

### 24h Reading Group: 3 Edits of Gilles Deleuze's *What is a Dispositif?*

The 24h reading groups seek to explore the different links between theoretical and philosophical writing and various forms of artistic and other cultural practice, particularly through different forms of collaborative writing. Members of the groups are also interested in notions of poly- and transliteracy and in how reading together constitutes a transversal and dialogical movement across normative textual economies and dominant notions of original meaning. Premised on the notion that reading itself is not primarily an interpretative but an intensive, generative and aesthetic act involved in the production of prototypical ethical styles and formations of subjectivity, the group is interested in exploring reading as an collective and collaborative action involving not only a dialogue around specific texts, concepts and notions but also a continuous and experimental investment in the form of the group itself as an affirmative yet critical formation.

This text comprises three edits of an email based discussion of Gilles Deleuze's text 'What is a Dispositif?', published in *Two Regimes of Madness* (London & New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), taking place over twenty four consecutive hours on the fourth and fifth of June, 2007.

#### Edit 1

The task of all creative thought if indeed it can be set a task, is to become congruent with its own creative process. At once joyous by freeing itself of any representative function and gaining through the multiple telling of its story a faith in its capacity to make a difference, it becomes an expression of its own generosity and a love of the world. Creating an opening to the open by dismantling the dualisms that separate the outside from the inside, it becomes an invitation to dance. Having no finality or any ordained trajectory, a beginning that is never mistaken for an origin, it keeps just rolling in to roll on all the while engendering unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being.

To create any authentic change, a change marked with its own necessity, it is first necessary to understand that it is not ours, this world; it is *itself* us. Every attempt to take hold of the world, as if it were given all at once, and fashion it to our perceived need invariably creates something quite monstrous and moreover unable to sustain itself it proves to be provisional and ultimately futile. At this level of understanding, one failing to grasp the technogenesis of the human, (it is a lack of origin that lies at the origin of mankind's making) politics will only deceive the way it always deceives. A recognition that after Auschwitz, Adorno was led to claim, 'politics has migrated into the autonomous work of art, it has penetrated most deeply into the works that present themselves as politically dead.'

A thinking that wishes to take its place as part of a radical materialism shared by both human and nonhuman actors alike and where the mind and body and world are in immanent relation with each other to become one with a matter of affirming and willing the world will be opposed to all thinking that takes itself as a literal representation of the world (a so-called world view). Shunning linear reason and fragmented analysis it will oppose a thinking tied down by what it knows. All objectivism will be replaced by a new, vital and reflexive epistemology. An importance will be given to mapping rather than endlessly weighing and measuring, for as thought becomes a part of the world it is no longer thinking about the world but thinking with it. As such it will come to understand that when everything ends in visibility we will have reached the most degraded form of existence. If the dialectic has indeed fulfilled itself, for Keith Ansell-Pearson, it is no longer one's alienation one is fighting against but rather one's transparency.

The act of thinking arrives first as an involuntary encounter, a pain, a certain violence, a shiver, a spasm, a jolt, a problem that subsists as with Kafka's three impossibilities, (God, Man, Nature), for James Brown it was hungry children going to school to learn and a desire to make the move, each time it returns us to the reservoir of sense, that unintelligible depth without dimension. Thinking will begin as an extreme passivity for finding itself grounded in the fixity of the signs of language (for Deleuze, signs are the components of images, their genetic elements) whose combinations alone stimulate gestures (making language stammer with often comic results, Beckett) and movements that necessarily reduce language to silence. Is this not why Melville's story of Bartleby resonates so strongly for all those caught in writing the disaster? 'The disaster', writes Blanchot, is the disappearance of the proper name.

