

Gilles Deleuze
And the Apolitical Production of Being

by

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Abstract

Gilles Deleuze's ontology is often understood to ground a kind of radical pluralism, the political defense of which is thought to be articulated most strongly in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books. It is clear, however, that this "politics" is defined in a wholly *negative* way, and that the revolutionary dimension of these books is animated by a strictly *ethical* logic. In my view, if there is a politics in Deleuze it must be understood in relation to the central problem of his ontology: namely, the problem of understanding how being is *produced*. To grasp politics as a *singularity*, as a *mode* of ontological production, has a number of radical consequences – consequences, however, that Deleuze himself did not embrace. Ultimately, Deleuze's conception of ontological production appears marked by an *apolitics*, in that any effective mobilization Being's transformative potential requires that we stand posed to sacrifice anything of the integrity and organizational capacity of political existence that limits the expression of Being itself.

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INTRODUCTION

We are well acquainted with the characteristics that have come to define Gilles Deleuze's thought: a refusal to give heed to calls of "the end of philosophy", as made evident by the near endless array of conceptual creations that populate his work; an approach that can only be called perverse given the success with which he was able to render canonical philosophers like Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant – along with many other writers, painters, filmmakers, and scientists – into the accomplices of the most contemporary experiments in art, science, and philosophy; and finally, a kind of desperate but utterly sober determination to prove that it was still possible in our world, as banal and over-determined as it had become, to engender something absolutely *new*.

If these characteristics give us an appropriate portrait of Deleuzian thought, then it is little wonder that most readers have found him completely *mystifying*. What are we to make, after all, of a thinker whose erratic style and idiosyncratic references to experimental forms of thought seemed resolutely "anti-philosophical" but whose work, it must be acknowledged, is barely intelligible outside of the conceptual history of Continental philosophy? Faced with this disjunction, most readers in the Anglo-American context have tended to find in Deleuze's writings a rigorous defense against all that is unifying in contemporary existence, a kind of "nomad thought". Despite his insistence on the strictly philosophical nature of his work, Deleuze's own intentions were thought to be aimed at nothing less than turning philosophy *against itself*, of making all that is sedentary in classical thought dissolve before the flux of contemporary being, of rendering all the instability of our "post-modern" world into something positive, and even

joyous.¹ We need only consider the primacy granted by such readers to the figure of the *rhizome*: a figure that subverts all stable unity, identity and representation, endlessly connecting and reconnecting with other rhizomes, happy to abandon any and all existing relations to the world and immerse itself in the flux of life. The relevance of this figure seems obvious enough: our world has become, after all, utterly “flat” given both the ubiquity of the mediums of communication and the ease with which we move between territories. Perhaps the only real sin today is failing to connect. Insofar as we become rhizomatic we have learned how to turn the post-modern blurring of identities, and the angst surrounding the status of social and political representations, into *virtues*.

Despite their attentiveness to the subtleties of his conceptual creations, this “anti-philosophical” reading of Deleuze has been abetted by many of the authors in the first wave of Deleuze studies in the Anglo-American academy. For most of these commentators, Deleuze’s work seemed to call less for philosophical evaluation and more for fidelity to the spirit of Deleuzianism, which, given the extent to which this fidelity consisted in a detailed mapping of his terms and concepts, tended also to be true to the letter. In as much as commentators were able to render him compatible with existing forms of cultural and political theory, particularly Anglo-American “post-structuralism”, Deleuze appeared increasingly as a kind of radical *pluralist*, for whom philosophy was simply a means of allowing us to liberate the plurality of social being from any and every encroachment by the aborescent, totalizing figures of old. For most, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a two-volume series of books that Deleuze wrote with the psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, represented the most radical formulation of a politics of plurality and flux,

¹ See Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 8.9-9.0 for a good overview of this still common image of Deleuze.

a “micropolitics” that sought out the residue of all the old macropolitical unities so as to dispel (as Michel Foucault once wrote) “the slightest traces of fascism in the body”.²

Even a summary examination of this wave of commentary reveals, for all its diversity, a remarkable convergence on at least two fronts. First, that Deleuzianism is animated by the continual demonstration, in the face of all rigid and sedentary phenomena, that Being is grounded in an irreducible heterogeneity of fluctuating differences, becomings, desires, etc., a heterogeneity which, when subjected to the telos of dialectical representation and identity, is liable to be crushed in the gross machinery of negativity, opposition, and *ressentiment*. Second, that what at first appears strictly as a quarrel with the aborescent figures of the philosophical tradition (Platonism, Hegelianism, Kantianism, etc.) finds its ultimate fulfillment only in a *politics*, or a micropolitics, capable of exposing all the ways in which the old macropolitical figures (opposition, negativity, hierarchical forms of organization, and so on) are aligned with the mechanisms that repress Being more generally. We end up with a politics that wages the power of Being’s fundamental heterogeneity by means of a *continuous experimentation* with the transformative potential of existence, in recognition of the fact that the only liberatory project possible today must, in light of the failure of the old revolutionary models, hold rigorously to the defense of pluralism and embrace our contemporary, rhizomatic sociability.

Thus, Paul Patton, who has probably written more than anyone on the relation between Deleuze’s philosophy and politics, acknowledges that “the function of mutation, metamorphosis and the creation of the new is ontologically primary” in Deleuze and

² Michel Foucault, “Preface”, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xiii.

Guattari's work.³ On this basis, he surmises that Deleuzian politics amounts to an effort to precipitate new micropolitical becomings, freeing social particularities (sex, race, or class-based differences) from their subordination to any central, macropolitical difference or prerogative (especially the class-based antagonism of Marxism). It is only by upholding the plurality of social particularities that it becomes possible to fashion new social assemblages, capable of "enhancing" relations between individual and collective bodies.⁴ Such is Patton's project to provide an ethico-political reading of Deleuze, in line with his liberal convictions.⁵ Todd May finds in Deleuze a "politics of life" (as well as a politics of time), that works to expose "neglected areas of intervention" in which to engage in micropolitical experimentation: "Since there is no essence to which to appeal, and thus no Archimedean point in the political realm from which revolutionary change can proceed, politics is always a matter of experimenting with practices".⁶ For Michael Hardt, Deleuze's "attack [on] the dialectical unity of the One and the Multiple... is [an] attack on the primacy of the State in the formation of society", and an insistence on "the real plurality of society".⁷ For Eric Alliez, Deleuze and Guattari's micropolitics provides

³ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 45

⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-48; 79.

⁵ See, for example, Paul Patton, "The World Seen from Within: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Events", *Theory & Event* 1 (1997) <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/theory_and_event/v001/1.1patton.html> (August 26, 2006). Patton makes numerous attempts to render Deleuze's ethics compatible with social contract theory, and something of a politics of recognition. Take this passage from the above article: "contemporary efforts to de-colonialize the law and political institutions of countries with large indigenous populations may be understood as attempts to return to the original conditions of the problem [of colonization], to 'problematize' existing solutions in order to arrive at new ones. The legal recognition of aboriginal title to land, or new forms of constitutional association, may be seen as new solutions to the problem of colonial society".

⁶ Todd G. May, "The Politics of Life in the Work of Gilles Deleuze", *SubStance* 20 (1991): 34; Todd May, "Gilles Deleuze and the Politics of Time", *Man and World* 29 (1996): 302. See also Todd May, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114-153.

⁷ Michael Hardt, *An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 25. Hardt's collaboration with Antonio Negri in *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) represents an interesting effort to combine a Deleuzo-Guattarian political ontology with a perspective encompassing Spinoza, Marx, and Foucault. Other thinkers, notably John Protevi, *Political Physics*:

for the “disidentification of politics as a means of integration into identity and unity,” a disidentification grounded in “*a political ontology of becomings* which never ceases to undo the sedimentation of identities”.⁸

It was only, perhaps, with the philosopher Alain Badiou’s book, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, that commentators began to take Deleuze seriously as a *philosopher* first and foremost, and the strictly philosophical trajectory of his conceptual creations and idiosyncratic readings in the history of thought. This classically philosophical lens on Deleuze had the great value of disentangling his thought from its incorporation into the idiom of the dominant, post-structuralist streams of Anglo-American cultural and political theory. And in the process something of great *untimeliness* of Deleuzianism was for the first time brought to light. For, as Badiou (as well as more recent authors like Peter Hallward and Alberto Toscano) argued, Deleuze’s hostility to the categories of unity, identity, and representation ought to be viewed less in terms of its resonance with post-structuralism, and more in the context of his effort to articulate an original philosophy of *ontological production* – that is, a philosophy capable of grasping the means by which the variety of Being is produced in a wholly *immanent* way, such that it becomes possible to grasp the creation of both the terms and forms of material *actuality* and the determination of the *potential* by which actualities are transformed, by appealing solely to the ontological resources of this world. However much his concepts or slogans may have resonated with the anti-philosophical or pluralist tendencies of Anglo-American post-structuralism at the time of its translation into English, these

Deleuze, Derrida, and the Body Politic (New York: The Athlone Press, 2001) argue similarly to Hardt and Negri, that Deleuze’s work grounds a radically *democratic* conception of socio-political self-organization.
⁸ Eric Alliez, “Anti-Oedipus – Thirty Years On”, in *Deleuze and the Social*, ed. Martin Fuglsang and Bent Meier Sorensen (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2006), 155-156.

commentators argued, Deleuze's work could only be adequately interrogated in terms of the success with which his unique philosophical assemblage (Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson, Spinoza, Kant, etc.) was capable of rendering the anomalous movements of ontological production *thinkable*.⁹

And as these "second wave" commentators insisted, adequately thinking being in the context of Deleuze's philosophy required much more than simply resistance to unity, continuous experimentation, and the defense of pluralism. Rather, true thought was defined by our capacity to seize hold of the *singularities* of being, those unique, "transformative points" embedded within the ordinary course of events, capable of altering the basic coordinates of reality, of giving rise to something *new*. And this effort, in turn, required that we be able to intuit, beyond the meager categories of representation and identity, the full variety or *multiplicity* of being immanent with our given actuality. Indeed, according to Badiou, "Deleuze was the first to properly grasp that a contemporary metaphysics must consist in a theory of multiplicities and an embrace of singularities".¹⁰

If anything, Badiou and others argued, Deleuze's was almost *indifferent* to the actuality of our world, being more concerned with the production of new forms of being than with the fate of any created thing, more concerned with formulating abstract

⁹ See, in addition to Badiou's *Deleuze*, Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (New York: Verso, 2006); Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation Between Kant and Deleuze* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006). This is not to suggest that these are the only works examining Deleuze's philosophy as such; other examples include Hardt, *Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, and Manuel Delanda's very interesting scientific/realist interpretation of Deleuze in *Intensive Science & Virtual Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2004). The argument here is that it is only with Badiou's work that something of the singularity of Deleuze's thought was first reclaimed from its subsumption into the post-structuralist language alluded to above.

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, "One, Multiple, Multiplicities", in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2006), 68.

concepts than with asserting the autonomy of concrete, social pluralities. From this point of view, and in contrast to the first wave of commentary, Deleuze's philosophy seemed to place socio-political issues at a remove from the ontologically productive movements of Being, to the extent that these issues were orientated towards securing the well-being and the integrity of actual political relations. In short, the argument went, Deleuze's philosophy was in many ways *politically indifferent*.¹¹

Might there be, beyond the quarrel represented by these two waves of commentary, a deeper compatibility between Deleuze's philosophy and politics? We will argue that this question can only be answered by examining the ways in which *politics itself may be considered as a mode of ontological production* in Deleuze's work.

Contrary to both the insistence on Deleuze as the perverse champion of becoming and plurality or as classically philosophical and politically indifferent, we must attempt to grasp the implications of conceiving of politics *as a singularity*, a turning point mobilized in the form of an event, capable of fundamentally transforming the coordinates of socio-political being. This, in turn, requires that we understand the conditions under which ontological production is intrinsic to political struggle itself, and in what sense being and politics merge in Deleuze's work.

One of the initial obstacles to such a project is the fact that this work has tended to be perceived as being divided into two periods: an initial "philosophical" period where

¹¹ While we will examine these critiques in detail below, it is worth noting criticisms made of Deleuze in a different vein. Patrick Crogan's "Theory of State: Deleuze, Guattari and Virilio on the State, Technology, and Speed", in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 4:2 (1999), argues that Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is torn between a static, abstract, and hierarchical conceptual framework and an experimental, rhizomatic orientation. Against Crogan, however, I would argue that all Deleuze fails to fully live up to is the theory of State championed by Crogan's own post-structuralist reading of Virilio. Indeed, while Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is indeed abstract, it is *also*, as we will see, experimental, a possibility neglected by Crogan largely because of his insistence on making Deleuze and Guattari's thought accountable to his own post-structuralist vision.

Deleuze was, by all indications, indifferent to social and political affairs; and a later “political” period, in which he left behind his dusty philosophical edifice to embrace the fluid, transgressive world of revolutionary politics. Let us now look more closely at Deleuze’s work, to try to dispose of this perception of Deleuze’s “move into politics” in the hope that we may also begin to move beyond the alternatives posed by his commentators.

Overview of Deleuze’s Work and “Move into Politics”

Certainly if we examine the works that Deleuze has written on his own, we immediately notice that his focus is limited almost entirely to philosophy and art, with little or nothing to say about social or political issues. He devoted his early work to constructing an original history of philosophy, from his first book on the empiricism of David Hume, to books on Nietzsche, Kant, Bergson and Spinoza. He would, after several collaborative efforts with Felix Guattari, write books on Leibniz and Foucault. Deleuze also published artistic studies of Sacher-Masoch, Marcel Proust, Francis Bacon, and two volumes on cinema, the latter three books coming late in his career. In the late 60s, Deleuze set forth his own philosophical vision in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, books often spoken of as the crowning achievements of Deleuzian philosophy.

It should be clear that by “philosophy” Deleuze has never meant anything other than *ontology*, the study of being, and the creation of ontological concepts. But if one were to suppose that Deleuze’s ontological disposition would predispose him to consider the great political themes taken up by his predecessors, one would be largely disappointed. Aside from minor statements and asides gesturing to the political nature of

a term or concept, Deleuze, as Paul Patton notes, has demonstrated “an almost complete lack of engagement with the central problems and normative commitments of Anglo-American political thought”.¹² On the one hand, this is not surprising. It is probably true that, in general, the most rigorous “ontological” philosophers of modern Continental philosophy – Heidegger in particular – tended not to prioritize political problems in their work.¹³

On the other hand, it *is* surprising, given that Deleuze’s philosophy so persistently challenged conformist modes of thinking, that the work of this period did not brush up against some of the problems germane to Anglo-American political philosophy: the organization of the polis, the nature of power, the question of sovereignty, and so on. Without foreclosing the possibility of there being something like a genuinely political dimension in the ontology of Deleuze’s solo writings, we certainly have to acknowledge that there is nothing *overtly* political about it. Slavoj Žižek probably captures the prevailing view of the books of this period when he writes that they are the product of “a highly elitist author, indifferent toward politics”.¹⁴

¹² Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 1.

¹³ Incidentally, an interesting evaluation of all three thinkers is to be found in the first chapter of Slavoj Žižek’s *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 2000). In the context of Žižek’s discussion in this chapter, it is perhaps more accurate to say that Heideggerian philosophy is incapable of overcoming the politically sterile oscillation between the potentially fascistic “decisionism” of his early work and the overt “fatalism” of his later work. For Žižek, Heidegger’s problem was not going far enough in the former direction, by refusing to embrace the “abyss of radical subjectivity announced in Kantian transcendental imagination”, and brought to fulfillment in his own Hegelian-Lacanian conjunction (see *Ibid.*, 23). One might add here, in a similar vein, Alain Badiou’s critique of the theme of finitude, a theme that, for him, is constitutive of contemporary thought because it marks the relegation of the infinite to a “non-appropriable or unnameable horizon of immortal divinity”. “Little by little”, he adds, “a generalized historicism is smothering us beneath a veneer of disgusting sanctification”. Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and Mathematics”, in *Theoretical Writings*, 28.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20. See also, Alain Badiou, *Deleuze*, 11.2

A major break has tended to be identified in Deleuze's work, following the events of May 1968 in France. These events, which included unprecedented mass worker's strikes and student uprisings, led many thinkers in France to question the prevailing social, philosophical and political tendencies of the day, particularly the dominance of Marxism and orthodox strains of Freudian psychoanalysis. The great influence of May '68 on Deleuze is evident in the first book he published after the events, *Anti-Oedipus*. Written with Guattari, the book certainly was something of a departure from Deleuze's solo writings, both in style and content. For the first time, it seemed, Deleuze had shifted his "anti-political stance" to engage directly with social and political themes. In terms of politics, *Anti-Oedipus* offers a thorough revision of a number of Freudian and Marxist themes: a universal history of capital, a (perhaps nascent) theory of the State, a developed ontology of both social and "desiring" production. What's more, *Anti-Oedipus* was written in a style that, if not anti-philosophical, was certainly more antagonistic to the conventional way of writing philosophy at that time than Deleuze's own "philosophical" books. To many, the recalcitrance of *Anti-Oedipus* was a far cry from Deleuze's earlier work on the history of concepts.

More significantly, *Anti-Oedipus* marked the first time that Deleuze integrated social and political events and processes directly into his ontology. In the spirit of the time and place in which it was written, *Anti-Oedipus* sought to think through the original forms of collective experimentation that the protests of May '68 had rendered – in the most urgent and hopeful way – adequate material for thought.

Deleuze appeared to endorse the view that *Anti-Oedipus* marked something of a turn towards politics for him. In conversation with the Italian thinker Antonio Negri, he expressed himself in the following way:

I, for my own part, made a sort of move into politics around May 68, as I came into contact with specific problems, through Guattari, through Foucault, through Elie Sambar. *Anti-Oedipus* was from beginning to end a book of political philosophy.¹⁵

Even more than *Anti-Oedipus*, its companion volume, *A Thousand Plateaus*, seemed to verify the claim that Deleuze had indeed made a “move into politics”. (For his part, Antonio Negri dubbed this second volume “in its entirety a book of political philosophy”.¹⁶) *A Thousand Plateaus* was in some ways a departure from *Anti-Oedipus*, largely dropping the question of desire and psychoanalysis to engage with a much broader range of subjects, from linguistics to archaeology and ethnology, to literature and music. *A Thousand Plateaus* was also a much more overtly political book, with a plateau on micropolitics and two large plateaus devoted to the State and the war machine, fleshing out the chapter in *Anti-Oedipus* devoted to the universal history of capital. Together, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* comprised *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a remarkably dense and innovative ontology of capitalism and the possibilities for evading its control.

However appealing this narrative of Deleuze’s “move into politics” may be, it does not hold. On the one hand, as we will examine in detail in the first chapter, the fruits

¹⁵ See the interview “Control and Becoming” in Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 170. Foucault was a friend of Deleuze’s throughout much of the two thinkers’ lives; Elie Sambar edited a journal devoted to the rights of Palestinians. The “specific problems” Deleuze is referring to are probably the condition of prisoners and the Israel-Palestine conflict. Deleuze participated in organizations devoted to both of these issues, following May ‘68.

