook analysis of a certain kind of 'assemblage'. They mention in particular his conception of the 'rules of formation' of discourses as '*functions of existence*': not the conditions of correctness of every possible well-formed utterance, but the conditions of production of the utterances that actually occur. These conditions – concepts and objects, institutions and practices – are different in kind among themselves and bear no resemblance to the form of the discourse they determine, yet they are all equally contingent, historical realities. (It was just this heterogeneity in the way Foucault itemised the determinants of a discourse that his English Althusserian critics denounced as untheoretical 'eclecticism'.) (22)

In seeking an adequate and positive theory of effectuations, Deleuze made use of the concept of *multiplicities*. ("Where there opens up the swarming world of anonymous, nomadic singularities, impersonal and preindividual," he wrote in *Logique du Sens*, "we finally enter on the field of the transcendental"). This concept, due originally to Riemann's non-Euclidean geometries, and traced also by Deleuze in the

writings of Husserl and Bergson, is linked in *Rhizome* to the (perhaps slightly enigmatic) idea of spaces of ' $n - 1$ ' dimensions, and the description of certain kinds of 'assemblages' as 'flat'. One might describe the operation intended here, in contradistinction to Husserlian 'transcendental reduction', as a sort of 'immanent reduction'. An example from painting may help to show what is meant. Kandinsky wrote that "one of the first steps away from representation and towards abstraction was, in the pictorial sense, the exclusion of the third dimension, i.e. the tendency to keep the picture in a single plane"; but he indicated also the need for a further change in the relation between pictorial space and the objects which occupy it, going beyond the mere elimination of orthogonal perspective-space: an "optical destruction of the picture-plane" – the picture-plane "disappears, so to speak and the elements 'hover' in space which, however, knows no precise limits (especially in depth)" (23). A Kandinsky is a multiplicity. By 'flatness' Deleuze and Guattari mean a situation of this kind, where condition and conditioned inhabit the same space, with no extra dimension for an overview 'in depth'. The fact that there is no resemblance or analogy of condition and conditioned is what gives its point to their concept of 'assemblages': an effectuation is the assembling and connecting of its own heterogeneous conditions, and these conditions are its parts and materials – hence '*machine* assemblage'.

'Pluralism = Monism', as they write in *Rhizome*: an attractive mode of thought, provided only that one *can* think in it. As a philosophy of the real, the theory of 'assemblages' follows from a doctrine which Deleuze traces back in philosophy to Spinoza and Duns Scotus, namely that of the *univocity of being*: the term 'being' applies in the same sense to all entities, regardless of their mode. Similarly, the concept 'assemblage' can be applied with equal pertinence to a relation of ideas or a relation of animals – or a relation of both. As with the above-mentioned philosophers, this principle is accompanied by an exceedingly rich and subtle elaboration of distinctions and descriptions. Deleuze and Guattari do not simply flatten the 'immanent' and the 'transcendent' into one uniform layer of actuality. What they do instead, and this typifies their technique (a kind of non-structuralist, empirical formalism) is to distinguish within the actual two quite different and opposed ways in which assemblages can connect 'immanent' and 'transcendent' – one which operates through hierarchical schematisms, and one which operates through free syntheses: the two forms existing both alongside and immanent in each other, so that every actual assemblage partakes simultaneously, in different aspects and to different degrees, in both – 'territorialised'/'deterritorialised', 'stratified'/'destratified', 'coded'/'decoded'... It is not only in their typology of assemblages that Deleuze and Guattari develop this system of non-dualistic couplets; there are corresponding, interlocking distinctions among modes of individualisation, of space, of 'line', of temporalisation; most importantly perhaps, as Paul Patton explains below, there is a distinction between what one may regard as two modes of *possibility*: a 'plane of organisation' and a 'plane of consistence'.

It is possible to see here in this philosophy of immanence a kind of 'philosophy of life' which escapes the usual vague misgivings aroused by such a term – the suspicion

of some kind of organicist nostalgia, yearning for some lost mediaeval order of things (or worse). For Deleuze and Guattari, the organism is not the model or the essence of life, life is not equivalent to the organism; organisation is only a (necessary, but relative) stratification of the living. And so their answer to the Spinozist ethical-physical question lies in a different direction. The optimum in life, the maximisation of its relations and forces, would be the loosening, to the greatest degree possible without destroying them, of the fixation of 'one's' assemblages on the 'plane of organisation', in order to construct them on the other, *abstract* 'plane of consistence'. – Exchange with nature, rather than immersion in organism and organisation: such is the sense of the *Anti-Oedipus*'s parable of the 'schizophrenic process'. "He thought that it must be a feeling of endless bliss to be in contact with the profound life of every form, to have a soul for rocks, metals, water and plants, to take into himself, as in a dream, every element of nature, like flowers that breathe with the waxing and waning of the moon" (24). But there is also a question of risks: will one's plane be one of 'consistence', or will it miss the objective, stray over the edge into a 'black hole', petrify or vitrify itself in a fascism (micro- or macro-) or a crack-up? 'Different, but not necessarily better' is a phrase used more than once in *Mille Plateaux*. To remain subjectified, stratified is not the worst of possible fates.