To think is not the enacting of the will which merely reiterates the self as that which belongs to the self and consolidates the construction of the ego (just another commodity to be appropriated as a quantity of equivalence) but according to Blanchot it is the power of thought that effaces the self. A call, that Foucault found in the 'enigmatic' statement, that already existing non-unitary multiplicity, Barthes' 'punctum' found in the photograph of his mother, Lyotard's 'figural', that gift which takes place in the region where something is missing, that call where rhythm appears and lives in those intervals of silence and Orpheus is unable to prevent himself from looking back at Eurydice. Is this Spinoza's celebration of hidden treasure, there where we find the 'obstinate singularity of the human soul that is by nature non-communicable'?

To think the apparatus, thought must again become one with the chaos that prompts it, to do otherwise is merely the will to govern it, which inevitably harbours all the injustice and cowardice of power that man has grown so familiar with. If consciousness grew originally as a result of the recognition of its own death, to liberate consciousness, to move it from a unique personal consciousness to an oceanic one it is surely necessary to redouble the question of death, to sustain it not by appeasing it but instead conferring upon it a new brilliance, for as Spinoza maintained: 'A free man thinks of nothing less than of death and his wisdom is a meditation not of death but of life'. A consciousness vis-a-vis life, to find out of it a style, a plane of consistency that breaks free of any fixed and contained idea of the self. To turn and turn again, to live in error (without control or authority) to thwart, to interrupt the ride of chasing after the straight line of our dreams shackled as it is to the organic discursive body that separates us from becoming one with the world.

## Edit 2

Setting the stage,

(a) the repudiation of universals

(or maybe of universalization, majoritarian functions, designations of universal origins, the universality of the origin)

(b) the assertion of newness

(or maybe of the new, a futural aspect within the concept of power-as-potential, power-as-collective-capacity, power-as-actualized-commonality).

Try this for size: we are describing a kind of life cycle - an apparatus is established: people start to resist it: eventually the apparatus gives way - in a revolutionary process - or evolves in a way that accommodates the resistance; and a new apparatus is formed. This, in turn, is resisted and the cycle happens again.

In this case the joy and hope of the minoritarian liberation struggle is simply a part of a life cycle.

Or a thousand cycles, with trajectories going off between them and across them, lines traversing entire fields of such cycles; cycles forming larger cyclical images; exilic lines forming micro-cycles; jolts and ruptures, speeding ups and slowing downs; scissions within the cyclical fabrics; the minoritarian resistance being both specific to a cycle and exilic, always involves an accumulative yet barren foreignness, and spasmodic movement with little predictability.

In such politicized terrain, does the term political remain useful? Is there a politics of the precarious and exilic beyond the messianic waiting for some sort of political transformation or homecoming? A sustained precarious quality. A permanent exilic state.

<sup>1</sup> ... multilinear cartographical complexes simultaneously bind potential into given realities

into visibilities, utterabilities, formations of powers and subjectivity

and unbinds such formations in lines of flight or becoming that exceed dominant conditions and constitute a future cartographical principle around which differentiation actualizes itself in prototype forms, programs, styles of life. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> There is no ground from which all these lines emanate. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A no ground that is a ground.

To say 'there is no ground' might be to construct one all the same,  
like a vague and diffused light –  
an opal perspex, or a mist into which a body might fall.

The falling man.

And in front of this, the lines stand in relief, their segments giving birth to more segments, forced to turn back on themselves on the encounter with the limits of other lines, sticky surfaces congealing:

blue gum.

black market gum.<sup>6</sup>

... no ground that is all ground.

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<sup>1</sup> *second variation; 6.45 am, turn turn, [...], turn turn; third variation; 7.00 am cranes cranes [...]* cranes cranes cranes [...]  
ellipsis [an infinity with meat on both sides]

<sup>2</sup> Each apparatus is therefore a multiplicity where certain processes in becoming are operative and are distinct from those operating in another apparatus. Estimate.