¹⁶ Antonio Negri, quoted by Jeremie Valentin, “Gilles Deleuze’s Political Posture”, in *Deleuze and Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 191.

of Deleuze's supposed political conversion, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, is startling in its failure to ground a distinctly political mode of ontological production. While incorporating everything from the State to the status of "nomads" into its ontology of capital, these books seem ultimately to link politics by nature to those mechanisms that *repress, regulate, or normalize* the ontologically productive powers immanent to the social sphere. In as much as politics is given a wholly negative status in their ontology, Deleuze and Guattari devise a set of *ethical* maxims that they feel are best able to sanction the forms of being capable of evading capitalistic control and affirming life. This ethic, which they call "non-fascist living", calls for *continuous experimentation* with the productive powers immanent with our being, producing ourselves anew whenever the mechanisms of control reassert themselves. Because this ethic is premised on the fact that the powers of ontological production can only be invoked by sacrificing the integrity and the organizational capacity of political being (which, in any case, is defined only negatively), the liberatory or revolutionary aspect of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* amounts to a largely *apolitical* one.

On the other hand, if we wish to assert that Deleuze's work, as a whole, is dominated by such an ethical practice, we must contend with a rather different problem. For the fact remains that there are elements of Deleuze's ontology, as presented throughout his books (including his work with Guattari) that suggest a genuine *affinity* with a revolutionary politics. Indeed, hints that Deleuze's planned last work, before his death in 1995, was to be a book devoted to Marx suggest that he may have been dissatisfied with his and Guattari's ontology of capital, and his own "move into

politics".¹⁷ In my view, when we examine the core elements of Deleuze's ontology, the concepts of multiplicity and singularity, independently of the contemporary valorization of the rhizome, we discover a Deleuze who comes close to restoring politics to its *positivity*. Admittedly, as we will see in chapter two, Deleuze's own contributions to thinking politics as a mode of ontological production are fragmentary and underdeveloped. Nonetheless, in so far as a tenable link exists between ontology and politics in the notion of a political singularity, it must be acknowledged that the nominal distinction between ethics and politics in Deleuze's work may, in fact, disclose a source of great *tension* within his ontology as a whole.

Apolitics and the Thought of the One

We could, in fact, go further and suggest, as I do in chapter three, that the primary tension in Deleuze's ontology amounts, more or less, to a conflict between an apolitical ethics of non-fascist living and a revolutionary politics of singularity. This much becomes clear when we examine the major critiques that have been made of Deleuze's philosophy. Of these, Alain Badiou's book on Deleuze is most prescient. Like Deleuze, Badiou maintains that philosophy today hinges upon a question of being, specifically the way in which we conceive of the pure multiples of being and their corresponding unique, or singular points, against the familiar theoretical refrains of our contemporary milieu, whether political (the valorization of pluralism and public opinion, the defense of capitalism, human rights, multiculturalism, and so on) or ethical (the historicity of finitude, the indebtedness to the Other). That said, however, Badiou maintains that

¹⁷ Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell note that, as the time of their translation of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze was "writing a work on 'the greatness of Marx'". See their "Translator's Introduction", in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), viii.

Deleuze's philosophical project remains committed to a renewed thinking of "the One", and not the liberation of multiplicities. Badiou does not mean by this that Deleuze's ontology boils down to an affirmation a simple totality or unity. Rather, he argues that ontological production, for Deleuze, is animated by a *univocal power*, a power which is *ontologically One*, even though it is deployed in a diversity of *formally* distinct actualities. For Badiou, such a metaphysical orientation implies that political subjects can only be passive recipients of ontological transformation, because our formally distinct social and political actuality is always *unilaterally determined* by the One's own nomadic circulation, and because there is no way of truly intuiting the movements of the One without remaining indifferent to what ontological production *demand*s of our lived actuality itself.

Central to Badiou's critique is the distinction Deleuze makes between *the actual* and *the virtual*, terms derived from the work of Henri Bergson. These terms describe the nature of the two basic registers of being in Deleuze's ontology: the order of extended, measurable, material being, of everyday "lived actuality" and "states of affairs"; and the order of immaterial, "intensive" virtuality.¹⁸ For Deleuze, the virtual corresponds to a kind of determinate "potential" whose nature is in no way determined by, or implied in, the form of our actuality. Whereas the actuality of being can be said to be subject to predictive, exhaustively determined causal laws, the virtual belongs exclusively to the order of singular *events*, of brute eruptions, which, while *caused* by actual processes, nonetheless are of a nature that exceeds this causality. Indeed, May '68 for Deleuze (and

¹⁸ On "states of affairs" and its Stoic resonances see Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Continuum, 2004) 7; on the Bergsonian origins of the virtual see Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 42-43 and 97-102.

Guattari) provided an exemplar of what is singular in political events, because it presented a revolutionary potential or virtuality that amounted to *something more* than just a playing out of a historically determined class antagonism or cultural tension, an excess that French society has yet to properly embody.¹⁹

By the same token, however, Deleuze maintains that the being of the virtual is just as *real* and determinate as the being of the actual. And it on this point that Badiou's dispute with Deleuze begins. For, Badiou argues, if we wish to uphold both that the virtual is as real as the actual and that the reality of the virtual exceeds and is distinct from its actual causes, then we must sacrifice the *integrity* and determinacy conventionally associated with actual being. From this point of view, Deleuzianism appears marked, above all, by a general devaluation of any sustained engagement in socio-political actuality, or of anything that would limit the expression of the One. This leads Peter Hallward, another one of Deleuze's critics, to argue that Deleuze's ontology is orientated "out of this world", that it is directed at continually *escaping* from the sedimentation of actuality into distinct identities and relations. What we end up with is an ontology in which any distinctive space for political thought can only be subsumed by an ethical and apolitical dynamic, one which serves to render subjects, in their actuality, *maximally expressive of the One*, against any social or political prerogative that might stand in its way.

Certainly this view of Deleuze's ontology has its critics, among them the theorist Alberto Toscano who maintains, against Badiou and Hallward, that ontological

¹⁹ See the very important article by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "May '68 Did Not Take Place", in Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 233-236.

production for Deleuze is a much more contingent, experimental, and hazardous process, more a “praxis” than a unilateral unfolding of the One. And, in light of Toscano’s reading, we might add that there is in Deleuze’s ontological praxis a dramatic re-orientation of the values cherished by contemporary political theorists – pluralism, contingency, indeterminacy, and so on. It is with Deleuze that we begin to discern what the re-affirmation of philosophy could mean to political thought – namely, the possibility of once again restoring a certain *positivity* to politics, of making revolutionary politics no longer the accomplice of a historical trajectory of class antagonism, or of a simple resistance to unity and norms, but of a kind of ontological antagonism, a singularity, *determined in the course of the production of socio-political being itself*. On the basis of Deleuze’s ontology, it once again becomes possible to determine a political prerogative attuned to the productive potential hovering over collective political struggle, a prerogative whose primary value consists in the way in which it is *traversal* to the plurality of social particularities or differences.

By the same token, however, having devised a philosophy possessed of such incredible sensitivity to the singular potential subtending our actuality, Deleuze ultimately proves incapable of positing any way in which this potential could be harnessed for a fundamental transformation of political existence. Perhaps because his ontology is so attuned to the circulation of the One, Deleuze stops short of linking politics, *by nature*, to the singular event. It follows that if we are gain a successful intuition of a singular movement of Being we must be willing to subordinate our socio-political demands to an ethics of non-fascist living, one that stands prepared to sacrifice anything of our political existence that limits the expression of the One. We cannot avoid

the conclusion that while Deleuzianism represents something of a move beyond those forms of political theory whose tendency it is to deny that politics proper is animated by an overriding antagonism, that see the defense of pluralism as the highest aspiration of thought, it is ultimately orientated towards constructing a singular form of *apolitics*. In reconciling the ‘ethical’ and the ‘political’ dimensions of Deleuze’s thought, we find that only an ethics of non-fascist living is capable of affirming life and liberating Being, because any embrace of the singular movements of the One is premised on a transfixion and disintegration of our existence that is irreconcilable with positive form of politics. There is perhaps a profound disenchantment with politics in Deleuze’s philosophy, when the affirmation of life requires that we stand ready to sacrifice our efforts towards *decisively* overcoming what is intolerable in political existence.

Note on Deleuzian Terminology

When reading and writing about Deleuze, one is forced to grapple with an unusually excessive set of terms and concepts that, moreover, tend to change from book to book. Readers familiar only with *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, for example, may be surprised to find that desire, the rhizome, the body without organs, and the nomad, barely figure in Deleuze’s solo writings. What may be more surprising, however, is the extent to which the *role* played by each new term appeared largely unchanged from book to book, in the manner that the cast of a classic play remains unchanged throughout the many performances made of it. Thus, what Deleuze calls “the virtual” in *Bergsonism* plays a similar role as “desiring-production” in *Anti-Oedipus*, in that it names the element of positive, productive potential, determinable independently of a given form of actuality, identity or subjectivity. Consider also, the concept of the “body without organs” in

Capitalism and Schizophrenia, which plays a similar function as the concept of “sense” in *The Logic of Sense*, by naming a kind of minimally extended *field* of virtuality that determines the productive potential attuned to a multiplicity of organs or statements.

Why does Deleuze rely upon such a disparate set of terms and concepts to play such similar ontological roles? It might be suggested that such terms play a determining function in animating Deleuze’s own philosophical *perspectivism*. While terms and concepts play roles consistent throughout his work, they each define a perspective immanent to the being of the subject matter at hand. Thus, while the body without organs expresses a *biomechanical* perspective on being, the concept of sense expresses a perspective immanent to the being of *language*. Like Nietzsche’s use of the term, each such perspective does not describe a point of view of a reality that exists independently of them all. Rather, each such perspective expresses the whole of being relative to the terms of a given domain (sense and language, capitalism and schizophrenia, difference and repetition, and so on).²⁰

Throughout this thesis we will migrate between terms and concepts, in order to attempt to grasp something of the relation between ethics and politics in Deleuze’s ontology. Generally speaking, we will employ the term “collective” when referring to socio-political being, to describe those orders of being that are transversal or *diagonal* to the divisions (individual/society, particular/general, State/society, and so on) that compose the familiar social and political categories. For, as we shall see in chapter one, there is good reason to question whether or not the concepts developed to *Capitalism and*

²⁰ On perspectivism and Nietzsche, see the first chapter of Jeffery A. Bell, *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos: Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Difference* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

Schizophrenia represent Deleuze's sole meditation on being from the perspective of politics.

CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICS OF *CAPITALISM AND SCHIZOPHRENIA*

For anyone wishing to examine the status of politics in Deleuze's work the obvious place to start is with *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, books that Deleuze linked to his own "move into politics", and which commentators generally agree represent his major "contribution to political thought".²¹ Certainly it is difficult to read these books and fail to sense something revolutionary in Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of biomechanical "flows" (desire, affects, people, goods and so on) – flows which, for the authors, are productive of the forms of social being associated with the historical emergence of capitalism. For most, I suspect, this sense is confirmed in so far as the authors' micropolitical practice appears to valorize all that is rhizomatic and pluralizing in resisting capitalist control. Indeed, we have already seen how dominant this conviction is amongst the commentary on Deleuze and Guattari's politics, a politics that serves, generally speaking, to link the apparatuses of the State and capitalism with the mechanisms that regulate and stifle the production of being in all its forms.

But how revolutionary is this politics? I will argue that, although Deleuze and Guattari often speak of politics, the very name "politics" for them seems to have a largely *negative* value, referring almost solely to the mechanisms by which being is repressed, segmented, and controlled. In so far as this politics *does* seek to liberate the ontologically productive flows that compose the being of the social, the only forms of collective being it can sanction are those that follow the *ethical* injunction that we live in a state of constant experimentation with the possibilities of collective "becoming". Even when

²¹ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 171; Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 132.

considered as a politically minded ethics, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of non-fascist living seems *ambiguous* at best, for there is a likelihood that the forms of collective being it sanctions would be severely at odds with the forms of organization effectively required to resist political domination and control. This fact alone suggests that there may be something inherently *apolitical* about this ethics.

What is at stake here, ultimately, is whether the micropolitics of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* implies a distinctly *political* mode of ontological production. As we will see, upon closer examination this "politics" appears less as a contribution to political philosophy, and more an extension of the ethical logic of "counter-actualization" developed in Deleuze's earlier work (particularly *The Logic of Sense*) to the realm of politics. One of the reasons that the resemblance between this ethics and politics has not been recognized as such is because of the tendency among commentators to find something *inherently* revolutionary in those elements of Deleuze and Guattari's ontology that are resistant to unity, identity, and representation. As we will see, this is the case even with the most comprehensive reading of Deleuze's politics in the Anglo-American academy, Paul Patton's *Deleuze and the Political*, a book that, perhaps more than any other, lays bare all that is problematic in the dominant readings of Deleuze's ontology and politics.

But let us look closely at Deleuze and Guattari's ontology, and the concepts associated with their "political philosophy".

A Micropolitics of Desire

The political theory of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books finds its primary formulation in what Deleuze and Guattari call "micropolitics" or "the politics of desire".

In both cases, the authors are concerned with the ways in which ontologically productive flows are organized and coded in line with a historically dominant form of social and political being. Central to their ontology are the different modes of *territorialization* associated with the emergence of capitalism. Territorialities are not simply markers of sovereignty, in the conventional sense, but patterns of segmentation and de-segmentation that regulate the long-term tendencies of different “assemblages” of flows. As Deleuze and Guattari constantly reiterate, however, territorialities are largely determined by the movements of “deterritorialization” that they are bound up with, the ways in which flows are made to take flight from a territoriality, and the reterritorializations that are made of them. Indeed, as we shall see, Deleuze and Guattari tend to distinguish the basic tendencies immanent to the assemblages considered in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with reference to a whole series of such *dualisms*.

But what is the nature of the flows and territorialities of capitalism, and how do they relate to politics? Consider, first of all, what Deleuze and Guattari call “desire” as it appears in *Anti-Oedipus*. Here, perhaps anticipating the difficulties that would later dog their book, the authors go through pains to demonstrate that desire is not a spontaneous or primal drive (“nothing is primal”) nor is it “an undifferentiated instinctual energy”.²² In fact, for them desire does not even belong, by nature, to the instinctual mechanisms of the self, nor is it directed primarily at persons or things. “For the prime evidence,” Deleuze and Guattari write, “points to the fact that desire does not take as its object persons or

²² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 77; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 215.

things, but the entire surroundings that it traverses”.²³ This is because for them desire is a *non-subjective* force, a force which neither emanates from an individual psyche nor is rooted in an essential form of subjectivity, but flows through and traverses the social milieu in its entirety.

It is because of their conception of desire that the authors direct the majority of their critical attention at the Freudian figure of Oedipus. The interpretative schema of Freudian psychoanalysis reads all the desiring investments of the patient as being linked by nature to subjective *representations* or stand-ins for the mother, the father, and the child (or ego). This is because, for Freud, the social organization of the libido occurs when our unrequited desire for some element of the familial system is sublimated, thereby integrating us into the social field. For him, desire can invest the social field only through the mediation of a set of representations which refer it back to those elements of the familial system – the father, the mother, and the ego – that constitute the “Oedipal triangle”.

By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari argue that desire is not primarily based on *lack* – the thwarted desire for a return to pre-Oedipal subjective “wholeness” – or *law*, associated with an originary denial or name of the father. In fact, it is not defined negatively, but invests the social field directly, in a positive manner, without *any mediation, or representation at all*. As they write:

We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that the libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production.²⁴

²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 292.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

Thus, the Freudian tendency to link desire to Oedipal forms of representation provides, for the authors, a schema of the repression of ontological production more generally, a schema in which desire is viewed as constantly replaying the “Oedipal drama” instead of actively *producing* historically unique forms of sociability. This is why Deleuze and Guattari say that the unconscious is not a “theatre” for the continual playing out of the Oedipal drama of unrequited desire, but a “factory”, a productive space.²⁵ For them desire is always *desiring-production*, a non-subjective and ontologically productive flow that gives rise to repressive forms of representation and identity only in a *secondary* way – only when desiring-production is organized in such a way as to be made subordinate to transcendent “Oedipal” phenomena. This point takes on a distinctly political inflection when we acknowledge that the subordination of desire to transcendent representations extends well beyond the family: “Oedipus” can also be a State, a nation, and even a face; anything that enforces an organization of desire resonant with a repressive form of social and political being.

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari go so far as to argue that the “fundamental problem of political philosophy” is bound up with a problem of desire. This is, for them, a problem that appears most acutely in cases of *fascism*, and could be posed as follows: “Why does desire desire its own repression, how can it desire its own repression?”²⁶ They want to know how, if desire is primarily a non-subjective and productive force, it can give rise to repressive social configurations, how it can actively stifle its own productive capacities. This is, in essence, what the politics of desire is concerned with: grasping the ways in which desire is turned *against itself*, how “local”, psychical forms of repression

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 215.

are resonant with broader forms of social and political repression (the terminal case being fascism).

Deleuze and Guattari develop this logic in *A Thousand Plateaus*, a book in which they speak less exclusively of desire in favour of a more broadly named ontology of flows and assemblages of such flows. Here the politics of desire is referred to as “micropolitics”. Like the former, micropolitics requires that we grasp those organizations of flows beyond any essential form of subjectivity or historical social configuration. Here, also, they all but leave behind their critique of psychoanalysis and their analysis of social repression to look at the *segmentation* of being more generally, and the ways in which certain forms of segmentation resonate with the overtly political mechanisms of control.

For Deleuze and Guattari, segmentation occurs both in “rigid” and “supple” modes, across two planes of being. On the one hand, there are rigid segmentations enacted on the *molar* plane: a plane of fully constituted, quantifiable actuality, co-extensive with Oedipal forms of representation and identity. Molar segmentations are clear enough: the division between the sexes, class divisions, racial divisions, and so on. On the other hand, there are supple segmentations which take effect only on a *molecular* plane: a more fluid and “pre-subjective” order which eludes stable identities and cannot be properly grasped by our faculties of representation. Molecular segmentations are slightly more complex, and involve segmentations that are not co-extensive with the major social divisions, even though they “traverse” these divisions and can be re-

territorialized on them. These include not only segmentations of desire, but also “affects”, “micro-perceptions”, and so on.²⁷

As Deleuze and Guattari see it, molar and molecular segmentations co-exist in every society. That said, the most powerful forms of segmentation are those invested in the control of the more erratic, molecular flows. In this sense, the molecular realm can be said to be *primary* in micropolitics. Consider the authors’ analysis of the *State* mechanisms of segmentation and control. In modern capitalist social formations, Deleuze and Guattari see the State as effectuating the *overcoding* of flows, making all the local, molecular segmentations of being resonate in a homogenous space, so as to act as a “resonance chamber” for the productive activities of these flows.²⁸ Overcoding functions by actively *converting* molecular flows into segmentations of a molar sort (by ensuring, for example, that all kinds of erratic flows relating to indeterminate forms of sexuality and labour politics are translated into sex and class binaries – man/woman, proletariat/bourgeois, and so on).