But why privilege the 'abstract' at all? "The notion of the abstract is a very complex one: a line may represent nothing, be purely geometrical, and yet not be purely abstract as long as it still traces the contour of something. The abstract line is the line which doesn't mark a contour of anything, but instead passes *between* things – a mutant line. In this sense the abstract line isn't a geometrical line at all, but the most living and creative of lines. Real abstraction is a non-organic life. The idea of non-organic life is constant in *Mille Plateaux*, since it is the life of the concept" (25). Abstract, then, does not mean unreal or ideal. The problem, however, is that we are very much used to thinking of the abstract as that which *separates* life and concepts. The voices are always with us that denounce every fresh venture into the conceptual as a plot against man: "a subject-less structure, and one in which men and women are obliterated by ideologies", as E.P. Thompson puts it in a characteristic phrase (26). I am not suggesting that Deleuze and Guattari, either by precept or by example, enable us to satisfactorily answer all the questions that presently vex us about the ethics of intellectual activity. But they could help to change the way in which these questions are posed. Since it is not unknown in such discussions for the term 'Spinozist' to function as a term of (mild) defamation, the point can appropriately be made by quoting from a short biography of Spinoza written by Deleuze.

"In his whole way of living and thinking, Spinoza posits the image of a positive, affirmative life, against the simulacra with which men content themselves. . . . Life is not an idea, a matter of theory for Spinoza. It is a manner of being, one and the same eternal mode in all its attributes. And only from this viewpoint does the geometrical method assume its full meaning. It is counterposed in the *Ethics* to what Spinoza calls a satire; and satire is all that which takes pleasure in the impotence and pain of men, all that expresses contempt and mockery, and nourishes itself on accusation, malice,

depreciation, base interpretation, everything that can break the spirit (the tyrant needs broken spirits, as broken spirits need a tyrant). The geometrical method ceases to be a method of intellectual exposition; it is not a question of professorial exposition, but of a method of *invention*. It becomes a method of vital, optical rectification. If man is somehow twisted, this twistedness can be rectified by connecting it to its causes, *more geometrico*. This optical geometry traverses all the *Ethics*. People ask whether the *Ethics* should be read in terms of thought or in terms of powers (*puissance*) – for instance, are the attributes powers or concepts? In fact there is but one term, Life, which comprehends thought, but also inversely which is comprehended only by thought. Not that life consists in thought; but only the thinker has a life potent (*puissant*) and free of culpability and hatred, only life explicates the thinker. One needs to comprehend in a single whole Spinoza's geometrical method, his profession of lens-grinding, and his life" (27).

In the present day, people are perhaps most accustomed to link the label of 'Spinozism' with the work of Louis Althusser. The term might also be associated with Jean Cavailles, the philosopher of mathematics (shot by the Germans in 1944) whom Althusser cited among his teachers. George Canguilhem has written that "it is because the philosophy of Spinoza represents the most radical attempt at a philosophy without a *cogito* that it was so near and so present to Cavailles' thought, as much when he was explaining the idea of his Resistance struggle as when he was explaining the idea of mathematical construction". And he has added, (in an article on Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*): "it so happens that this philosopher, who does not believe in history in the existential sense, refutes in advance, by the action he feels led to execute and by his historic death, the existentialist argument of those who seek to discredit what they call structuralism by damning it for engendering, among its other misdeeds, passivity in the face of accomplished fact" (28).

It would, of course, be dishonest to exploit the force of Canguilhem's testimony as a cheap means of conferring glamour or discredit on whatever persons or activities one happens to choose. But the biographical examples I have just been citing do seem to me to suggest a more modest and general point, not indeed one which assures the value of the texts I have been writing about, but one which concerns the kind of relevance it would be *possible* to find in them. This is to draw attention to the fact, one that perhaps does not sufficiently surprise us, that, on *both* sides of the ongoing debate between the advocates of lived experience and rigorous theory, there is an implicit consensus that philosophy, as the practice of concepts, is not to be taken to have anything to do with politics, as *scientia vitae*. – As though 'life' were the one non-philosophical, or apolitical concept.

Notes.

1. On child analysis see in addition to *Anti-Oedipus* (trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Viking Press, New York 1977: the translation is perfectly serviceable and ought to become available in Britain without further delay) the texts translated in *Language, Sexuality and Subversion*, eds. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris, Feral Publications, Sydney 1978.