<sup>3</sup> This is not the case: the disciplines Foucault described are the history of what we are slowly ceasing to be and our current apparatus is taking shape in attitudes of open and constant control that are very different from the recent closed disciplines. The contrast between the clean white sheet of fabric and the derelict environment - the physical background curtain of scribbling - the mere act of doing anything here, highlights a really significant aspect of this text, prominent in the crane and that concrete basis: to be a cartographer, in this sense, is not simply a matter of analysis (cloth being clean) of making connections and links, of making a diagram that deconstructs given conditions, but of little and continuous acts of dissent that burst those habit-patterns to be small, events that open up those points of mutagenesis where being articulates itself differently, in difference. The marine transportation business has atrophied. There used to be some shipping industry and a rather active port in this city, but with the general decline in that kind of industry, coupled with a bridge linking Sweden to the continent, it is now decimated. This is not a matter of a difference being reiterated, or positions being taken up, or any simplistic notion of a turning to something we know is elsewhere, the silent transversal projection.

<sup>4</sup> Each apparatus is therefore a multiplicity where certain processes in becoming are operative and are distinct from those operating in another apparatus. Estimate.

<sup>5</sup> And the curves themselves are utterances because enunciations are curves that distribute variables and a science at a given moment, or a literary genre or a state of laws or a social movement are precisely defined by the regimes of utterances they engender. A couple of weeks ago, I walked around a more or less abandoned harbour in a city near to where I live. And give up the port of the city soon. An image to link the everyday to the global, the specific workings of power involved in an everyday habit to global political, social and economical developments. Another tangent, or example, or something. As for me the metal wire has been attached.

<sup>6</sup> Modern subjectivations resemble the Greek subjectivations no more than Christian ones; the same is true of light, utterances and powers. Multi-little. My, does it droop - the crane and the hook and someone – in the metal wire.

To say that there is no ground is to say that there is all ground, common ground, ground in the common and immanent absence of transcendent and aprioristic origin. It is to assert that there is a level of futural openness.

(Power in this sense is both specific to the formation to which it is bound, and diffuse, common, in its potential to exceed those formations, which means that struggle, resistance, dissent, too, is at once sustaining itself. On the other hand, joy does seem to lend itself to discussion in terms of colours, or sounds - and maybe that's the point regarding blandness: it's not so much a designation of individualism, as it is a distinction between it and the joy of the collective

<sup>7</sup> We are born from the opening of new paths, each with their singular encounters and directions, giving each part of the world a distinctness. But equally when these paths furiously turn in on themselves, losing any perspective and orientation we are left with the debilitating feeling of a world losing its capacity to form a world.

<sup>8</sup>You say

'what is to be done?'

how much can our bodies actually take?

(in the dual sense;

how much can our bodies refuse themselves, how much refusal can our bodies take,

and how much intensity,

before becoming unrecognizable,

before mutating into something other than what we know as a body)

Talking about joy, in this context, involves a kind of discovery – the discovery of liminality, limits to limits – another one of the 'impossibilities' from which things start to emerge.

(Discovering certain 'impossibilities', paradoxically seems to open up to a plethora of minor trajectories. Deleuze and Guattari's famous example, of course, is Kafka's triple impossibility: the impossibility to write in German, the impossibility not to write in German, and the impossibility not to write. Perhaps we can see any regime or formation of power as composed not only out of multilinear complexities, but of the impossibilities such complexities constitute and the points, within those sets of impossibilities, where life can be affirmed anew.)

<sup>9</sup>Sustainability is not a matter of conservation:

it is a turning, and a turning from the turning, and a turning from the turning from the turning: a deviation activated by a careless looking-elsewhere,

and the extension of such experimental turning – a turning towards potential, a turning towards the unexpected and the event – into a constitutive principle:

a people yet to come, a future communitarian order, a politics against Politics;

it is to recognize that within the impossibility of Politics, we find an ethico-politics, a political life which is, to some extent, communal.

And this is a truly peculiar joy – it is not the joy of recognizing oneself in that which is similar to oneself (similarity and commonality, in this sense, are absolute distinct). Much rather, it is to recognize within the impossibilities of given conditions a common future element that is not really similar to anything but that incorporates and echoes of a commonality that is shared.