Likewise, they argue that social formations organized on the basis of capitalism function by means of a continual deterritorialization of flows, coding them as abstract quantities (for example, money) so as to better regulate them within a single system of exchange, a single social formation. What keeps these continually deterritorialized flows from staving off the formation of any stable social and political order whatsoever is the constitution of an “axiomatic”, a thing which, when attached to a previously uncontrollable set of flows, renders them commensurable with capitalistic exchange (the constitution of a minimum wage, for example, which ensures that demands for worker’s

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 213-214.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 224.

rights are translated into a form commensurable with the continuation of capitalism). The axiomatic function like a *relative* limit that wards off *absolute* deterritorialization by continually finding new ways to reterritorialize flows in chains of equivalence and exchange value.²⁹ Capitalist social formations are based upon a continual displacement and expansion of the limits of what can be integrated into capitalism as such, so as to prevent any flows from “taking flight”. The limits of the capitalist social order can thus be said to be entirely *immanent* and accessible to the apparatuses of capitalism itself.

In a similar vein, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the molar level of *fascism* operates by segmenting the molecular flows (affect, desire, perception, and so on) in a way that resonates with the fascism of the State. What sustains such “micro-fascisms” is a local formation of desire and affect that revolves around a kind of “black hole”, a vacuous space in which desire continually turned against itself, actively stifling the potential for flows to grow and propagate together. As Philip Goodchild explains, micro-fascism once again foregrounds the problem of Oedipal representation. “[M]icrofascism”, he writes, “results when Oedipus becomes deterritorialized from a specific content of prohibition and a specific representation of desire, in order to attain an infinite form. Oedipus...may reterritorialize on a race, a nation, an ideal, a myth, a cause, a face, or capital itself”.³⁰ In short, the micro-fascisms that sustain molar or State fascism are reactionary in the most violent of ways: they bring into play deterritorializations of desire infused with such strong *anti-productive* tendencies that desiring-production is never able

²⁹ Ibid., 246.

³⁰ Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari: An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 197-198.

to gain a foothold, to connect with other flows, and re-territorialize on forms of collective being capable of permitting the immediate expression of desire in its own right.

Ultimately then, micropolitics is aimed, first of all, at rendering thinkable how we might precipitate the *absolute deterritorialization* of flows from the merely relative play of the molar and molecular, deterritorialization and re-territorialization, that subordinates the long term tendencies of being to a repressive social formation. Indeed, from this point of view, Deleuze and Guattari are much more interested in the ways in which flows *escape* stifling investments than in any particular investment as such. They go so far as to argue that “from the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular”.³¹ Secondly, however, in order to counter the micro-fascisms that pervade our existence, it is not enough simply to promote lines of flight and movements of absolute deterritorialization (though, admittedly, the end of *Anti-Oedipus* does suggest as much).³² We must do so in a way that is “life-affirming”, that affirms the productive nature of desire within the context of a given form of life and existence. What is important is that we grasp a movement of absolute deterritorialization without either reterritorializing it on a stifling, molar plane (repression in the conventional sense) or staving off *any* successful process of re-territorialization, any molar formation, such that the process of deterritorialization *itself* becomes fascistic and, finally, deadly (a drug addiction, for example).³³ To strike a balance between these two dangers, to find a way to find allow for the *consistent* expression of desire, is the essence of what they call “non-fascist living”.

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 216.

³² See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 340-382.

³³ *Ibid.*, 228.

Non-Fascist Living: an *Ethics*

As every reader of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* knows, the very nature of the authors' project renders it impossible to discover an underlying logic or unity in the disparate, and unwieldy conceptual creations that populate the books.³⁴ Nevertheless, Paul Patton, in his *Deleuze and the Political*, has attempted to trace the development of Deleuze's politics across the entirety of his work (except for his writings on art), locating *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* within the development of Deleuze's ontology as a whole. Arguably, Patton's text represents the most comprehensive examination of Deleuze's politics in the Anglo-American academic world.³⁵ Like virtually every commentator, Patton argues that "Deleuze's contribution to political thought is concentrated in the books he co-authored with Guattari", primarily *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.³⁶ By drawing upon Patton's text in this section, I want not only to take advantage of a representative reading of "Deleuzian" politics, but also to isolate the difficulties involved in treating the politics of desire *as* a "contribution to political thought". As we shall see, not only is Patton's text symptomatic of the failure of most commentators to adequately distinguish the politics of desire from the overtly *ethical* logic developed in Deleuze's earlier work (including, most prominently, *The Logic of Sense*), it also leads us

³⁴ It is probably in recognition of this fact that Guattari articulated his famous statement that a book should be treated less like a unified whole and more like a "toolbox": a reservoir of concepts to be used as needed. See Brian Massumi, "Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy", in Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xv.

³⁵ As compared with other texts on Deleuzian politics, including Nicholas Thorburn's *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics*, Philip Goodchild's *Deleuze and Guattari*, and the work of Todd May, Patton's text is broader in the number of works of Deleuze's considered, and more focused on the question of how this work pertains to the specifically Anglo-American tradition of political philosophy. Patton was also one of, if not the first to write on Deleuze's politics in the Anglo-American context, and did more to solidify a certain image of Deleuzianism than the aforementioned authors.

³⁶ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 132.

to ask whether there is such a thing as a distinctly political dimension *to be found* in Deleuze's and Guattari's work.

That is not to deny, however, that many elements of Deleuze's philosophy certainly *suggest* a politics, as Patton himself is aware. Consider, for example, Deleuze's conception of *thought*. As Patton notes, Deleuzian thought is driven by the effort to free thinking from its subordination to the conventional "images of thought" that have cropped up over time (Descartes' *Cogito*, for example, or Kantian common sense). Deleuze describes such images as "a system of coordinates, dynamics, orientations: what it means to think and to 'orient oneself in thought'".³⁷ Images of thought are those implicit, pre-philosophical, and *common sense* elements that fetter thought to a given territoriality, suppressing the deterritorializing potentials in experience by rendering things thinkable only on the condition that they accord with the segmentations, divisions, and codes of the dominant society. By contrast, true "thought" for Deleuze is akin to a "forced movement", precipitated in the face of all the intellectual and physical *habits* that render the world familiar and easily identifiable to us.³⁸ As Patton notes, any philosophy content to think on the basis of an image can only, for Deleuze, sustain a "complacent" mode of thinking and, in turn, a conformist type of politics, in line with segmentations upon which State capitalism (as well as other dominant forms of social being) functions.³⁹

As Patton notes, Deleuze accords a very important role to the *concept* in deterritorializing thought from its conventional images – so much so, that in their book

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 148, quoted in *Ibid*, 18.

³⁸ Consider Deleuze's statement: "To what are we dedicated if not to those problems which demand the very transformation of our body and our language?" *Ibid.*, 192.

³⁹ Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 22.

What is Philosophy? Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy simply *as* the creation of concepts. But what is meant here by “concept”? For Deleuze a concept functions to expose the *virtualities*, the molecular potential embedded in everyday experience, such that things become thinkable as processes of on-going ontological production, continually “in the middle” of being, rather than strictly delimited entities subject to a unilateral logic of development. If we look at Deleuze and Guattari’s most famous concepts – their conceptualizations of territoriality, but also the “body without organs”, “assemblages”, the “war machine”, and so on – we see in each case that the concept serves to grasp things at their *points of transformation*: it thus becomes impossible to think of territorialities apart from their movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, bodies apart from the continual re-constitution of the “organs”, and so on. Indeed, we could call such points of transformation *singularities*; for Deleuze, *every genuine concept is a singularity*.

It should be emphasized, however, that the concept itself belongs solely to *philosophical* modes of thinking, as opposed to what Deleuze and Guattari consider the other modes of thought – namely, science (which draws practical *functions* from infinite virtuality), and art (which renders thinkable the *percepts* and *affects* that constitute the “being of the sensible”, prior to or beyond its harnessing to the human subject). Thus, even though we may develop political concepts, the concept *itself* remains the product of a properly philosophical thought (the same way that political affects, like those that circulate in the fascist spectacle, belong strictly to an artistic mode of thought, or political functions, like opinion research statistics, to science). We will return to this point below.

Having established the relation between thought and conceptual creation in Deleuze's work, Patton goes on to examine the concepts central to Deleuze's ontology, with the aim of establishing the continuity between Deleuze's notion of thought and his later political philosophy. Of these concepts, there is none more longstanding in Deleuze's ontology than that of *multiplicity*, which, according to Patton, is "key to the structure of the concepts invented with Guattari, and thereby to the ethico-political implications of their collaborative work".⁴⁰ The concept of multiplicity functions, for Deleuze, to seize in thought a "multiple as such" independently of the opposition between the multiple and the One, and independently of any *unity* or identity external to the elements of a given multiple.⁴¹ On at least a superficial level, the centrality that Patton accords this concept to the structure of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* seems obvious. If non-fascist living is ultimately a question of deterritorializing flows from the segmentations that stifle and control life, then we must be capable of grasping these flows in their pure "un-attachedness", as pure multiplicity, free from any necessary unity or encompassing space.

The difficult question, however, is how this key concept of multiplicity finds *concrete* expression in the politics of desire. Is it enough to say that, in promoting resistance to unity and fixity, in taking sides with the multiple against any sovereign One, multiplicity is an *inherently* political concept? According to Patton, the concept provides "grounds for the autonomy of individual differences and [the rejection of] those forms of reductionism which treated particular differences, such as sex and race, as subordinate to

⁴⁰ Ibid, 30.

⁴¹ See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 182.

one central difference or social contradiction”.⁴² This is because the concept merges with a “political perspective...directed not at the installation of new constants or the attainment of majority status,” such as masculinity or whiteness, a concept that wages “the transformative potential of becoming-minor, or becoming-revolutionary, against the normalizing power of the majority”.⁴³ As for the first point, it can be said that, for Patton, the concept of multiplicity grounds the irreducible *plurality* of the social sphere, the autonomy of social particularities. This leads to the second, related, point. If the plurality of the social sphere is secured by the ontology of multiplicities, then it follows that only those forms of social and political being *that compose multiplicities themselves* are adequate to expressing difference and affirming this plurality. This is what Patton means when he writes of a political perspective “directed not at the installation of new constants or the attainment of majority status”: only those forms of being that become dispossessed of their majoritarian status, that affirm the multiplicity of their being against the declaration “our difference above all others”, are capable of partaking of the “transformative potential” of becoming-minor or becoming-revolutionary.

If it be accepted that the concept of multiplicity is essential to the relation between Deleuze’s ontology and politics – a politics that Patton sees as concentrated in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books – then Patton’s text must be read closely on these two points. In my view, it is precisely with this aspect of his reading that the utterly *problematic* nature of the politics of desire becomes apparent. Despite what Patton, and many like-minded commentators argue, a closer inspection of this ontology of politics

⁴² Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 46

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48

demonstrates quite clearly that, from the perspective of micropolitics, politics is certainly *not* a form of ontological production.

This first becomes most apparent when we look at the Patton's initial point, his equation of multiplicity with pluralism. Consider that, in their ontology of flows, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between the molar and the molecular, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, such that one of the terms in play is primary: lines of flight are primary in the production of the social, micro-fascisms in the production of macro-fascisms, and so on. It is the nature of these distinctions that provokes Patton to write, after two solid chapters of exposition on *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, that *Anti-Oedipus* "is in many respects conducive to an anti-political stance".⁴⁴ He later includes *A Thousand Plateaus* in this charge.⁴⁵ Why "anti-political"? Because Deleuze and Guattari, by championing the deterritorializing tendencies of capitalism as the transformative potential that may be harnessed to provoke revolutionary transformation, inscribe a fundamental *dualism* in their politics. This dualism implies, Patton says, that "the political sphere is always reactive by nature," serving only to inhibit, stifle, or regulate the molecular flows of desire.⁴⁶

But where precisely does this dualism *lie*? Deleuze and Guattari are clear that this is *not* a simple dualism between the molar and the molecular, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. As they write in *Anti-Oedipus*, "there are fundamentally two poles; but we would not be satisfied if we had to present them merely as the duality of molar formations and the molecular formations...everywhere there exists the molecular *and* the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 105

⁴⁶ Ibid., 104. The presence of a fundamental dualism in Deleuze and Guattari's work is examined in more detail by Frederic Jameson. See Frederic Jameson, "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze", in *A Deleuzian Century?*, ed. Ian Buchanan (London: Duke University Press, 1999), 13-36.

molar: their disjunction is a relation of included disjunction, which varies only according to the two directions of subordination, according as the molecular phenomena are subordinated to the large aggregates, or on the contrary subordinate them [the large aggregates] to themselves”.⁴⁷ This is why the authors situate the dualism *within* being itself: even when molecular flows and deterritorializations are precipitated within collective being, *we never take leave of the molar as such*. Rather, the success of the politics of desire hinges upon whether the materiality of collective being is subordinated to “large aggregates”, molar segmentations, or to “molecular phenomena”. A truly liberatory and, indeed, *revolutionary* investment of desire occurs only when the production of social being is subordinated to desiring-production, so that desire is *directly* productive of being, rather than being fettered to mechanisms that regulate and control this production in line with the territoriality of a dominant form of social being.

Given the nature of this dualism, in what sense can it be said, as Patton suggests, that “the political sphere is always reactive by nature” for Deleuze and Guattari? For all the nuance of their analysis, it seems that on the whole, “politics” concerns only the mechanisms by which productive molecular flows are subordinated to molar organizations of desire, only those means by which being is segmented. As the authors themselves admit, “Good or bad, *politics and its judgments are always molar*, but it is the molecular and its assessments that makes or breaks it”.⁴⁸ Obviously, Deleuze and Guattari are not suggesting that politics is *exclusively* a molar phenomenon, for we have seen that, for them, the molar and the molecular, deterritorialization and reterritorialization are always intertwined and bound up with one another. What they do

⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 340-341.

⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 222. Emphasis added.

seem to be suggesting in this passage, however, is that politics is confined solely to the *reactive* side of the dualism between the molar and the molecular, functioning only to regulate and control the productive flows of being. From this point of view, it is difficult to see how the politics of desire could imply that politics has anything but a *negative* ontological status.

Granted, one could argue that “politics” here still consists in the delicate, cautious practice of promoting collective becomings, absolute deterritorializations, and revolutionary investments of desire; that there is another politics, “more profound” than this reactive figure, orientated towards the liberation of desiring-production, revolution in the production of the social, and consistency in non-fascist living. In my view, however, the positive, liberatory, or revolutionary aspect of the politics of desire is determined almost solely by an *ethical*, not a political, logic.

One of the primary indications of this is the subtle metamorphosis that occurs between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. The observation has often been made by commentators on Deleuze that *A Thousand Plateaus* contains more cautionary notes and warnings (on promoting sustainable and life-affirming deterritorializations, war machines, and so on) than *Anti-Oedipus* and thus, is a much more politically “sober” book. (Consider that, in the latter, the authors argue that “one can never go far enough in the direction of deterritorialization”, the former calls, again and again, for “sobriety”.⁴⁹) To my mind, this observation should be correlated with the fact that *A Thousand Plateaus* is a much more overtly *political* book, containing much more developed theories of the State, micropolitics and segmentation, nomads and the war machine, and so on. I would

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 321; See, for example, Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 503.

argue that the more extensively and cautiously Deleuze and Guattari articulate their political theory, and the productive and revolutionary modes of being they think it enables, the more they are forced to multiply and fine tune the number of *ethical* injunctions that effectively guide the processes of becoming and the practices of non-fascist living once the multiplicity of flows has been liberated from control. Such ethical injunctions call, generally speaking, for a constantly renewed *experimentation* with the possibilities of ontological production. Consider this oft-quoted passage from *A*

Thousand Plateaus:

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.⁵⁰

We can see that these injunctions act as the affirmative counter-part to the ontology of segmentation, serving, in effect, to *sanction the positive forms of being* that Deleuze and Guattari think are capable of revolutionary and non-fascist living. One could certainly argue at this point that all Deleuze and Guattari have done here is promote, for a contemporary milieu that finds decisive comfort in settling down, a kind of maximal openness to the multiplicity of Being. It follows that if this is an injunction it is of the least constraining, and most inclusive sort: a “pragmatics” instead of a program. But we should not be too quick to discount the determinative and exclusive nature of this ethics. Nicholas Thorburn, for example, writes in his study on Deleuze’s politics that the emphasis on constant experimentation in Deleuze and Guattari’s work stems from the authors’ own orientation towards oppressed and minortarian forms of being, for which

⁵⁰ Ibid., 161.

experimentation is a means of overcoming the lack of possibility in existence. As he writes, “rather than allow the solidification of particular political and cultural routes, forms, and identities, such ‘willed poverty’ serves to draw thought and practice back into a milieu of contestation, debate, and engagement, and forces ever new forms of experimentation”.⁵¹ It is precisely this “forcing” aspect that is key, however, and the notion that such forcing serves to “draw thought and practice back into a milieu of contestation, debate, and engagement”. What is at stake here is not the value accorded to experimentation or “forcing” in producing original modes of being for, by any account, Deleuze philosophy accords great value to both (particularly in his conception of thought). The issue at hand is what such experimentation is *for*, to what or where it is *orientated*. For Patton, as evidently for Thorburn, such injunctions serve to ground the *plurality* of the socio-political sphere, and to secure for thought a “milieu of contestation, debate, and engagement” capable of nothing more than ensuring the preservation of this plurality.⁵²

Given the rather effusive quality of the ethical content of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, it is admittedly somewhat difficult to isolate the *specific* set of ethical injunctions at work here. For his part, the philosopher Alain Badiou argues that Deleuze develops three central ethical “maxims”: “elude control”, “precipitate events” (or becomings, absolute deterritorializations, and so on), and “believe in the world” (or believe that new modes of being can be produced within the ontological resources of *this*

⁵¹ Nicholas Thorburn, *Deleuze, Marx, and Politics*. <<http://libcom.org/library/deleuze-marx-politics-nicholas-thoburn-2>> (Jan 13, 2007).

⁵² Arguably, such an emphasis on experimentation seems more in line with an aristocratic conception of thought. Indeed, in contrast to Thorburn’s emphasis on Kafka and Beckett as minoritarian writers, Deleuze and Guattari write that “it is not populist writers but the most aristocratic who lay claim to this future”, namely, the “constitution of an earth and a people that are lacking”. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 108.

world).⁵³ Whether or not these maxims are exhaustive of the ethical content of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is not the point; rather, the point is that these injunctions serve, in place of a positive figure of politics, to determine the forms of being adequate to non-fascist living.