2. See for a summary of this book my review in *I&C* 2, Autumn 1977.
3. Michel Tournier, *Le vent paraquet*, Paris 1977, pp.151-152.
4. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Paris 1977 pp.68-9.
5. *Différence et répétition*, Paris 1968, p.3.
6. Jean Malfatti de Montereaggio, *Etudes sur la Mathèse ou Anarchie et Hiérarchie de la Science; avec une Application spéciale de la Médecine*, translated from the German by Christian Ostrowski, introduction by Gilles Deleuze, Paris 1946, p.xi.
7. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza*, Paris 1970, pp.29-30.
8. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, Paris 1967, p.233 (citing Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, I.17), 199, 247, 197f.
9. Gilles Deleuze, Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, p.74.
10. Jacques Donzelot, "Une anti-sociologie", *Esprit*, December 1972, p.838.
11. Interview with Catherine Clément, *L'Arc* 49 (Deleuze), 2nd edition 1980, p.99.
12. Jacques Donzelot, *ibid*.
13. *L'Anti-Oedipe*, p.306; *Anti-Oedipus*, p.257. My translation.
14. Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism*, 1980, p.161f.
15. Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, 2nd augmented (and abridged) edition, Paris 1978, p.221f. Quotes from *Dialogues* (cf. note 4 above) p.115, and Dante's *Paradiso* ("The love that moves the sun and the other stars").
16. Note that this distinguishes between desire, need and pleasure: desire, as effectuation, is not equivalent to the satisfaction of need: the existence of a desire does not magically satisfy a corresponding need. The non-satisfaction of needs *prevents* any effectuation/"assemblage" of desire; but conversely, the elimination of unsatisfied needs does not by itself suffice to construct such an effectuation (the former term is still only a *negative*). On the other hand, the idea of desire as fixated on pleasure, of pleasure as a "discharge", is another inadequately negative conception of desire as effectuation. – Not that pleasures are not desirable, but "it's when one persists in referring desire to pleasure that one comes to perceive by the fact of doing so that desire essentially *lacks* something." *Dialogues*, p.119.
17. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, Penguin Book 1966, p.135. Deleuze, who pays a warm tribute to Sartre in *Dialogues*, would probably not disavow the precedent.
18. Interview with Catherine Clément, p.99f.
19. Michel Fichant, "L'Épistémologie en France", in *Histoire de la philosophie* ed., François Châtelet, Vol. 8, Paris 1973.
20. Cf. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, Paris 1964.
21. Gilles Deleuze, *Le Bergsonisme*, p.12f.
22. Deleuze and Guattari lay particular stress on the way Foucault's analyses illustrate the 'double-headed' character of all human 'assemblages': on the one side combinations of utterances, on the other combinations of objects or traits of objects. One of their most interesting moves is to draw on the linguistic theory of Louis Hjelmslev in order to give this observation a more developed and generalised formulation. For Hjelmslev (following Saussure) a language is a function on two separate and autonomous *strata*, *expression* and *content*, each stratum possessing its own 'forms' and 'materials', organised in ways that are mutually isomorphous in their overall structuring but not superposable on a one-to-one basis. Deleuze and Guattari see Hjelmslev's ability to dispense with the role of a ruling Signifier in linguistics as indicating the possibility of a generalisation of his model, without imperialism, to spheres beyond linguistics proper and even (with particular qualifications) beyond the anthropological domain.

23. Cited in Paul Overy, *Kandinsky, The Language of the Eye*, 1969, p.121f.
24. *Anti-Oedipus* p.2, quoting from Buechner's *Lenz*.
25. Interview with Catherine Clément, p.100f.
26. E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, footnotes.
27. Deleuze wrote three such brief Lives, of Hume, Nietzsche and Spinoza, all for short volumes containing selected texts from the philosophers with an introduction. It is worth remarking on his unusual ability to execute such a theme without either bathos, *ressentiment* or psycho-history. Consider how the average Anglo-Saxon critic deals with philosophers who had a personal 'record': for Nietzsche, various amalgams of malice and condescension; for philosophers like Sartre, Marcuse and Adorno whose lives and work were marked by, and at moments themselves marked parts of our recent histories, there continues the unforgiving zeal to make them *pay* for their lives. Deleuze works to a different principle. "My ideal, when I write about an author, would be to write nothing that might affect him with sadness, or, if he is dead, make him weep in his grave: to think *of* the author one is writing about. To think of him so intensely that he can no longer be used as an object, and so also that one can no longer identify oneself with him. To avoid the double ignominies of knowingness and familiarity". (*Dialogues*.)
28. Georges Canguilhem, *Vie et mort de Jean Cavallès*, 1976, pp.30-31; "Mort de l'Homme ou épuisement du Cogito?" *Critique* 1967, p.616f.