(Presumably its unsustainability reveals individual contentment as a matter of extremes - extreme excitation; extreme disappointment - a boom and bust scenario - whereas the strange and peculiar joy is so because it is sustaining itself. On the other hand, joy does seem to lend itself to discussion in terms of colours, or sounds - and maybe that's the point regarding blandness: it's not so much a designation of individualism, as it is a distinction between it and the joy of the collective

(an optimism re-playable,  
to keep rolling is to keep things rolling in)).

### Edit 3

#### Foucault - Cranes - Book Image

*... And the cranes, and the curves themselves are utterances because enunciations are curves that distribute variables. A science at a given moment; a literary genre; a state or law; social movement: all are precisely defined by the regimes of utterances they engender.*

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<sup>7</sup> What Foucault saw as the current or the new was what Nietzsche called the untimely, the "non-current," the becoming that splits away from history, the diagnosis that relays analysis on different paths. Walking around the area, you find all these huge cranes. Why was it done?

<sup>8</sup> You walk. You walk because of the bit and you turn.

<sup>9</sup> Some have thought that Foucault was painting a portrait of modern societies as disciplinary apparatuses in opposition to the old apparatuses of sovereignty. Some way was found.

A couple of weeks ago I walked around a more or less abandoned harbour in the city. There, a book-image links the everyday to the global. Metal wire. I refuse to identify these processes with a Reason par excellence. Against the backdrop of the cartography of power that this terrain constitutes, the physical backdrop of the graffiti tags on the concrete bases of the crane stands out as a physical behaviour, a physical act of defiance. It is attached as a physical behaviour. Cruelly interrupted, Foucault's research was going to show that processes of subjectivation eventually took on other modes than the Greek mode, for example in Christian apparatuses, modern societies, etc. Clearness, itself, in cranes. (I was there as if in communion with a particular movement – with the containers still full, filled from above. Around them, variegated ruin – ruin lay around. Left there as if in the middle of a movement with shipping containers still piled up around, and various debris lying around. Each apparatus is a multiplicity in which certain processes in becoming are operative and are distinct from those operating in another apparatus. *Estimate. I reject any restoration of universals, of reflection, communication or consensus.* Next having walked around for a bit, I found a large disused crane with a metal wire and hook. Somebody had tied a piece of white fabric – a posh table cloth – to the metal wire. [The part whose cloth was white was tied in the elegant cloth.] F.'s relationship with the Frankfurt school and the successors to this school was a long series of misunderstandings. Another kind of enterprise was combined with the international bridge, where the harbour was active. The vast quantity of the old harbour was abandoned. Explosions of peculiarity constitute collective and communitarian life. This is an image that can only be understood through such important charting methods as those outlined by Deleuze in his text, as well as in his book on Foucault and his book image. A wasteland, the cartography of which involves historical trajectories – connecting, linking various dispositifs, or formations of power. First the breakfast of all the workers that have lost their jobs, the unemployment offices, those who make money from selling out the welfare state, to those who lost their companies etc. etc.) Modern subjectivations resemble the Greek subjectivations no more than Christian ones; the same is true of light, utterances and powers. Multi-little, my dog; the crane and the hook; the metal wire. Was Foucault painting a portrait of modern societies as disciplinary apparatuses in opposition to the old apparatuses of sovereignty? Not so: the war disciplines he described are the history of what we are slowly ceasing to be, and our current apparatus is taking shape in attitudes of open and constant control that are very different from the recent closed disciplines. The clean white sheet of fabric and the derelict environment – the physical background curtain of scribbling – the mere act highlights a significant aspect of his text, prominent in the crane and the concrete basin: to be a cartographer is not simply a matter of analysis (cloth being clean), or of making connections and links, or of making a diagram that deconstructs given conditions. It is a matter of little acts – continuous acts - dissensions that burst the habit-patterns - small events that open up those points of mutagenesis where being articulates itself differently, in difference.