And, in fact, the argument is probably better served by going *directly* to Deleuze's overtly ethical work and examining its resonances with the politics of desire. In my view, the politics of desire directly obeys the ethical logic of *counter-actualization* developed in Deleuze's own *The Logic of Sense*. Deleuze's ethics here is organized around the statement: "Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us".⁵⁴ For Deleuze, to consider the matter of how "not be unworthy of what happens to us" is to draw the full ethical implications of the concept of the *event*. In keeping with the dualistic nature of his ontology, Deleuze posits two basic registers in which every event occurs: the actual, which corresponds roughly to the molar, and the virtual, which is roughly synonymous with the molecular. What inspires Deleuze to consider the event as the locus of his ethics is his concern with the ways in which we might resist the *ressentiment* that disabling events (war, illness, and so on), as well as the betrayal of potentially revolutionary events (like May '68), inspire in us. To ask how we might be worthy of the events that befall us is really to ask how we might *counter* our own helplessness before the "brute facticity" of

⁵³ See Alain Badiou's lecture, a video of which is available at http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/deleuze/deleuze_day1_2.ram (December 13, 2007)

⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 169.

everyday reality. “To grasp whatever happens as unjust and unwarranted... is... what renders our sores repugnant”.⁵⁵

Thus, Deleuze will locate within his ontology of the virtual, potential lines of flight from the stifling determination that events exercise over us. For him, the productive or affirmative power presented by the event is a properly virtual power, which is not of the same order of the actual event. The *virtual event*, the event proper for Deleuze, “is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs”.⁵⁶ Though from a personal point of view, it always seems as if events proceed by means of a predictable causation and determination, the virtual aspect of the event is what effectively *overflows* or exceeds this causation; far from belonging to the present of its actualization, the virtual event “sidestep[s] each present”.⁵⁷ As Peter Hallward puts it, every virtual or properly creative event can be considered a kind of “effect that becomes irreducible to its cause”.⁵⁸

To *counter-actualize* is, on the one hand, to grasp this virtual aspect embedded in what occurs, to “release” it from its territorialization in an actual state of affairs or lived experience. But this requires, in turn, that we be capable of actualizing this event in a way that differs from its original actualization; otherwise, we would cancel out the power of virtuality by subordinating it to the same causation that precipitated the event in the first place. Thus, we must be able to embody the event “on the surface” of being, in a mode which preserves its excessive nature while rendering it thinkable, and affirmative of life. Deleuze gives the example of the actor. While an actor is always present in the acting of a role, the role he or she represents effectively exceeds the present of its actualization. The

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁸ Peter Hallward, *Out of this World*, 41. Emphasis removed.

actor's mode of actualization "redoubles this...physical actualization, in his own way, which is singularly superficial—but because of it more distinct, trenchant, and pure".⁵⁹ In Deleuze's privileged example of the actor, we can again see that the nature of the dualism he draws is *not* simply between the actual and the virtual: the actor obviously does not lose his or her actuality by "redoubling" it with a (virtual) role. Rather, by counter-actualizing the present of their actuality they thereby *subordinate* their actuality to a properly virtual determination – a role – that allows the event to be deployed on the "surface" of being, rather than remain fettered to their actuality or remain buried in the depths of their materiality.⁶⁰

Needless to say, the idea of virtual causality, such as presented in *The Logic of Sense*, is rather complex. Nonetheless, the resonances between the ethical logic of counter-actualization and the logic of the politics of desire should already be clear. On the one hand, to liberate or free the properly productive powers of being (the virtual event, or the flows of desiring-production) requires that we be capable of subordinating our actuality (an actuality which is always actual-virtual, molar-molecular) to the virtual, molecular, or deterritorializing dimensions of being. On the other hand, in order to ensure that that we are adequately expressive of desire or virtuality, we need to create forms of being capable of actualizing these powers such that they can be *consistently* productive of life, free of the repressive determination of the actual present or the formless depths, a "black hole". The only forms of being capable of such a task are those that are able, by

⁵⁹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 172.

⁶⁰ See *Ibid.*, 44. See also Manuel Delanda who interprets this ethics from the point of view of complexity theory. As he explains: there are "some areas of the world, those defined by processes which are nonlinear and which operate far from equilibrium, [which] do not conceal the virtual underneath extensities and qualities but rather reveal it, or allow it to express itself... To the extent that counter-actualization accelerates an escape from actuality which is already present in some intensive processes, the quasi-causal operator is referred to as a 'line of flight'". Manuel Delanda, *Intensive Science & Virtual Philosophy*, 114.

harnessing these productive powers, of composing *multiplicities themselves*, actualizing events on the “surface” of being.

If nothing else, this similarity between the logic of the politics of desire and the ethics of counter-actualization should at least alert us to the striking fact that between the overtly ethical work that is *The Logic of Sense* and the overtly political work that is *A Thousand Plateaus* (published eleven years later), there is virtually no effort made towards the development of *a uniquely political logic of liberation or revolution*. As Peter Hallward rightly notes, though *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* marks a significant departure from Deleuze’s earlier work in some respects, (including something of a refutation of his earlier embrace of psychoanalysis and structuralism in *The Logic of Sense*) “the logic of counter-actualization itself doesn’t change, neither here nor in the remainder of Deleuze’s work”.⁶¹

That said, is it so surprising that the politics of desire should be devoid of a positive, autonomous conception of politics? After all, as we have seen, Deleuze and Guattari are quite clear in their treatise on philosophy that politics is *not even a distinct mode of thought*. Alain Badiou draws attention to this fact in a lecture on Deleuze’s politics, when he argues that, for Deleuze, “politics” is only a thing “for” art, science, and philosophy” – that there is no “politics of politics” to be found in his work.⁶² Though his comments are rather brief, we can surmise that, for Badiou, Deleuze’s conception of politics is limited to the set of mechanisms that constrain or liberate artistic, scientific,

⁶¹ Hallward, *Out of this World*, 67.

⁶² Badiou, <http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/deleuze/deleuze_day1_2_ram> (December 13, 2007).

and philosophical thinking themselves, but not a thing that would directed at the liberation or revolution of political phenomena considered in their own right.

And if only those forms of collective being engaged in a constant experimentation with the opportunities of ontological production are commensurable with the liberation of desire, what of those forms of political struggle that do not meet this requirement? What of those forms of struggle that do not affirm plurality, that subordinate political experimentation to an overriding prerogative (Palestinian autonomy, for example, or the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq)? *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is not without consideration of these questions. In *Anti-Oedipus* for example, Deleuze and Guattari draw a distinction between subjugated-groups and subject-groups: *subjugated-groups* are groups that attempt to precipitate revolution on the preconscious, molar level, while repressing desiring-production at the unconscious level, while *subject-groups* wage revolution with the liberated flows of desire in their own right, precipitating an unconscious revolution. As they note, however, “one is continually passing from one type of group to another” such that it is difficult to say “where the revolution will come from, and in what form *within* the exploited masses”, even if this undecidability only demonstrates the revolutionary potential inherent in desire.⁶³ As Deleuze and Guattari further note in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the real power of “minorities” has nothing to do with number and everything to do with the fact that a true minority composes a “non-denumerable set”, a “multiplicit[y] of escape and flux” defined by the capacity to continually produce new *connections* between its elements: “The power of the minorities is not measured by their capacity to enter and make themselves felt within the majority

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 349 and 378.

system, nor even to reverse the necessary tautological criterion of the majority, but to bring to bear the force of the non-denumerable sets...against the denumerable sets".⁶⁴ All this demonstrates, however, is that, apart from the condition that we affirm the multiplicity of being (the capacity to produce new connections), the matter of what *forms* of collective being are genuinely revolutionary is, for Deleuze and Guattari, decidedly mixed. There is always hope that a movement appearing outwardly rigid may contain within itself revolutionary investments of desire, just as there is always the danger that an unconscious revolution will fall back into a reactionary politics. It is difficult, however, to avoid the conclusion that, in an ontology that confines politics merely to the reactive dimensions of being, Deleuze and Guattari cannot avoid devaluing the macropolitical figures associated with this politics – including the figure of political organization *as such*.

A Political Logic?

That we should end up with an utterly *ambiguous* ontology of politics may strike one as unsatisfying. At best, this politics amounts to an extension of Deleuze's ethics to the political realm, an ethics defined by continual experimentation and connection with the ontological possibilities of social and political being. At worst, the politics of desire tends towards an *apolitics*, consigning all that is not open to continual flux and metamorphosis to the reactionary, sedentary dimensions of existence. For the latter, the highest value that can be affirmed is a defense of pluralism, which, as we have seen, tends to be translated by their commentators as a defense of social particularities or individual differences against any overriding political prerogative. Arguably, there is

⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 470-471.

little to stop such a project from ultimately declining into a *lifestyle politics*, a politics that sees in broad scale political events only a potential encroachment upon our right to define our identities any way we choose. We might be justified in reading more closing into the judgment rendered by Michel Foucault when he wrote of *Anti-Oedipus* that it was “a book of ethics...being anti-oedipal has become a life style”.⁶⁵

None of this should be taken as a critique of Deleuze’s ethics *per se*. Indeed, the ethics of *The Logic of Sense* are by any account extraordinary, all the more so when one realizes that it was developed around the onset of an illness that would drive its author to suicide many years later. We can, however, seriously question the status of this ethics *as the groundwork for a political philosophy*. Given the great tension that results from trying to sustain a distinction between ethics and politics in much of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, we ought to scrutinize the apparently innocent coupling of these terms that Patton (and he is certainly not alone in this) makes when he writes of “the kind of ethical or political evaluation” made possible by Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual framework.⁶⁶ Indeed, we could even say that it is not only the implied interchangeability of these terms, but the fact that the ethics of non-fascist living actually *presupposes*, upon closer inspection, that politics be nothing other than negative and reactive, that keeps Patton from extracting a positive form of political thought from *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Despite offering some rare applications of the ideas of deterritorialization and the war machine to cases of colonialism in Australia and Canada, *Deleuze and the Political* ends up as a book filled with suggestions and asides about minor political

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, “Preface”, in Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, xiii.

⁶⁶ Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 70. Emphasis added.

comments in Deleuze's own work, and ambiguous political expressions in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes.

As for what sort of *relation* might be said to exist between ethics and politics in Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari's) philosophy – there is little, if anything, in his work to suggest that he devoted serious thought to this matter. As a result, it is largely up to the reader to try to discern a distinctive space for political thought and practice. If we are to take seriously Slavoj Žižek's suggestion that Deleuze's ontology may contain a “political logic” distinct than that of the politics of desire, we might have to examine other elements of Deleuze's (and Deleuze and Guattari's) work to discover it.⁶⁷

Even if there is a possibility that such a “logic” exists, however, we should not lead us to affirm Žižek's reading of Deleuze: namely that *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* itself marked an escape from a “deadlock” that emerged in Deleuze's early work (as well as more characteristically “Deleuzian” books, like the cinema volumes). This is a deadlock, Žižek claims, between an ontology wherein virtual becomings figure as an *effect* of material causes, on the one hand, and ontology wherein the virtual is *productive* of actual, material entities on the other.⁶⁸ *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, he argues, overcame the deadlock in favour of an ontology of production, whereas the earlier work (especially *The Logic of Sense*) developed an ontology based on the “radical gap between generative process and... immaterial sense-effects”, a logic Žižek finds more politically radical and prescient.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 32.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 21

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

However interesting this assertion may be, especially to those less favourable to *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, there is no decisive “break” at the level of ontology between the different periods of Deleuze’s work. Certainly Deleuze’s work shows signs of significant development over time.⁷⁰ But as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, Deleuze’s ontology itself was always concerned with the theme of ontological production (and just as consistently dealt with the paradoxical causality that Žižek seizes upon). Indeed, it is in grasping how these two dimensions of Deleuze’s ontology are *commensurable* that we might discover some clue as to what a true Deleuzian politics could look like.

⁷⁰ One of the most significant being his rethinking of structuralism.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS A POLITICAL SINGULARITY?

It may be that Deleuze's work is poorly understood from the point of view Anglo-American "post-structuralism". In my view, much of the untimeliness of Deleuzianism is lost when we find in it only a defense of pluralism, and resistance to unity and control. This is particularly the case when we give due consideration to the fact that while Deleuze's philosophy is committed to thinking Being as a pure multiplicity, it is just as strongly defined by his efforts to embrace the *singularities* of Being – those unique, transformative points that occasionally strike lives, points which can always be said, in retrospect, to have changed everything: "turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points".⁷¹ It is this dimension of Deleuzianism that seems to clash with the rhizomatic sensibility of our contemporary milieu, and that seems to have escaped so many of his commentators: namely, his efforts to restore a kind of creative urgency to the struggle against repression and control, to construct an utterly sober *fidelity* to the virtuality of events, to draw something positive even from the depths of the intolerable.

This alone might lead us to reconsider the political virtues of Deleuze's work, apart from its rather contrived integration into the idiom of post-structuralism. We also have to acknowledge, however, that despite the vigor with which Anglo-American commentators have celebrated Deleuze and Guattari's politics of desire, Deleuze himself was ambivalent, to say the least, about its accomplishments. It is often convenient to

⁷¹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 63.

ignore the fact that he regarded the reactionary response to May '68 in the wake of *Anti-Oedipus* as an indication of the book's "fundamental failure".⁷² One can only suppose that it was a sense of dissatisfaction with his and Guattari's political ontology of capital, and its pertinence in our contemporary milieu, that led him to prepare a book on Marx prior to his death by suicide.⁷³ In so far as *A Thousand Plateaus* was marked by a move away from a revolutionary politics and a re-embrace of the ethics of *The Logic of Sense*, we may have to contend with the fact that whatever substance there is for thinking an ontologically productive form of politics, it exists largely as a potential or *virtuality*, distributed across the entirety of his work. Against the temptation to subsume this virtuality under the banner of a pluralism, or to incorporate it into an existing stream of post-structuralism, we might attempt to recover something of its *singularity*, no matter how scattered and ephemeral its formulations. And this, in turn, requires that we revisit the core elements of Deleuze's ontology, to locate those places where politics merges with both the multiplicity of being and its corresponding unique or singular points.

A Return to the Question of Being and Politics

Commentators have discovered enough in Deleuze's work to support the idea that, for him, politics finds its highest expression in resistance to unity *as such*, and in a skepticism of any overriding prerogative or antagonism that would provide a determinate basis for political struggle. It is supposed that such a view captures the wisdom of our contemporary milieu, a milieu in which no social difference or particularity is pre-

⁷² See Gilles Deleuze, "Preface to the Italian Edition of *A Thousand Plateaus*", in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 308-309.

⁷³ See Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, "Translator's Introduction", in Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, viii.

eminent, where gross opposition tends to be replaced by a multiplicity of antagonisms and struggles, where experimentation, mobility, and connection are the highest virtues.

Those content to see Deleuze and Guattari's micropolitics of desire as the only true expression of his politics are liable to defend this portrait of our contemporary milieu. After all, they need only point to the monstrosities of the old revolutionary models, and resurgence of religious fundamentalism today as evidence of the many micro-fascisms that continue to haunt us. Might it be, however, that the micropolitical appeal to a politics based on pluralism and constant experimentation risks *disavowing the antagonism that is constitutive of politics itself*, even to the point of endorsing a "post-political" vision where, in the absence of an overriding prerogative of political struggle, politics is reduced to a vacuous competition between multiplicities of interests, identities, and lifestyles?

We can begin to understand the significance then, of attempting to conceive of politics *as a singularity*: for when politics is conceived as a point of fundamental transformation, capable of precipitating revolutionary productions of collective being, it once again becomes possible to appeal to a prerogative, a focal point, capable of traversing the social particularities, identities, and lifestyles that mark us today, for circulation in capital. Given what we have said in the last chapter, however, it is unclear what precisely a political singularity would be for Deleuze – or, more precisely, how such political "turning points" could be linked to revolutionary productions of collective being.

I. Politics as Singularity: A Prerogative of Collective Struggle

Initially at least, we might be tempted to think of singularities as being synonymous with otherness, "difference", or alterity, terms ingrained in contemporary

post-structuralist theory. Roughly speaking, such theory tends to converge, as Brian Massumi argues, on the assumption that the relation between individual and society is determined by a pre-constituted structure or “intersubjective frame”, with subjectivities being defined by their “positioning” within the frame.⁷⁴ For such theories, the singular (otherness, alterity, or difference – like sexual or racial difference, for example) is defined as that which eludes any of the prescribed positions (positions defined, for instance, by the “man/woman” or “white”/“black” binaries).

But in such a schema it is difficult to see how the singular could be grasped except on the *basis* of the intersubjective frame in question, as *relative* to the terms in play. This is the case, Massumi argues, even for those forms of cultural theory that equate singularity with indeterminate, “in-between”, or hybrid forms of subjectivity. For in both of these theoretical schemas

the terms of a relation are normally presumed...to be already-constituted. This begs the question of change because everything is given in advance. The interrelating simply realizes external configurations already implicit as possibilities in the form of the pre-existing terms. You can rearrange the furniture, even move it to a new location, but you still have the same old furniture.⁷⁵

Indeed, if singularity is understood on the basis of already-constituted terms like “man/woman” or “white/black” then it is difficult to imagine how we could conceive of ontological transformation other than as a possibility contained in, or implied by, the terms themselves. If we wish to do more than simply “rearrange the furniture” then we need a conception of singularity that involves not merely original or hybrid *configurations* of a given set of terms of collective being, but an authentic “turning point”

⁷⁴ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 68.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

considered in its own right. Indeed, if there is any justification for re-instating a systematic ontology as the basis for political thought, it is this: in a theoretical milieu that finds radicalism only in the process of subtracting thought from metaphysical or ontological “truth-claims”, we continue to *rely* upon a socially constructed frame of intersubjectivity in order to verify or attest to the singularities that elude this frame. As a result, not only are we forced to sacrifice both *the autonomy and the positivity* of Being’s singularity, but the very possibility of political critique would seem to depend upon the existence of a dominant intersubjective framework. And it is difficult to see how such a view would not end up proclaiming the impossibility of decisively overcoming *anything*.

This is why perhaps the most elementary feature of Deleuze’s conception of singularity is that it is not merely relative but *absolute* in nature. As true turning points and points of inflection, singularities correspond to a radical potential for transformation in our being that is no way determined by a pre-constituted frame or structure of terms, but is nonetheless *determinable* in the course of actualization. Indeed, we already saw something of this absolute character of the singular in the previous chapter when we noted that the power of virtual events stemmed from the fact that they were irreducible to their actual causes. In its absolute character, the transformative potential of a singularity does not coincide with the set of possible positions, actions or configurations given in the form of a term or the mechanistic causality to which it is subject

This point becomes clearer when we examine the main philosophical antecedent for this conception of singularity, Spinoza. For Spinoza, as much as for Deleuze, the singular is *in-itself* a “real distinction”, something already determinate without requiring

dialectical mediation or subjective synthesis to come into being.⁷⁶ According to Peter Hallward, a singularity is a “unit of being” for Deleuze.⁷⁷ This is, in essence, what Deleuze means when he argues that singularities are “impersonal” or “pre-subjective” in nature: far from determining the singular, the subject – as well as the objects of experience – only incarnates or embodies the determinate singularities that lie in proximity to it. It may seem paradoxical that each singularity could correspond to a real distinction in being, that *each* singularity could express something absolute. For Spinoza, as Michael Hardt notes, this paradox lay in the tension between the absolute nature of the idea of God and the evident finitude of actual, experiential being. In attempting to resolve this tension, Spinoza advanced the notion that the singularity of the absolute idea was expressed in an infinite number of *formally* distinct attributes.⁷⁸ In a similar manner, for Deleuze singular absolutes are always embedded or *localized* in actual, formal distinctions. In this sense, to rework a phrase of Deleuze and Guattari’s, we could refer to the singular, from the point of view of our formally distinct actuality, as a “local absolute”.⁷⁹

In relation to the pre-constituted terms of an intersubjective framework, the singular in-itself must be said to be resolutely *neutral*, being indifferent to “the particular and the general”, individual and society, and so on.⁸⁰ In fact, this neutrality extends to all

⁷⁶ Hardt, *An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, 61.

⁷⁷ Hallward, *Out of this World*, 27.

⁷⁸ Hardt, *An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, 65.

⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 382. While Deleuze and Guattari use the phrase in question in their description of “nomads”, I think the phrase works as a description of singularity, given that they seem to be using it describe *how* a nomad is singular.

⁸⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 116 and 173. While Deleuze tends to oppose the term “collective” to “individual” in *The Logic of Sense*, I employ the term “collective” in the way that Deleuze and Guattari do in much of their collaborative work – as an order *traversal* to both the individual and society, the general and particular, and so on.

schemas that invoke permutations along the lines of the “form/matter” distinction – that is, that operate on the assumption of a transcendent form or function imposed on a passive matter (as, for example, with the imposition of the State-form on a “state of nature”, or the imposition of functions associated with modernization on a “primitive” or archaic *socius*). As John Protevi has demonstrated in his work on Deleuze, such *hylomorphic* schemas have played a politically reactionary role in the history of philosophy, by grounding the necessity of the State (or an equivalent transcendent ordering mechanism) in the organization of being.⁸¹

By this same token, Deleuze is intent on distancing his conception of singularities from *essences*, laws or archetypes that would wholly transcend the matter of ontological production.⁸² Thinkers like Protevi and Manuel Delanda have focused on Deleuze’s *materialism* in an effort to demonstrate how his philosophy of production moves beyond the ontological concept of the essence, and the schema of hylomorphism. In demonstrating the neutral or indifferent nature of singularities (what he calls their “mechanism independence”), Manuel Delanda draws upon the mathematical concept of the *attractor*.⁸³ He gives the example of soap bubbles and salt crystals, both of which are triggered by a singular point or attractor, which, although it can be said (retrospectively speaking) to lie in proximity to these entities, nonetheless remains autonomous from, and irreducible to, the formal distinctions that emerge between them. We need not refer back to an essence or form (sphere and cube, for example) in accounting for the difference in form, but only a *point of transformation* which, in his example, is a point minimal

⁸¹ See John Protevi, *Political Physics*.

⁸² As Deleuze notes in the context of his critique of Platonism: “To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to remove essences and to substitute events in their place, as jets of singularities”. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 64.

⁸³ Delanda, *Intensive Science & Virtual Philosophy*, 14.

energy: thus, a soap bubble emerges by minimizing surface tension, while a salt crystal results by minimizing bonding energy.⁸⁴ Delanda gives a vivid illustration of Deleuze and Guattari's characterization of singularities as being internal to matter itself, "like implicit forms that are topological", acting to catalyze or trigger the emergence of material entities from virtual elements and relations.⁸⁵ We end up with a kind of "materiality possessing a *nomos*" rather than a materiality subject to external laws.⁸⁶

Though offering little in the way of developed consideration of singular forms of politics, Deleuze was highly influenced by May '68 in France, and tended to consider the question of political forms of singularity from the perspective of that event. In an important essay written sixteen years after May '68, Deleuze and Guattari place it in a line of revolutionary uprisings: "the revolution of 1789, the Commune, the revolution of 1917".⁸⁷ Despite the betrayals and disappointments that marked the aftermath of these events, the authors write, each in its own way represented "a breaking with causality", "an opening onto the possible", and a neutrality or indifference to the existing terms of the collective, which allowed its transformative power to "pass as much into the interior of individuals as into the depths of society".⁸⁸

But if these features exhaust the singularity of the event, then May '68, as an exemplar of a political singularity for Deleuze, amounts to a largely negative figure – as if it consisted solely in its *resistance* to normalizing causality, its *indifference* to the existing terms of French society. What we have yet to do is reconcile these features with the positive and *productive* aspect of the event. For it is only by reconciling these two

⁸⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 408.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, "May '68 Did not Take Place", 233.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

aspects that we can decisively answer the more pressing question concerning the relation between Deleuze's ontology and politics: does it follow from Deleuze's ontology that only a pluralism, governed by an ethics of non-fascist living, can accommodate liberatory productions of being?

It should already be apparent that singularities are possessed of a *double* nature. On the one hand, they are impersonal, pre-individual, and neutral with regard to the distinctions of actual terms and forms. This neutrality corresponds to a certain unactualized potential, a virtuality or "ideality". Deleuze refers to the different varieties of potential as *Ideas*, in a sense derived from the philosophy of Kant. Now, given what we have already said about Deleuze's ontology, it should be clear that the nature of this virtuality cannot be determined by tracing it from the actualities whose production it governs. It is equally the case, however, that ontological production cannot fall back on a schema that would invoke a form/matter or individual/society permutation ("hylomorphism"), nor a transcendent essence or archetype, all of which would severely compromise the revolutionary nature of his ontology. It follows, then, that we must be capable of grasping this neutral virtuality corresponding to every singularity as *immanent to its own actualizations*. That this constituted something of a paradox was clearly recognized by Deleuze and occupies a central place in *The Logic of Sense and Difference and Repetition*.⁸⁹

In attempting to think through this paradoxical space, Deleuze had reason to appeal to the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon, and his work on the theme of

⁸⁹ Thus, in relation to sense, Deleuze asks rhetorically: "How can we maintain both that sense produces even the states of affairs in which it is embodied, and that it is itself produced by these states of affairs or the actions and passions of bodies (an immaculate conception)?" Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 141. See also, *Difference and Repetition*, 244-254.

individuation. For Simondon, as Deleuze notes, individuation or actualization “presupposes a prior metastable state – in other words, the existence of a ‘disparateness’ such as at least two orders of magnitude or two scales of a heterogeneous reality between which potentials are distributed”.⁹⁰ It must be said that such a disparateness testifies to the existence of a singularity, or indeed, *singularities*, which are arrayed in accordance with the distribution of potentials. Furthermore, “disparateness” is synonymous with the neutrality that defines a singular potential, “neutrality” being understood in the sense of “sterile”, or too disparate to give rise to discrete offspring. This disparate field of singularities defines the unique distribution of potential inherent in every Idea. The question arises, then, as to how such a field can be actualized or individuated utilizing only resources immanent to itself. For Deleuze, drawing again on Simondon, the actualization of the virtual occurs not through the imposition of a form on a passive matter but “in integrating the elements of the disparateness into a state of coupling which ensures its internal resonance”.⁹¹ In this way, the potential defined by this disparateness is *progressively stabilized* into increasingly discrete forms: from the minimal, virtual extension that defines the organization of potential in the different variety of Ideas, to the more fully extended, stabilized terms and forms that populate everyday human experience.

Deleuze characterizes the relation between a distribution of singularities and the diverse actualizations that emerge from them as a relation between a “problem” and its solutions (in a sense derived from the work of Albert Lautman). A *problem*, from this point of view, does not refer to a temporary insufficiency or lack, but defines the

⁹⁰ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 246.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

“objective” state of disparity and heterogeneity between different orders or magnitudes of being. A solution corresponds to the invention of a local process of integration and compatibility between these orders. While “a problem is determined only by the singular points which express its conditions”, the problem is not resolved or dissipated by being determined or actualized.⁹² Rather, the determination of a problem, and the distribution of potential inherent in it, engenders and precipitates solutions, *without this potential thereby being dissipated*: “the problem is determined in space and time and, as it is determined, it determines the solutions in which it *persists*”.⁹³ Indeed, though “a problem does not exist, apart from its solutions” it is nonetheless nominally *distinct* from its solutions, as the disparate or metastable distribution of potential that every case of a solution *presupposes* as a condition of its being posed.⁹⁴

Consider some examples. In the realm of biology, the theory of problematic Ideas and singularities has significant implications for moving beyond the vulgar Darwinism that defines the evolution of an organism solely as a response to externally imposed obstacles or needs. “An organism is nothing if not the solution to a problem, as are each of its differentiated organs, such as the eye which solves a light ‘problem’”.⁹⁵ More significantly for our discussion, Deleuze defines *revolution* as “the social power of difference, the paradox of society, the particular wrath of the social Idea”.⁹⁶ For Deleuze, the upheaval corresponding to every revolution brings the full plenitude of a social Idea to bear on the actuality of collective being, its “particular wrath” being defined precisely by the disparity, the shock or trauma that marks the presentation of every event from the

⁹² Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 65.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 139. Emphasis added.

⁹⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 163.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

point of view of our given subjective conditions. Indeed, as problems or Ideas are determined, this determination itself implies a “condensation of singularities which, by dint of ideal events, defines the concentration of a ‘*revolutionary situation*’ and causes the Idea to explode into the actual”.⁹⁷ It should be clear that, for Deleuze, a “revolutionary situation” is never defined by a simple resistance to unity and totalization, but defines the *positive* state of a determined problem, the point at which the disparateness underlying the production of collective being is concentrated or intensified to such a degree that it takes on the role of an attractor, altering the very *orientation* of social and political being.

That said, an Idea does not act simply as a static reservoir of possible actualizations. Just as every historical instance of a revolution redefines, to some degree, what revolutionary politics *is* (from the differences between the French revolution, to 1917, May ‘68, and afterwards), so does every determination of a revolutionary situation transform the very Idea of revolution itself. Indeed, “the metamorphoses or redistributions of singularities form a history; each combination and each distribution is an event”.⁹⁸ But equally, every political event involves an original concentration of virtuality, a new distribution of singularities, such that Deleuze and Guattari can write in reference to May ‘68: “The possible does not pre-exist, it is created by the event”.⁹⁹ This is precisely what keeps the conception of singular events and Ideas from collapsing into some version of an essence: even though the virtuality of an event, properly speaking, is *a-historical*, being distinct from its historical actualizations, this a-historicity is nothing

⁹⁷ Ibid., 190. Emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 67.

⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, “May ‘68 Did Not Take Place”, 234.

but the element of a chaotic and primordial metamorphosis, of difference-in-itself or metastability, what Deleuze calls, following Nietzsche, the Eternal Return.¹⁰⁰

Every political singularity thus functions like a kind of elusive *prerogative* for collective political struggle, to the extent that it represents the determination of an Idea of revolution, and the concentration of a revolutionary situation that political being can be said to be *more or less* expressive of. In this sense, political Ideas are “regulative” of collective struggle itself, determining a kind of virtual *horizon* or *focal point*, that can either be mobilized in the formation of a revolutionary political sequence, or stifled and turned against itself, so as to negate its transformative potential.¹⁰¹ Indeed, this would seem to suggest that every singular event of politics gives rise to an *overriding antagonism* that lingers in its wake, an antagonism between those who would attempt to most fully express its Idea, and those who turn against it, seeking to regulate and control its transformative potential.

We ought to be careful, however, to note that a singular prerogative cannot in any way be represented or identified with a given social or historical content. As Deleuze notes, “The actualization of the virtual always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation”, given that “actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate”.¹⁰² This fact alone testifies to something inherently *experimental* and

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze’s conception of time and metamorphosis, which represents a synthesis of Nietzsche as well as Henri Bergson, is without a doubt the most complex aspect of his work. Needless to say, Deleuze does not interpret the Eternal Return as the return of the Same, but as the re-instating of the element of difference and Life, which is a-historical precisely because it is too chaotic to *sustain* a historical trajectory. Probably the best interpretation of the Deleuzian conception of time and the Eternal Return is to be found in Peter Hallward’s *Out of this World*.

¹⁰¹ See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 168-169: “the concepts of the understanding find the ground of their (maximum) full experimental use only in the degree to which they are related to problematic Ideas: either by being arranged upon lines which converge upon an ideal *focus* which lies outside the bounds of experience, or by being conceived on the basis of a common *horizon* which embraces them all”.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 212.

hazardous in Deleuze's ontology, for "we know of the existence and distribution of singular points before we know their nature", the manner in which a singularity "extends and spreads itself out in a determined direction".¹⁰³ In contrast to Patton and others, however, this experimentalism is not at all driven by the need to secure a pluralism, but is undertaken under the most sober and positive of *necessities*, determinable in the eruption of an event.¹⁰⁴ Such necessity is in no way reactive, as if creativity and production occurred only in a state of externally-imposed duress (such is the case, it must be said, even with the threat of assimilation or annihilation, to the extent that it is posed solely by an external power). Genuine production occurs by means of an "objective" duress, whose nature is more along the lines of a problem: "necessity" in this sense, corresponds to the fact that, although a singular eruption appears *impossible* from the given terms and forms of our actuality (because of the power of the State, the apathy or powerlessness of "the people"), its presentation in the event nonetheless bears a force that *must* be grappled with, a power that is not at all a matter of will.¹⁰⁵

If we wanted to go further, we might even suggest that it is precisely because their failure to link politics, *by nature*, to the event that Deleuze (and Guattari) tended to define "the political" as little more than a recurrent mechanism of segmentation and repression. Both Alain Badiou and Jacques Ranciere have moved in the direction of defining every form of politics strictly as a disparate singularity, occurring from time to time in the mode

¹⁰³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 120 and 126.

¹⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "What is the Creative Act?", in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 313: "There has to be a necessity, in philosophy and elsewhere; otherwise there is nothing".

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, as Katharine Wolfe rightly notes, Deleuze turns Kant's "ought into a must", his imperative into a necessity, by positing that the imperceptible power of a singularity as something "which forcibly erupts; it cannot but be perceived, whatever the community's will". See Katharine Wolfe, "From Aesthetics to Politics: Ranciere, Kant and Deleuze",

<<http://www.comtempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=382>> (April 4, 2007).

of the event, against the idea of a universal space or datum of political phenomena.¹⁰⁶ In this sense, we ought to question the relation that Paul Patton, for one, makes between Deleuze and *the* political, for there is nothing in Deleuze's ontology to indicate that singularities and events could be grasped from the point of view of a given space or ground of political occurrences (a common sense). If we hold strictly to the notion that every real eruption of a politics is ontologically singular, then it seems plausible to suggest that politics itself be defined as nothing but the variety of incommensurable *sequences* emerging in the wake of an event, sequences defined not by the establishment of a certain ensemble of institutions or the fulfillment of determinate historical trajectory, but by the series of betrayals and the acts of fidelity that stake out the hazardous course of those involved in producing radically new forms of political being. As we will see in the next chapter, however, it is precisely because of his insistence on grasping every event as a mobilization of a *single creative power*, as a deployment of the productive force of the One, that Deleuze is kept from pursuing this path.

II. Multiplicity as the 'Ground' of Singular Instances of Politics

According to Paul Patton, multiplicity provides "conceptual grounds for the autonomy of individual differences and [the rejection of] those forms of reductionism which treated particular differences, such as sex and race, as subordinate to one central

¹⁰⁶ More precisely, Alain Badiou maintains that "a politics is a hazardous, militant and always partially undivided fidelity to eventual singularity under a solely self-authorizing prescription". The broader point nonetheless holds that "there are only plural instances of politics, irreducible to one another, and which do not comprise any homogeneous history". Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (New York: Verso, 2005), 23. See also Jacques Ranciere, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999; and *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2006). Both Badiou and Ranciere base their conceptions of politics in confrontation with the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt, for whom political events ought only to be judged from the point of view of a given subjective unity, a common sense, capable of exposing judgments on politics to contrary opinions of those participating in this unity.

difference or social contradiction”.¹⁰⁷ Given what we have just said, however, it seems that every political singularity, presented in the wake of every revolutionary event, determines a prerogative of collective being, a problematic Idea, that is utterly *neutral* with regard to “particular differences”, traversing both the individual and the social, the general and the particular, and so on. Indeed, we might say that the readings of Patton, Todd May, Nicholas Thorburn, and others, can only be upheld on the condition that we insist that every invocation of an Idea of political struggle masks a secret appeal to a *social norm* by which to determine genuinely revolutionary social differences from false or illusory ones (as with the Marxist tendency to appeal to the norm of *class* as determinate of revolutionary struggle). Such a view, however, fails to draw the full consequences of the fact that, for Deleuze, “Ideas are *multiplicities*”, and thus are irreducible to any determinate social content.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, when we examine the concept of multiplicity more closely we see that its association with the idea of pluralism possesses little more the value of an *analogy*.

This is because a multiplicity, strictly speaking, is composed entirely of virtual elements, and tends to lose its Ideal nature as soon as we identify it with a variety of social particularities or the predicates of identity. Consider that Deleuze defines a multiplicity, first of all, as being composed of elements that are virtual and indeterminate, such that “they imply no prior identity...[or] something that could be called one or the same”.¹⁰⁹ The co-existence of these elements composes the chaotic order of metastability or difference in-itself, the idea of which occupies much of Deleuze’s *Difference and*

¹⁰⁷ Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, 46

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 182. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

Repetition. Second, these elements possess the capacity to be rendered *determinable*, but only to the extent that they draw upon resources intrinsic to the multiplicity itself.

Deleuze describes such resources, via the language of differential calculus, as reciprocal, differential, and “non-localisable ideal connections”.¹¹⁰ On this basis, we have no need to refer a multiplicity or Idea to “a uniform space in which it would be submerged”.¹¹¹

Indeed, multiplicities and their corresponding distributions of singularities *do not occupy a universal space and time*, but define a unique space-time adequate to the conditions under which an Idea individuates *itself*, a singular spatio-temporal ground attuned to its unique expressive potential. “A multiple ideal connection... must be actualized in diverse spatio-temporal relationships, at the same time as its elements are actually incarnated in a variety of terms and forms”.¹¹²

That is not to say, however, that Deleuze considers extrinsically defined multiples, that is, multiples that are defined relative to a sovereign “One”, as somehow illusory or non-existent. The point of the concept of multiplicity is rather to demonstrate that every encompassing unity or totality, every universalizing space-time associated with the One *is itself, of the order of an Idea or multiplicity*. “Everything is a multiplicity in so far as it incarnates an Idea”, Deleuze writes. “Even the many is a multiplicity; even the one is a multiplicity... the one is *a* multiplicity”.¹¹³ Generally speaking, a collective is genuinely expressive of the revolutionary power of a political Idea only if it capable of subordinating its unifying, totalizing, identitarian elements to the virtual prerogative determined in association with the Idea. “A multiplicity certainly contains points of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid. Emphasis removed.

¹¹³ Ibid., 182.

unification, centers of totalization, points of subjectivation, but these are factors that can prevent its growth and stop its lines”.¹¹⁴ This is why Deleuze distinguishes between two types of multiplicity: *extensive*, numerical, quantitative multiplicities which are extrinsically defined; and *intensive*, continuous, and qualitative multiplicities which are intrinsically defined.¹¹⁵ As with all of dualisms that populate Deleuze’s work, the point is less to oppose the revolutionary power of intensive virtualities to the stifling nature of extensive actualities – all forms of collective being are, after all, *simultaneously* actual-virtual, extensive-intensive – than to provide a means of nominally distinguishing the revolutionary potential of Ideas from the diverse actualizations made of them.

If anything, then, it is by subjecting the individual differences and social particularities that compose the terms and forms of an intersubjective framework to an unsparring metamorphosis, and making this the object of an *affirmation*, that the true power of difference, that idea that Deleuze pursues in *Difference and Repetition*, is asserted. Only then can we understand that the “permanent revolution” that Deleuze associated with his concept of difference is something much more sober, and even painful, than the “difference” championed today, for it demands a rigorous fidelity to the prerogative of a revolutionary Idea.¹¹⁶

But what does it mean, precisely, to affirm the transformative potential of Ideas, to embrace singularities and events? What does it mean for *the subject* of a singular politics?

¹¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, “Preface to the American Edition of *Dialogues*”, in *Two Regimes of Madness*, 305.

¹¹⁵ Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 38-44.

¹¹⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 53.

Subjectivity: or How to *Think* the Singularity of a Politics

It is not enough that events occur, that political singularities be actualized, in order for revolutionary political transformation to occur. Rather, the process of actualization must correspond to the production of new forms of subjectivity capable of giving *maximum expression* to the revolutionary situation implied in every political Idea. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari located the political “crisis” of the decades following May ‘68 (and the publication of their *Anti-Oedipus*) as stemming from “the inability to assimilate May ’68” on the subjective level.¹¹⁷ If we have made the case against any necessary affinity between Deleuze’s ontology and the pluralistic tendencies of contemporary post-structuralism, it nevertheless remains to be seen what our reading bodes for the forms of political subjectivation capable of *embodying* revolutionary Ideas. In short, we have yet to see how political singularities can be *thought*.

One may recall that in the previous chapter we noted that Deleuze does not consider politics an autonomous form of thought, in the way that he does with art, science, and philosophy. That said, are there conditions under which thought could *become political*? We could say that Deleuze’s whole politics wagers on the possibility of artistic, scientific, or philosophical constructions to effectively *mobilize* certain distributions of potential, to envelop a set of singularities, presented in the wake of every revolutionary event. Certainly, this implies a deep skepticism of *political organization as such*: as if the available forms of organization in politics were unsuitable material for thought (as opposed to conceptual organizations in philosophy, or affective or perceptual organizations in the arts). That said, Deleuze was himself involved in organizations that

¹¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, “May ’68 Did Not Take Place”, 234.

worked for the rights of prisoners and homosexuals, and was associated with activists working on behalf of the Palestinian struggle so, at the very least, this skepticism was not reducible to a simple dismissal.

Under what conditions could thought become political? In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari write that “it is with utopia that philosophy becomes political”.¹¹⁸ By “utopia”, however, they do not mean a simple political idealism, a “dream”. Rather, utopian, for them, “designates the conjunction of philosophy, or of the concept, with the present milieu—political philosophy”.¹¹⁹ In what does this conjunction consist? The task of such “political philosophy” is, on the one hand, to determine the virtual multiplicity, the Idea, inherent in a social multiplicity. This means plunging thought and perception into the disparate material of collective being, in order to free “immanence from all the limits still imposed on it by capital”, segmentation, and control.¹²⁰ On the other hand, this immanence must be determined *as* an Ideal problem, as a prerogative, by means of a conceptual creation capable of grasping the singularity of an event in a form which is *thinkable*. In this way, a “revolutionary situation” can be thought independently of its actualizations, and, in turn, its *betrayals*. As Deleuze and Guattari write, referring to Kant’s comments on the French revolution, the concept extracts the singularity of an event from its actuality, such that we can apprehend the French revolution as “an immanent enthusiasm without anything in states of affairs or lived experience being able to tone it down”.¹²¹ By extracting the singularity of a revolutionary event from its actualization in a state of affairs, this singularity comes to exercise a kind of regulative

¹¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 99.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100, Emphasis removed. The authors immediately go on to wonder, if, “in view of the mutilated meaning public opinion has given it...*utopia* is not the best word”.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

effect over socio-political being, on the basis of which it becomes possible to relaunch “new struggles whenever the earlier one is betrayed”.¹²²

We might ask *how* a political singularity could be rendered thinkable. For Deleuze, true thought is only produced by means of a fundamental *disruption* of the harmony upon which our faculties, our everyday judgments, perceptions, identifications and acts of recognition, rest. “Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*”.¹²³ This “something” is none other than the problem, or rather, the shock or trauma that a problem brings to bear on our existing subjective conditions. For we do not identify or represent a pre-existing singularity so much as *engender* its ontologically productive power at the level of the faculties. Indeed, we could say that the production of thought requires that our faculties enter into such a state of discord that they become *equal to a site of ontological production itself*. Needless to say, it follows that, for Deleuze, “there is only involuntary thought”.¹²⁴

From this point of view, we can also understand how *artistic* thought can become political. For Deleuze, art is, at its core, a creation of *percepts* and affects. While concepts were defined by preserving in thought the radical potential of a revolutionary situation, percepts work “to make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become”.¹²⁵ Art is thus linked to a *visionary* function that consists in making the power of a political singularity something that is *sense-able*, that is perceptible or affective. Deleuze is fond of quoting a moment from the Rossellini film

¹²² Ibid., 100.

¹²³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 182.

Europe 51, in which the bourgeois heroine encounters a group of factory workers and remarks: “*I thought I was seeing convicts*”.¹²⁶ For Deleuze, the heroine’s statement does not simply represent a moment in which she unmasks the “underlying reality” of the workers’ social condition (she only “thought” she was seeing convicts). Rather, the statement “I thought I was seeing convicts” perfectly encapsulates the *sense* of her encounter, because it gives expression to the imperceptibility of the workers’ condition, an imperceptibility, we could say, that traverses both the category of the worker and that of the convict, amounting to a lived actuality in which the worker is both *simultaneously*. The lived actuality of the worker is all the more intolerable because it appears imperceptible from the point of view of our common sense faculties of recognition, which are more than capable of distinguishing workers from convicts, more than capable of justifying their condition (and whose slogan, therefore, could be said to be: “well, people have to work”). Indeed, it is telling in this respect, that Deleuze also regarded his friend Michel Foucault as such a visionary because of his talent for seeing how techniques of discipline, imperceptible from the point of view of our given sociological categories, had become dispersed throughout the social sphere (becoming integrated into the techniques of discipline not only with regards to labour, but education, the military, sexuality, and so on).¹²⁷

We might dwell for a moment on the ways in which “everyday” forms of thinking serve to render the singular imperceptible to us. Recall, in the previous chapter, Deleuze’s hostility to forms of thinking grounded in a conventional “image of thought”, one that

¹²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 20.

¹²⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 47-53: “Foucault...had a passion for seeing...Foucault never stopped being a *voyant*...”

defines the proper exercise of thought as a mental deployment along the coordinates, segmentations, or orientations of a dominant territoriality. So conceived, thought amounts to an application of Kantian *common sense*, an *a priori* unity of the faculties, bolstered by an assumption of *good sense*, a belief that human subjects naturally *desire* the truth.¹²⁸

For Deleuze, the common sense forms of communicability, recognition, and identification inherent in our existing subjective conditions serve to do little more than *justify* repression and control, by taking the pre-existent organizations and syntheses that ground a dominant form of social being as necessary conditions for (intersubjective) experience.

For Kant, the most basic operation of common sense is the construction of an *a priori* harmony of the faculties around a self-same objective datum, giving rise to a generic subject whose *a priori* structures are “mapped onto the sensible, phenomenal domain”.¹²⁹ While Kant was not so interested in extending his aesthetic to the political realm, thinkers like Hannah Arendt, and more recently Jacques Ranciere and Alain Badiou, have placed common sense at the heart of the relation between politics and the event. This is because, as Arendt notes, common sense is not simply a “private” sense that enables us to express particular thoughts and feelings, but a properly *intersubjective* sense, a sense “that fits us into a community” and assures “potential agreement with others”.¹³⁰ Through common sense the sensory world is thus “prepared” in such a way that what we experience of events registers in accordance with the terms of a common

¹²⁸ The critique of good and common sense occupies the better part of the “Image of Thought” chapter in *Difference and Repetition*.

¹²⁹ Katharine Wolfe, “From Aesthetics to Politics: Ranciere, Kant, and Deleuze”, <<http://www.comtempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=382>> (April 4, 2007)

¹³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 70 and Ronald Beiner, “Hannah Arendt on Judging”, in *Ibid.*, 104.

sensibility. Whatever diversity there is in the various sensations that we experience, the intersubjective *ground* of these sensations, that by which the diversity of sensation is given to appear, remains the same for the community of experiencing subjects.

We can understand that thought demands the creation of new *spaces and times*, in order to adequately subjectivize a singularity. While Kant maintained space and time as pure and universal forms of intuition, Deleuze's ontology implies that space and time are exclusively objects of creation or production, unique to each field of individuation. As Bruce Baugh observes "since forms of intuition such as space and time are empirically conditioned [in Deleuze's philosophy], rather than pure, they are not necessary and universal, but contingent and particular, concrete rather than abstract, prior conditions that are in each case already conditioned, and which differ from case to case, rather than being the same for everyone".¹³¹ But to "differ from case to case" does not mean that genuinely unique spaces and times correspond to the expression of mere social particularities. Rather, each space-time is produced as a means of grounding the Ideal prerogative of an event, composing *new forms of intuition* capable of rendering visible the imperceptible forces, the virtuality, caused by the event. In this way, Deleuze defines the "limit common to all" creative acts in art, science, and philosophy, as the creation of a "space-time", and hence, the inauguration of new subjectivities.¹³²

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari note that the notion of space and time as a universal embedding space has always functioned in tangent with a "Royal science". Roughly speaking, for Royal science, singularities can only be properly apprehended as

¹³¹ Bruce Baugh, "Transcendental Empiricism: Deleuze's Response to Hegel", in *Man and World* 25 (1992): 137.

¹³² See Deleuze, "What is the Creative Act?", 315.

occurrences in a universal datum or fabric of existence (a “Euclidean” space), and not as irruptions embedded in a multiplicity of spatio-temporal dynamisms. For them, there has always been a “nomad science” that has worked to produce functions capable of registering the movement of singularities beneath the universal coordinates of common sense. And indeed, the very concepts of singularity and multiplicity themselves can be said to be derivations of such nomad science.¹³³

We should note that the creation of space-times and new forms of intuition is a matter intimately bound up with politics, particularly in the domain of anti-colonial struggles. As Deleuze noted once in an interview with Antonio Negri, “people don’t take enough account...of how the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] has had to invent a space-time in the Arab world”.¹³⁴ In colonial situations like that between the PLO (admittedly, a more viable anti-colonial force in Deleuze’s time than ours) and the occupying Israelis, and in Canada with the struggles between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government (to recall an example of Paul Patton’s), it has often been noted how important the production of spaces and times are to the success or failure of a colonial venture. In British Columbia, as scholars like Cole Harris and Daniel Clayton have shown, the mapping of Indigenous territory has always functioned to ground the sovereignty of the colonizers by coding a homogenous space on which to distribute property and resource rights, to establish the sovereignty of the colonizer, and to re-order time in line with the demands of assimilative schooling and work programs.¹³⁵ We might also mention the on-going efforts to “cantonize” the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the

¹³³ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 366-374.

¹³⁴ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 172.

¹³⁵ See Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Daniel W. Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

erection of walls, the denial of housing and work permits, the expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolition of houses and crops, and the expansion of “checkpoints” in the occupied territories.¹³⁶ From this point of view, we can understand such events as the Oka crisis in Quebec, the first Palestinian Intifada, and the years that followed them, as a sequence in which Indigenous movements laboured to produce forms of intuition adequate to a self-determinate (and anti-colonial) subjectivity, to determine the singularity of colonialist control, and mobilize it against the lived actuality of their condition.

A Counter-Actualization

The very concept of political singularity, for Deleuze, implies a determination that is utterly indifferent to individual differences or social particularities, as much as to opposed terms or forms of an intersubjective frame or structure. This determination is co-extensive with a kind of virtual horizon, a “prerogative”, problem or Idea, and defines the revolutionary potential that collective productions of being can be said to be more or less expressive of. Politics thus becomes a mode of ontological production to the extent that we are capable of grasping this revolutionary potential in thought, in the form of a concept, percept or affect, or function. We have seen that each of these modes of thought shares a common limit in the creation of new space-times, which, in turn, constitute original forms of intuition capable of giving a political singularity maximum *subjective* expression.

That we end up with an ontology that seems commensurable with anti-colonial struggles, for example, should not blind us to the potential problems bound up with the

¹³⁶ Similar efforts are underway by the Americans to cantonize Sadr City in Iraq, to weaken the defensive capabilities of the population and to put al Sadr himself in a more vulnerable political position.

concept of political singularity. For on the one hand, we have seen that Deleuze remains indifferent to the extent to which the power of the event is commensurable with any sort of *organized* struggle against the powers of domination at work in our contemporary milieu. We have already noted that Deleuze's work betrays a distrust of political organization as such (particularly in the form of the *party* – Deleuze did not at any time join the Communist Party, like so many of his fellow philosophers in France in the period prior to May '68). On the contrary, he saw great promise in the possibility of thought itself, particularly in its philosophical and artistic modes, for producing potentially revolutionary political effects. Given the extent to which his conception of thought was akin to forced and *involuntary movement*, a shock or trauma stemming from a fundamental encounter with pre-individual being, however, we might wonder to what extent thought could be deployed within the context of an organized political struggle, say in present-day Palestine or Iraq, or in Indigenous politics in Canada, without such movements being rendered *vulnerable* to the forces of domination. It seems that while Deleuzian philosophy is incredibly attuned to the trajectory of singularities, and their corresponding Ideas, our very apprehension of these singularities is premised on its continual extraction from the actual state of affairs in which it is embedded. This fact alone would seem to require a radical discontinuity in political struggle, to the point where we might even wonder it is still a politics we are speaking of. Indeed, when we push things further, it is clear that *even to conceive of politics as a singularity in the context of Deleuze's work is to follow the 'ethical' logic of counter-actualization*. For any attempt to grasp a political singularity in thought requires two things: first, that we extract

it from the state of affairs in which it is embedded; and second, that we mobilize it in original forms of being capable of most fully expressing its power.

On the other hand, we might wonder why, if the concepts of singularity and event seem such promising resources for a positive conception of politics in his ontology, Deleuze (and Guattari) did not pursue this line of thought further. Why did he not link politics *by nature* to the event, as an occasional eruption of revolutionary potential capable of transforming collective being? Why did he and Guattari end up consigning politics to the negative, reactionary dimensions of being? We have already hinted at the possibility that Deleuze's reticence in this regard points to a broader tension within his ontology. We might further note how striking this is, given that so many of Deleuze's books were largely occasioned by *political* events. These events included May '68, but also World War II and Nazism, as well as the post-May '68 period of "indifference" corresponding with the rise in communication and information-based "societies of control", all of which bear their mark on *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the cinema books, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze's book on Foucault, and his numerous essays and interview collections published throughout this period. Whatever the political merits of each book considered in isolation, it must be acknowledged that the whole trajectory of Deleuze's thought bears witness to the determining power of political events, even if this determination was to prove largely incompatible with any genuinely political mobilization of its power.

CHAPTER 3: THE HAZARDS OF APOLITICS

We have yet to determine what sort of relation may yet exist between ethics and politics in Deleuze's thought. Perhaps the distinction between the two domains is purely nominal, in which case we must be prepared to locate within Deleuze's ontology the potential source of their disjunction. Only then will it become possible to speak decisively about the questions that remain: namely, why did Deleuze and Guattari not link politics by nature to the event, why did they continue to associate liberatory or revolutionary productions of being solely with an ethics of non-fascist living? And why does Deleuzian thought in general appear to be so incompatible with any sort of organized, integrated form of politics?

Instead of a clear distinction between ethics and politics, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that both the 'ethical' liberation of multiplicities and the 'political' fidelity to the singularity of the event form two *moments* in the logic of *counter-actualization*: the first consisting of the liberation of the virtual multiplicities inhering in actual events, and their extraction from the state of affairs in which they are embedded; the second in the determination of this virtuality as a problematic Idea, a singularity, capable of serving as a focal point for new productions of being. But if both the liberatory, pluralizing activities of non-fascistic living, and the political construction of a subjective fidelity to the singularity of events constitute two inseparable dimensions of counter-actualization, what becomes of any relation we might wish to draw between ethics and politics? And if no such relation is discernable, can we lay claim to any sort of autonomous space for political thought?

In this chapter we will attempt to better grasp this tension-filled relation between ethics and politics in Deleuze's work by examining how it corresponds to philosophical discrepancies pointed out by several of his major critics. Of these, Alain Badiou and his book *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* has done the most to challenge the orthodoxy that has built up in Deleuze studies, and its supposed affinity with the political virtues of his commentators (not only pluralism, but radical democracy, anarchism, and so on). In contrast to almost all of the prevailing assumptions about Deleuze's philosophy, Badiou argues that it is committed not to liberating the multiplicities of being, but to renewing the metaphysical tenets of "the One", conceived of as a *univocal power* of ontological production. For Badiou, Deleuze's entire enterprise implies a general devaluation of the reality and integrity of the actual. What's more, he charges that Deleuze's conception of thought is based on a process of asceticism and dispossession, one which is, by nature, "aristocratic" in orientation. Building on Badiou's reading of Deleuze as metaphysician of the One, Peter Hallward will argue that Deleuze is quite simply *indifferent* to the politics of this world, articulating a philosophy that is much more spiritualistic than most of his commentators care to acknowledge. Both Badiou and Hallward's critiques imply that the virtual is *unilaterally determinative* of actual being in Deleuze's ontology. From this point of view, the only ontologically productive disposition available to thinking subjects is to stand posed to sacrifice any element of their lived actuality that hampers the One's expression. It follows that any distinctive space for political thought can only be subsumed in an *ethical* and apolitical practice, functioning to make us maximally receptive to the One – even at the price of rendering us *indifferent* to the politics of this world.

By contrast, Alberto Toscano's *The Theatre of Production: Individuation between Kant and Deleuze* offers space for rethinking Deleuze's conception of ontological production from more of a political vantage point. Toscano sees ontological production in Deleuze as dependent upon the construction of distinct modes of *individuation*, the creation of a set of correspondences between disparate or metastable virtualities. In so much as thought participates in the production of unique regimes of individuation, it can be said to be actively involved in the creation of being itself. Thus, Toscano insists that there is a necessary element of *praxis* in Deleuze's ontology, for the necessity of the invention of regimes of individuation implies that the trajectory of ontological production does not move unilaterally from the virtual to the actual. Rather, every production of being must be said to be an utterly *anomalous* process.

As we will see, however, it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this "ontological" praxis with a genuinely political praxis, for the very process of thought in Deleuze remains premised on a subjective involuntarism, wherein any successful intuition of the singularities of Being is premised on our being transfixed by the pre-individual movements of the One. Moreover, it is clear that ultimately, even Toscano is led to affirm the primacy of ethics, and the apolitical nature of Deleuze's philosophy of ontological production.

Deleuze as Metaphysician of the One

Alain Badiou's short book on Deleuze must have come as a shock to those who felt that Deleuze possessed an unchallengeable sensitivity to the multiple differences and the singular trajectories hidden beneath our representations of the world. In essence, Badiou makes the case that "Deleuze's fundamental problem is most certainly not to

liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One".¹³⁷ That Badiou should make such a claim is consistent with his efforts to re-energize philosophy and ontology with a thorough revision of the categories of being and event. In his engagement with Deleuze's work he makes clear that he considers his vision of the multiple nature of being, inspired by the mathematics of set-theory and his conception of the event as a "pure supplement" subtracted from every regime of identification, in direct competition with the ontology of Deleuze.¹³⁸ Significantly, Badiou is also very much a *political* thinker, and his philosophical critique of Deleuze points to a deeper political dispute. Though he offers some limited praise for Deleuze's insight into "certain aspects of...political experimentation", Badiou nonetheless insists their philosophical divergence *stems* from the fact that, for Deleuze "politics is not an autonomous form of thought".¹³⁹

But on what grounds does Badiou make his case against Deleuze? After all, doesn't Deleuze's philosophy demand that ontological production be thought free from the determination of any sovereign unity or encompassing space, of any "One" which would inhibit the unfolding of a revolutionary singularity? Badiou sees Deleuze's metaphysical orientation as being overdetermined by his insistence that Being is univocal: the thesis, according to Deleuze, that Being is expressed or "said in one and the same 'sense' of everything about which it is said".¹⁴⁰ He argues that by holding fast to univocity, Deleuze cannot conceive of local, singular trajectories of ontological

¹³⁷ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 10.1.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2.3. See Badiou's "On Subtraction", in *Theoretical Writings*, 114, for a summary of the notion of event as pure supplement.

¹³⁹ Badiou, "One, Multiple, Multiplicities", 68-69.

¹⁴⁰ As Deleuze writes: "Philosophy merges with ontology, but ontology merges with the univocity of Being... The univocity of Being signifies that Being is Voice, that it is said, and that it is said in one and the same 'sense' of everything about which it is said. That of which it is said is not at all the same, but Being is the same for everything about which it is said". Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 205.

production as anything but *formally* distinct deployments of the univocal power of the One – that, for all their formal (or modal) uniqueness, each process of actualization expresses a productive power which is *ontologically* One.¹⁴¹ To be clear then: Badiou is not saying that Deleuze’s conception of being is such that it is *numerically* One, whereby the pure multiples and unique singularities of Being could be reduced to a simple unity or totality, a fixed classification or structure of terms and forms. As Badiou writes: “For Deleuze, *beings* are local degrees of intensity or inflections of power that are in constant movement and entirely singular. And as power is but a name of *Being*, beings are only expressive modalities of the One”.¹⁴² Consequently, though Being is univocal, and said in the same sense, “we have to admit an equivocity of *that of which* Being is said: its immanent modalities, that is, beings”.¹⁴³ For as much as Badiou’s thesis is surprising, in a sense it ought not to be. We have already noted that Deleuze’s concept of singularity is indebted to Spinoza, for whom the absolute power of ontological production (God) was distributed in an infinite number of formally distinct attributes. It remains to be seen, however, what consequences – especially what *political* consequences – follow from this initial point.

As Badiou reads it, the thesis of univocity has dramatic consequences for the status of actuality in Deleuze’s ontology. For if beings represent mere equivocal permutations of the One, whose nature is univocal, then “the equivocal status of beings, has no real status”.¹⁴⁴ That is to say, actual, formally distinct beings can only ever serve to mask, through an illusory, equivocal distribution, the univocity of the One, *which*

¹⁴¹ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 23.4-24.5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 24.5. Emphasis added.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

alone is real. Badiou develops this point in a very lucid, yet harshly critical examination of the concept of the virtual. Recall that for Deleuze (as for Spinoza) singularities, and their corresponding Ideas, are completely real and determinate prior to their actualization in states of affairs or lived experiences – the virtual is not a formless or passive matter, nor a static reservoir of potential (an essence). But if this is true, then the virtual must be *doubly* determinate: on the one hand, every convergence of virtuality determines a process of actualization, represented in instances of a “solution”; on the other hand, every convergence of virtuality, represented in the formation of a “problem”, determines the *other* virtualities that lie in proximity to that problem, “because every virtuality interferes with the others, just as a problem is only constituted as a problematic locus in the proximity of other problems”.¹⁴⁵ The virtual thus determines both the actual *and itself*.

If we still wish to maintain, as Deleuze does, that both the actual and virtual are real, as immanent and co-existent dimensions of the real object, we are compelled to reconcile this with the thesis of univocity. And if the thesis of univocity is to be upheld, then Being cannot be said in two senses of the same object, or else its reality would of necessity be equivocal. Thus, Badiou says, Deleuze is forced to argue, rather mystically, that the virtual and actual dimensions of the real object are, in the final instance, *indiscernible*. But, he charges, we can only maintain both, that the virtual is determinate and real, and that it is ultimately indiscernible from the reality of the actual, by depriving the actual of *its* integrity and reality: “the more Deleuze attempts to wrest the virtual from irreality, indetermination, and nonobjectivity, the more unreal, indetermined, and finally non-objective the actual (or beings) becomes, because it phantasmatically splits into

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 49.0.

two”.¹⁴⁶ We end up, once again, with the realm of “being” or the actual reduced to but a simulacrum of the self-communicating surface of the One.

Moreover, if the entire realm of the actual or being is reduced to mere simulacra, then we can only properly *think* Being by means of a fundamental “dispossession and asceticism” vis-à-vis our social and political actuality.¹⁴⁷ Again, that Badiou would make this point is not altogether surprising, and we have already examined how thought for Deleuze was a wholly involuntary movement, in which the faculties enter into such a state of discord that they become equal to a site of ontological production. For Badiou, the nature of Deleuze’s ontology leaves no place for choice as a dimension of thought. Or rather, the only choice involved in thought is the *choice to choose*, which for Deleuze means the choice to make ourselves available to the transfixing power of the One, independently of the content of any *particular* choice. Such a view is ascetic in that it is premised on “a sustained renunciation of the obviousness of our needs and occupied positions” because any attachment to such needs or positions is likely to serve as an obstacle to thought’s essential involuntarism.¹⁴⁸ And this, in turn, implies that thought can only be a process of dispossession, in that the only individuals who can be said to truly think are those who reach “the point where...they are seized by their preindividual determination”, those who “endure the transfixion and disintegration of their actuality by infinite virtuality, which is actuality’s veritable being”.¹⁴⁹

For Badiou, such a conception of thought is “profoundly aristocratic” in that it links thought, and thus the seizing of revolutionary potential presented by the One, to a

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.2

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.2-12.3.

renunciation of our occupied socio-political actuality, one that “individuals are not equally capable” of offering up.¹⁵⁰ After all, the status of lived experience in thought, he argues, is purely *negative*: our attachments to actual relations, memories, commitments may potentially act to prevent us from being traversed by the impersonal power of thought – and must be resisted if necessary. And the consequence for some individuals, those say, who survive in large part because of actual relations, organizational structures, commitments – those, in short, who simply cannot *afford* to undergo the loss of these attachments – is a foreclosure to thought’s transformative power.

And if it were not enough that Deleuzian thought were aristocratic, Badiou also charges that it is in any case incapable of truly grasping singularity as such. In Badiou’s words: “Deleuze has no way of *thinking* singularity other than by classifying the different ways in which singularity is not ontologically singular; in other words by classifying the different modes of actualization”.¹⁵¹ It is here that Badiou’s critique begins to become, most clearly, a critique of Deleuzian politics. For it is precisely in its capacity to determine a virtual prerogative, traversal to the divisions and particularities of actual being, that Deleuze’s ontology could be said to be most prescient against the reduction of singularities to social particularities. Should Badiou do critical damage to even *this* aspect of Deleuze’s work, then it would throw serious doubt as to the relevance of Deleuze’s politics indeed.

We have seen that, for Badiou, Deleuze’s philosophy is devoted to intuiting the One, as the absolute, univocal power of ontological production, within the relatively fixed permutations of the actual. Thus, if we insist on maintaining that the virtual,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Badiou, “One, Multiple, Multiplicities”, 81.

singular dimension of being is *immanent* to the actuality in which it can be intuited or thought by human subjects, we must be capable of grounding the continuity between the ontology of the virtual and those forms of being that give expression to virtuality. For Badiou, such an effort is bound to lose hold of the singular, oscillating as it does, “between a classificatory phenomenology of modes of actualization (and virtualization), on the one hand, and an ontology of the virtual, on the other”.¹⁵² Badiou is referring to Deleuze’s tendency to verify the singular nature of phenomena by means of *analogy* – to say that a certain actuality is “like” a singular actualization, “like” an explosion of an Idea into actuality (or a dissolution of an actuality into ideality). This recourse to analogy, which Deleuze consistently critiqued as a kind of residue of representational thought, seems to imply that singularities, Ideas, problems remain *transcendent* to the actualizations, the solutions made of them, in that it is always a singular virtuality that provides the descriptive criteria for their analogous phenomena.¹⁵³ Moreover, we could say that the oscillatory nature of Deleuze’s conception of singularity renders the verification of a political singularity dependent on a visionary, *intuitive* function, that a truly “Deleuzian” study of politics is apt to prove immensely difficult. After all, any successful effort to render the necessary indiscernability between the virtual and the actual dimensions of being compatible with a revolutionary production of political being is bound to appeal, in the end, to our taste for the mystical.

It’s worth noting that Badiou largely refrains from any overt critique of Deleuze’s politics, except to dispense with the caricatured portrait of Deleuze as grounding the rights of the free flux of desire against all that is sedentary in the world (what Badiou

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

calls, rather acerbically, “our planetary democratism”).¹⁵⁴ Otherwise, there are only scattered references, such that we are left to wonder if Badiou considers his critique of Deleuze’s philosophy to have nullified the question of politics altogether (this much is implied when Badiou critiques Deleuze for not upholding politics as an autonomous mode of thought). And certainly, in his assessment of Deleuze’s renewed thinking of the One, and the tension that it creates in his ontology between the rigorous determination of the virtual and the defense of the integrity of the actual, there is a sense that no such philosophy could be of any *real* use for politics. Such a view is confirmed in his assessment of Deleuze’s thought as “aristocratic”, and elsewhere, when he writes that Deleuze’s presupposition that “intuition is internal to the immanent changes of the One...cannot avoid continually depreciating what there is of...organization in the political”, because such intuition is premised on a process of transfixion and disintegration.¹⁵⁵

It was not until Peter Hallward’s *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, that a fuller critique of Deleuze’s politics was to be made. While echoing the charge that Deleuze’s philosophy is ultimately committed to a renewed thinking of the One, Hallward diverges in at least one important respect from Badiou. He argues that Badiou, in his reading of the relation between the virtual and the actual, conflates actuality *itself* with “equivocal simulacra” or “misleading surface delusions obscuring the virtual truth of being”.¹⁵⁶ For Badiou, as we have seen, such a distinction between the reality of univocal Being and the simulacra of equivocal or formally distinct beings

¹⁵⁴ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 9.0.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.9.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 177.

gestures towards a dualism between the virtual and the actual. By contrast, Hallward argues that the primary dualism in Deleuze's work is *not* between the actual and virtual, so much as between two *dispositions* of actuality itself: one which affirms its role as a local expression of the One, and one which, infused with *ressentiment*, clings to its identitarian particularities and refuses its pre-individual determination.¹⁵⁷

Indeed, we have seen the distinction between these dispositions at work in Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of the problem of fascism. For them, the ethics of non-fascist living required that we promote those micro-formations of desire capable of affirming the productive and non-subjective nature of desire, against those formations caught up in reactive investments in "Oedipal" representations, coextensive with the State, the nation, the family, and so on. But this is still an ethics of non-fascist *living*, premised on the fact that we remain, in some form, vulnerable individuals interacting in the world. It does not require that we somehow give up our actuality altogether, merely that we remain *open* to its continual dissolution and reconstitution. Contrary to Badiou's assertions then, we can say that genuine thought for Deleuze is not premised on the dissolution of actuality *tout court*. As Hallward says, by equating actual and equivocal, Badiou misses what may be Deleuze's "central concern: the difficult, laborious process whereby we ourselves, *in our actuality*, might become maximally or actively expressive of the One".¹⁵⁸

All those who see this as something of a defense of Deleuze, however, would be dismayed to see Hallward proceed to examine Deleuze's latent *spiritualism*. Specifically, he identifies Deleuze as a "theophanic" thinker, for whom "every individual process or

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 178.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. Emphasis added.

thing is conceived as a manifestation or expression of God, or a conceptual equivalent of God (pure creative potential, force, energy, life...)." ¹⁵⁹ Given how we have described his ontology, it is not difficult to see how this charge applies to Deleuze. As we noted in the previous chapter, the notion of singularity as a "local absolute" was largely influenced by Spinoza, for whom the "absolute" in question simply *was* God. In Hallward's view, Deleuze's notion of the singular – while arguably secularizing Spinoza's concept – is just such a "conceptual equivalent of God" in that it reduces the realm of actuality itself to a mere local, formally distinct expression of an absolute creative force. Similar to the way in which we have emphasized the distinction in Deleuze's ontology between the productive nature of singularities, Ideas or problems and the unproductive nature of the pre-constituted terms and forms of collective being, Hallward distinguishes – fully embracing the religious overtones – between the singular *creatings* of being, and the actual *creatures* that they give rise to.

What does this charge bode for the relation between Deleuze's philosophy and politics? Hallward argues that the spiritualist nature of Deleuze's philosophy is such that the actual or the creaturely is incapable of ontological creation or production in its own right. As a result, the only affirmative task for the creature is to strive to "redeem" itself by acting, as much as it can, as an effective vehicle for its own creative determination. In this context, redemption consists in not being an *obstacle* to the expression of such creative powers. Thus, while Deleuze can be said to have secularized the religious elements that he inherits from the philosophies of his predecessors (Spinoza, Leibniz and Bergson, primarily), he retains a similarly spiritualist *disposition*. And this is a

¹⁵⁹ Hallward, *Out of this World*, 4.

disposition that Hallward judges to be fundamentally incompatible with anything like a positive, revolutionary politics.

On the one hand, Deleuze's pre-eminent concern with the redemption of our actual, creaturely selves by virtual creations effectively precludes him, Hallward argues, from formulating any sort of conceptual edifice that "might enable more supple or more fruitful modes of actual interaction".¹⁶⁰ Why? Because, Hallward writes, in Deleuze's ontology relations between actual persons or things "as such...are deprived of any productive or creative force".¹⁶¹ We can thus add a further indictment to those already formulated by Badiou: if the virtual is, in-itself, fully determinate *and productive* then it does not require *any* mediation by a pre-constituted actuality in order to achieve and exercise this determinacy. The entire order of the virtual and the creative thus enacts an asymmetrical and unilateral determination vis-à-vis the actual or creaturely: *asymmetrical* because the creative always exceeds any actual causality, and does not resemble the actual creatures it gives rise to (in turn, actualities never resemble the singularities they incarnate); *unilateral*, because creation always proceeds, as it were, *from* the virtual *to* the actual – the actual can never be creative except as a *vehicle* for virtual creations.

We are now in a position to describe more specifically the distinction that Hallward sees between the two basic orientations that creatures can have in Deleuze's philosophy. On the one hand, there are creatures orientated toward preserving their actual relations to the world, including their "political integration".¹⁶² On the other hand, there are creatures capable of enduring the chaotic and disintegrating movements of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁶² Ibid., 82.

ontological production or creation *while remaining actual, and creaturely*. In effect, and it is in this that Hallward draws the title of his book, this same distinction can be drawn in terms of those forms of being “orientated towards a way of being *in* the world” and those “orientated towards a way of being *out* of the world”.¹⁶³ Though Hallward argues that Deleuze’s philosophy is orientated “out of this world”, this does not mean that it is thereby “extra-worldly”. Such an orientation is still *of* this world in that it is geared towards the virtual expression of being, and the virtual dimensions of worldly existence. As Hallward writes, “though the creature obstructs its creating, there is no other vehicle for the dissipation of this obstacle than the creature itself. The creating alone creates but it creates *through* the creature – there is no...higher reality than that of the human and the world”.¹⁶⁴

Hallward ends his book by drawing stark conclusions as to the consequences of this orientation for Deleuze’s politics. “The truth”, he writes, “is that Deleuze’s work is essentially indifferent to the politics of this world”.¹⁶⁵ As soon as Deleuze defines the nomadic movements of the One as ontologically primary “any distinctive space for political action can only be subsumed within the more general dynamics of creation or life”.¹⁶⁶ And though he fashions an ontology that is extraordinarily sensitive to the singular undulations of the One, Deleuze is unable to conceive of the singular in a way that would be compatible with a *specific* form of politics, capable of mobilizing the revolutionary power of an Ideal prerogative while preserving its own integration.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ See Peter Hallward, “Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific”, in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11.2 (1998): 442: “If a specific individual exists only as part of a relationship to an environment

The Subsumption of Politics

There is no doubt that any cozy link that one could assume exists between Deleuze's ontology and politics is seriously compromised by Badiou and Hallward's critiques. By drawing our attention to the metaphysical, speculative aspects of Deleuze's work (represented in the thesis of univocity), Badiou and Hallward are able to register a major disconnect between the ascetic, transfixing nature of the process of actualization and the supposed affinity of Deleuze with radical democratic theory and pluralism. More important still, is the authors' charge that Deleuze's ontology deprives actual, organized relations of *any* productive powers, such that the actual itself is left as little but a creaturely obstacle to the unfolding of the virtual, or as an ephemeral after-effect of the One's own nomadic circulation. It is *this* charge that threatens any meaningful distinction we could make in Deleuze's work between an ethics of non-fascist living and an embrace of revolutionary political singularities, because it implies that *any* distinctive set of practices in Deleuze are secondary in relation to the ethical, ascetic injunction to remain maximally expressive of our pre-individual and/or spiritualist determination. And, as we have seen, only continuous experimentation, an experimentation that stands ready to sacrifice whatever there is of integrity and organization in politics, is adequate to this task.

On the one hand, it is difficult to see how Deleuze's philosophy could *not* represent a renewed thinking of the One. Granted, any mention of "the One" with regard to a philosopher conventionally thought to have freed the sensual multiplicities of being

and to other individuals, a singular individual is one which like a creator-god or sovereign power transcends all such relations. The specific is mediated by its relations with others, while the immediately singular creates the medium of its own existence or expression".

is likely to rub many people the wrong way. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the “One” in question is nothing but the chaotic power of metastability or difference-in-itself, the eternal metamorphosis that Deleuze linked to the Eternal Return. Thus, the serious question to ask in regards to this thesis is not whether it spoils Deleuze’s pluralist credentials – for pluralism, as construed by many of Deleuze’s commentators, was never much a concern of his – but to what extent such a philosophical project can still be spoken of as *prescient*, and even potentially revolutionary, in our contemporary milieu. And this question forces us to scrutinize Badiou and Hallward’s critiques more closely.

Alberto Toscano’s recent book, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*, presents us with a good opportunity to do so. This book represents perhaps the only serious effort to respond to Badiou’s critique, from a point of view that is unusual in Deleuze studies for focusing on the Kantian aspects of his philosophy (as opposed to Spinoza). The Kantian aspects in play centre on the theme of *individuation*, the processes involved in the production of ontologically unique or singular beings (individuation, in this sense, is entirely separate from the formation of individual selves or consciousnesses). Toscano also considers a number of thinkers often ignored in studies of Deleuze’s ontology, examining the development of the theme of individuation as it appears in the work of Alfred Whitehead, C.S. Peirce, and Gilbert Simondon, in order, he says, to find the conditions for a theory of individuation that “accounts for the individuated without presupposing it in turn”.¹⁶⁸

What makes this book particularly interesting for our discussion is its insistence on a necessary element of *praxis* in Deleuze’s philosophy. While agreeing with the

¹⁶⁸ Toscano, *The Theatre of Production*, 157.

substance of Badiou's critique of the virtual, Toscano argues that this critique applies mainly to Deleuze's structuralism-influenced work, including portions of *The Logic of Sense*, as well as much of his writing on Henri Bergson. It is here that what Toscano calls "the sufficiency of the virtual," the notion "that [the] process [of ontogenesis] is a unilateral one, entirely driven by the virtual as its creative pole", is most firmly in effect.¹⁶⁹ For Toscano, what leads Deleuze into such a position is his tendency to link individuation to a *principle* of sufficient reason. In *The Logic of Sense*, this principle appears as what Deleuze calls a "paradoxical element" or an "empty square", an element that serves to expose every apparently closed structure to the Open of chance and constant metamorphosis. Deleuze considers the paradoxical element as a "principle of auto-unification" immanent to each distribution of singularities, one which ensures that each distribution is a "nomadic" one, containing an element of inconsistency or chance, and not a fixed or "sedentary" distribution that would render the singular co-extensive with an essence.¹⁷⁰ By presupposing the existence of such paradoxical elements, Toscano argues, Deleuze negates the truly hazardous, contingent, and experimental aspects of individuation, by refusing to make chance *co-extensive with the process of individuation itself*. Put more simply, by linking production to a principle of sufficient reason, which is operative independently of cases of individuation, Deleuze makes the virtual appear as exhaustively determined and unilaterally productive prior to any mediation by actuality. From this point of view, Deleuze's ontology appears vulnerable to precisely the critiques made by Badiou and Hallward.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 175.

¹⁷⁰ See Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 118-119.

Toscano appeals to other elements of Deleuze’s work, including sections of *Difference and Repetition* and much of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, as pointing towards a much more praxis-orientated ontology, wherein actualization plays a genuinely productive role. He focuses on elements of Deleuze’s ontology influenced by the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon, specifically Simondon’s notion that pre-individual being is organized in a “metastable” or “disparate” state, wherein “being is affected by inconsistency, populated by divergent tensions, and pregnant with incompatible potentials”.¹⁷¹ To minimally determine such a metastable state, as we noted in the last chapter, corresponds to the determination of a problematic Idea, which takes on the role of a prerogative or an attractor. Corresponding to every problem are instances of a solution, which represent a further state of convergence, to the point at which these inconsistent, divergent tensions sediment into formally distinct actualities. For Toscano, ontological production cannot simply unfold unilaterally from the determination of a virtual problem to the formation of diverse solutions or actualities, because the whole process is reliant upon a contingent moment of intervention corresponding to the *invention* of a compatibility between disparate potentials. This moment of intervention is individuation itself, Toscano argues, because to invent a compatibility between “orders of magnitude, difference, of potential, and so on – simply *is* to individuate”.¹⁷² Thus, individuation can be called a kind of “third term” between the actual and the virtual, intervening *between* the determination of a problem and the eruption of diverse solutions or actualities.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production*, 138.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 140 and 139.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 194.

Furthermore, individuation can be said to be co-extensive with the exercise of *thought* itself. So considered, thought does not consist in the immanent embrace of a principle, or the representation of a pre-existing objectivity because “thinking neither knows nor explains individuation, it individuates (modalities or regimes of) individuation by individuating itself”.¹⁷⁴ By enlisting thought in the determination of the virtual, Toscano writes, individuation appears “no longer the *sufficient reason* of difference, but its *construction* and *experience*”.¹⁷⁵ So considered from the point of view of individuation, ontological production appears as an utterly hazardous, “anomalous” process in which the subject of thought is intimately involved.

Indeed, we have said that in as much as politics can be considered as a mode of ontological production in Deleuze’s work, it should be conceived as process inaugurated by an event, a process where, in rendering the singularity of that event *thinkable*, we determine its revolutionary potential as a problem, an elusive focal point of collective struggle. Now, to determine a political problem is to invent a compatibility between the disparate virtualities presented by an event, a compatibility that finds its expression in a thought, in the form of a concept, a percept or affect, or a function. We could go further and say that to think a political singularity is to individuate *both* it *and* the subject it produces, simultaneously, by producing a unique form of space-time capable of further resolving the disparity of pre-individual of being to the point where it sediments into a subject-object relation. From this point of view, it is fair to say that, in so far as thought is bound up with this initial process of resolution, it serves to at least partially determine the *medium* by which a singularity is expressed. This is why Toscano insists on calling

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 152.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

individuation a “*praxis*”, a “‘point of mutation’ that allows us to think the process of individuation *as potentially transformative of ideality* [or virtuality] *itself*”.¹⁷⁶ From this point of view, it is not accurate to say that the virtuality presented by every event is unilaterally determinative of actual being, because the whole process of actualization requires that this virtuality be *thought*, that a minimal degree of compatibility be drawn capable of transforming it from a disparate, metastable “potential”, towards a point of convergence represented by the emergence of discrete actualities.

The question remains, however, as to what extent Toscano’s complex reading implies a distinct space for a *politics*, and how vulnerable this it yet remains to Badiou and Hallward’s critique. Certainly, the Deleuze that emerges from Toscano’s work appears as a figure for whom the production of being is a much more contingent, experimental, and hazardous process. That being said, there is enough in Toscano’s book itself to suggest that we may be stretching his analysis a bit thin in trying to apply it to the political realm. For, if we ask how such an ontological praxis could be translated into a distinctly *political* praxis, we are left with the same problems raised by Badiou and Hallward. Even if Toscano adequately demonstrates that ontological production is not a unilateral process, proceeding strictly *from* the virtual *to* the actual, we are still left without any way of making this production commensurable with any sort of integrated, organized political struggle. This is because, *even for Toscano*, the process of thought is one of dispossession. This much is made clear when he writes that: “inasmuch as the fractured and dissolved thinker is traversed by...movements [of individuation] he or she

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 180.

(or better: *it*) ‘becomes individual’; that is, succeeds in making individuality the equal of heterogeneity, anomaly, excess”.¹⁷⁷

What we end up with is an ontological praxis that is exclusive to an *ethical* practice or, in Toscano’s works, an “ethico-aesthetic experiment”, defined by the continual experimentation with the virtuality that subtends our constituted actuality and individuality.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, if we can only properly think individuation by *individuating and actualizing ourselves anew*, then it would seem that only an ethics of constant experimentation is commensurable with what Toscano calls a “praxis”. This is not to suggest that such an emphasis on experimentation *per se* leads to a prioritizing of ethics and an indifference to politics, for the very notion of a revolutionary politics would seem to be intimately bound up with experimentation. Rather, it is only when the process of thought, considered as an essential moment in individuation, is conceived as a kind of experimentation whose efficacy depends upon the absence of *any* conditioning political prerogative, that Deleuze’s ontology becomes subsumed by an ethical and apolitical dynamic. Even Toscano’s work seems ultimately to affirm this conclusion.

What’s more, Toscano’s book does little to convince one that Deleuze’s work is not ultimately geared towards a rethinking of the One. Given the primacy of ethics even in Toscano’s reading, we might wonder if the difficulty of carving out a distinctive space for political practice in Deleuze’s philosophy is not ultimately due to the fact that his orientation towards the One is so overdetermining. There are two likely reasons why this philosophical orientation compelled Deleuze and Guattari to define politics in a purely negative way, or to not embrace a conception of politics as a singularity. First, if the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 201.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 197.

singularity of a politics is understood as an expression of a univocal productive power, then we would tend to devalue all that is equivocal as a mere formal distinction, obscuring our apprehension of Being. Given the extent to which the power of the State would seem to amount to the power of dividing things up, of enumerating and segmenting Being, it would seem reasonable, from Deleuze's standpoint, to identify politics solely with the deployment of this power, and hence as a means of exploiting the equivocal nature of "being" for the purposes of controlling its continual production. For the alternative, that politics be conceived as an expressive modality of the One, would seem to require Deleuze to reconsider his very conception of thought.

This is because, to get to our second point, any successful intuition of the One's own singular trajectory, and hence any access to the ontologically productive power that such a politics would deploy, requires that we sacrifice the integrity and the organizational capacity of political existence to the disintegration and disaggregation that such an intuition requires. Furthermore, it is clear that the only form of subjectivity capable of true fidelity to the singularity of an event, a fidelity represented by an actuality that is maximally expressive of its virtual dimensions, is one which is defined by the highest possible degree of passivity and contemplation. It would be difficult to argue that Deleuze's description of the "visionary" of modern cinema did not apply to the Deleuzian thinker in general: "He records rather than reacts. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action".¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 3. Indeed, Peter Hallward argues this point throughout much of his *Out of this World*.

What Remains of Politics

No doubt the Deleuze presented in this chapter is a figure stripped of much of his charm, reduced to a handful of principles that most would find foreign to the spirit of his thought. By the same token, however, one would be hard-pressed to demonstrate that Deleuze was *not* a thinker of the One, that his conception of thought was *not* based, to a large extent, on a process of dispossession. Indeed, one of the main values of focusing on the relation between Deleuze's ontology and politics in this manner is that it forces us into an *encounter* with Badiou's critique, rather than simply dismissing it as simply the ravings of one opposed to the flux of life and the rights of desire. And if we are serious about what these ontological principles bode for politics, we ought not to assume that they can be dismissed by an appeal to the interchangeability between ethics and politics, as number of Deleuze's commentators have tendency to do. For, if nothing else, we have reiterated that the ontological primacy of ethics in Deleuze's philosophy works to *foreclose* any distinctive space for political thought and practice.

One might wish to argue, still, that our criteria for what counts as "politics" are far too limited. Peter Hallward, for one, is quite explicit in noting that, for him, "the politics of the future are likely to depend less on virtual mobility than on more resilient forms of cohesion, on more principled forms of commitment, on more integrated forms of coordination, on more resistant forms of defense".¹⁸⁰ Certainly there are those for whom the politics of the future are likely to depend on quite the opposite: more global and contingent social networks, more inclusive forms of organization, more flexible

¹⁸⁰ Hallward, *Out of this World*, 162.

forms of commitment, and a move away from prescriptive-based politics towards a more experimental and inventive one.

Perhaps, however, our milieu is at risk of being defined more by its apolitical tendencies than its micropolitical virtues. Not only do those who champion flexibility and contingency in political struggle tend to devalue the notion of a politics animated by an overriding antagonism, a singular focal point, but the links between micropolitical theory and the more pressing political struggles of today – in Sadr City, Gaza, South Lebanon, to focus on one region – appear undeniably *tenuous*. For all that Deleuze's ontology has to offer to politics, there has yet to be, as far as I know, an effective Deleuzian study of struggles like those just mentioned, or even of colonial situations in North America and elsewhere.¹⁸¹

It would be difficult to avoid the conclusion that Deleuze's conception of ontological production is capable of grounding anything more than *a singular form of apolitics*, whose nature we can briefly examine.

¹⁸¹ Paul Patton, in *Deleuze and the Political* for example, does examine several colonial cases, but his "Deleuzian" reading is so liberal that it is difficult to find any resonances between it and the reading that we have offered of Deleuze.

CONCLUSION: A SINGULAR APOLITICS

For all that Deleuze's work offers to the study of being, ethics, and art, it stands in an utterly ambiguous relation to politics. There is no denying that his ontology remains incredibly sensitive to the singular potential distributed throughout even the most listless of actualities. Moreover, there are few philosophies as capable of grasping the most ineffable organizations of virtuality, the most ephemeral forms of control and regulation of being. That Deleuze was able to translate the fruits of his intuitive method into a series of developed philosophical concepts – territorialization, multiplicity, the virtual event, and so on – testifies to the success of his venture. By the same token, however, Deleuze was no doubt forced to sacrifice something of the integrity of the actual in pursuing, so rigorously, the determination of the virtual. At its worst, the ontological primacy of the virtual tended to leave the actuality of politics as little more than gristle for the circulation of the One. At best, we could say that the entire Deleuzian enterprise migrates between an ethics of non-fascist living that works to sanction those distributions of the actual and the virtual capable of giving maximum expression to the One, and a conception of political singularity directed at rendering the processes of actualization and individuation commensurable with the overcoming of forms of domination. All in all, however, we must say that it is only with great difficulty that one could possibly prevent such a project from being subsumed in the ethical dynamics of non-fascist living and counter-actualization. By and large, the production of positive, non-fascist, and life-affirming forms of being is a wholly *apolitical* process.

That said, there *is* a real achievement in Deleuze's own fragmentary efforts towards developing a politics adequate to his conception of ontological production. To conceive of politics as a singularity makes it possible to relate political struggle to a kind of virtual prerogative, an elusive focal point which can be said to be transversal to the particularities and identities that compose social being. In so far as this prerogative corresponds to a positive, determinate, and revolutionary potential for change, Deleuze's ontology represents a move beyond those forms of cultural and political theory orientated towards "opening a space" in the intersubjective frame of collective being, and driven by the effort to liberate socio-political particularities (racial, sexual, or class-based differences). What's more, Deleuze's philosophy consistently defended the positive and transformative power of the event against the tendency to reduce all eventual occurrences to historically contingent discourses or truth-effects, and to consign singularity itself to an impossible moment or promise linked to an ethics of the Other. In this his work stands opposed to much of what is contemporary in post-structuralist political theory in the Anglo-American academy.

Along with this, of course, was Deleuze's consistent skepticism, or even "devaluation" of organized politics. Without having ever joined the Communist Party or embraced the politics of the State, Deleuze never wavered in considering artists and philosophers (and even the occasional scientist) uniquely capable of bringing the revolutionary power of political events to bear on the complacency of everyday existence. Indeed, it can be said that even Deleuze and Guattari's micropolitics is orientated much less to resisting the specifically political mechanisms of control and domination than with affirming the creative power of *life* itself, which for Deleuze was

nothing other than the infinite power of the One. For all the immense complexity and diversity of his thought and ontology, it could all be said to amount to an immanent evaluation of life, whether the “exhausted and degenerating life” of unproductive, fascistic being or the “outpouring, ascending life, that kind which knows how to transform itself, to metamorphose itself according to the forces it encounters...always increasing the power to live, always opening new ‘possibilities’”.¹⁸² And because life is affirmed only in the element of transformation, metamorphosis, and the opening up of possibilities, philosophy is always compelled to prioritize ethics, experimentation, and connection above *resistance* and fidelity to a distinctly political cause.

This, more than anything, betrays Deleuze’s profound disenchantment with the possibilities for political transformation itself. At a limit, the actual, when cut off from the virtual power of Life, came to be viewed by Deleuze as uncreative to the point of being suffocating and intolerable. Seeing the degree to which *Anti-Oedipus* was taken as a glorification of hedonism or a romanticization of drug-use and madness, he and Guattari would write of the dangers of going too far, of the necessity of sobriety and consistency when opening ourselves up to life’s transformative power. Nonetheless, Deleuze continued to feel as if existence was such that we had lost our connection with the world, as if we had become dispossessed of any natural or instinctive connection with Being. Because, for him, the contemporary fact of being is that

[t]he link between man and the world is broken...The reaction of which man has been disposed can be replaced only by belief. Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears...Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, *we need reasons to belief in this world*.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 141.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

What strikes one today, however, is that rather than historicizing or localizing this disenchantment, Deleuze tended to make the loss of the world a *fact of existence*. Indeed, his entire philosophical edifice could be said to be dependent upon the fact that the world is irremediably lost, that our only hope lies in continually exposing our actuality to the grace of the One.

And here, finally, we discover something like the kernel of Deleuze's apolitics. For, in a world that is *irremediably* lost, all hope for decisively overcoming what is intolerable in political existence, of restoring our link to the world, is necessarily foreclosed. There is no doubt something singular in the way that Deleuze was able to conceptualize such revolutionary powers of ontological transformation on the *condition* that politics itself had become devoid of all creative or productive power. Betrayal of a revolutionary cause, the presence of something intolerable in life: for Deleuze these figures are not political conditions to be overcome, but *potential sources of ontological transformation*. As long as the logic of counter-actualization is primary in Deleuze's work the possibility of decisively overcoming what is intolerable in political existence is secondary to extracting the singular power that inheres in the intolerable, in the unjust, in "false movement". Indeed, for Deleuze, "[b]elief is no longer addressed to a different or transformed world...but belief in this world, our only link".¹⁸⁴ There is a sense then, in which any liberatory thought or creation for Deleuze, *requires* the existence of something intolerable, of something unbearable, of a world which is lost. This seems to me to betray the positive nature of Deleuzian philosophy, the conviction that ontological production is

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 172.

always animated, in the first instance, by the embrace of the radical positivity of an event.

It must be said, however, that while the logic of counter-actualization no doubt fails to ground an ontologically productive form of politics, it certainly does not require any less courage or sobriety on the part of those who would seek to employ its power, in accordance with the one whose inflexible discipline forged its singular course.

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