

## The Contemporary: A Roundtable Discussion

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with

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*The only form of communication one can envisage as adapted to the modern world is Adorno's model of a message in a bottle, or the Nietzschean model of an arrow shot by one thinker and picked up by another.*

*In medias res*

EA:<sup>1</sup> Obviously, it is this department's status as a kind of 'savage anomaly' that led me immediately to accept your invitation. Not so much because of the fact that you are already being referred to here and there as the "stronghold of English Deleuzians"<sup>2</sup> - I'm extremely wary of any form of *mimesis*, of any *pastiche* or *repetition* - but because your work on Deleuze, as I witnessed during last year's nicely entitled conference *DeleuzeGuattari & Matter*, inscribed itself within the only framework that I consider to be 'Deleuzian' - which is to say a philosophical interrogation concerning the contemporary, an interrogation which regards a relationship to the present which consists in a freeing of its virtualities as constitutive of philosophical work. There is no reason why the history of philosophy itself should be excepted from this framework; if only because a great philosopher always has a grip on [*en prise sur*] this ontological plane of immanence. But there is also a second level of the contemporary, one more specific to our present condition, more 'diagnostic', closer to today's

<sup>1</sup> Parts of É. Alliez's contributions were translated from the French by R. Brassier and A. Toscano.

<sup>2</sup> This expression comes from É. Duhring's review of É. Alliez's *Gilles Deleuze, une vie philosophique* (Paris: Synthelabo, 1998) and K. Ansell Pearson's *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer* (London: Routledge, 1997) in *Critique* 623 (April 1999), 291-310.

philosophical play of forces, which I immediately encountered here at Warwick.

KAP: You have written that philosophy becomes contemporary when it is no longer Greek. One question would be: what is the contrast with modernity and what is the relationship with historicism in this attention to the contemporary? What is the status of this conception of the contemporary? And could you elaborate on the play between 'modern' painting and 'contemporary' philosophy which informs your current teaching both here at Warwick and at Vienna?

EA: There are a lot of questions there which it is difficult to reply to in a few words. But let us try all the same. My remark on the Greeks was a friendly provocation, passed on to me by my friends Claude Imbert and Barbara Cassin. The Greeks, meaning the project of a phenomenology of perception, with its Aristotelian source as defined in the *De Anima*, this treatise which phenomenologists and *sense data* analysts have never stopped ruminating and competing over - while it would be so simple for the ones to write the foreword and for the others to write the afterword. In other words: One last effort, dear colleagues, if you wish to be contemporary! On a more serious note; I think one must dare to use the concept of the contemporary in a philosophical register in a way which goes beyond merely historical or chronological considerations, in order to designate that which, today, is contemporary and that which, philosophically, may not or may no longer be so. To treat the contemporary, therefore, as a matter for philosophical diagnosis and intervention. This is what I tried to do in *Of the Impossibility of Phenomenology*.<sup>3</sup> Here the task was posed as: how to go out of the 19th century? It's certainly not obvious. If one examines what is taken to be the official division of the philosophical world today the impression is one of being compelled, in spite of the variety on display, to choose between Husserl and Frege and the dominant traditions each gave birth to. The question of the contemporary for me, then, centred on the very fact that both the philosophy of the subject and philosophy of the object imploded. After the extraordinary alternative thought which Bergsonism represented, this was unquestionably the key concern of the first half of the century; with Heidegger, of course, but more so with the later Merleau-Ponty and

<sup>3</sup> É. Alliez, *De l'impossibilité de la phénoménologie: Sur la philosophie française contemporaine* (Paris: Vrin, 1995).

the later Wittgenstein, who devoted themselves to the most radical deconstruction conceivable of their respective traditions, phenomenological and analytic, even though they still managed to keep a foot in the door ... that they both did this starting from the question of colour as it presents itself in modern art was what particularly intrigued me. Hence the seminars in Vienna, and now at Warwick, where I'm trying to understand modern art in terms of its break with romantic subjectivity (Baudelaire to Manet: "You are nothing but the first in decrepitude of your art...), in order to attempt a definition of the abstract machine of modern art *beyond subject and object* of which we would precisely be contemporary. It is in any case in relation to Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein that the so-called 'theological turn' in French phenomenology and the post-analytic style in Anglo-Saxon philosophy have a merely symptomatic value. Which does not stop from thinking that the former is 'better hung' than the latter, which regards philosophy as an amiable conversation between the partisans of lukewarm virtues. Their only real argument is that to try to do something else, for instance philosophy, one risks finding oneself parading in full Nazi regalia or collecting signatures for Pol Pot! Even in Heidegger's case, you'll agree that the argument is not exactly satisfactory. But coming back to my *Of the Impossibility of Phenomenology* ... in short, the task was how to think *immanence* and its conditions. It is no accident that Deleuze's last published piece of writing, 'Immanence ... A Life' insists exactly on this point.<sup>4</sup> Of course, this thinking of immanence is what informs Deleuze's critical approach to phenomenology. Phenomenology being the last avatar of this form of modern philosophy which seeks to reintroduce transcendence into an immanent field of production and process. The very idea of *incarnation* represents its absolute limits.

KAP: I still think we need to introduce some specificity into this notion of the contemporary or contemporaneity. Is there anything specific and peculiar about Deleuze and Guattari's return to the question 'what is philosophy?''? It's an interesting title *for them* to choose as the title of their last collaborative venture as it is so ordinary, almost banal and commonplace, even naïve. And yet we know that there is nothing ordinary about Deleuze's practice of philosophy and most definitely nothing naïve! So, the title of this book took a lot of people by surprise, Deleuzians and

<sup>4</sup> English translation of this 1993 piece appeared as 'Immanence ... A Life', *Theory, Culture, and Society* 14.2 (May 1997), 3-9.

non-Deleuzians alike. If one thinks of the 'time' of its publication in relation to its milieu its strangeness is also revealed. The 1990's have been a time of musings on and mournings over the 'end' of philosophy, the impossibility of the overcoming of metaphysics, a meeting of European phenomenology (and the silence of its post-phenomenology) and American neo-pragmatism. I think folk who work under the influence of these traditions - who are either post-phenomenological or post-analytic, in both cases in a negative sense as they have nothing positive or productive to offer - would just laugh at the seriousness with which the tasks of philosophy - ontological and metaphysical - are pursued in Deleuze's work and locate a naïvete not simply in a return to the question 'what is...?' but in the *investment* in philosophy. I think it's fair to say that for people like myself and many of the graduates at Warwick the vitality and creative energy of Deleuze's work comes from the sense one gets from reading him - and which is obviously the fundamental feature of the heretical materialist tradition he 'belongs' to (Bruno, Spinoza, Bergson, and so on) - that philosophy has barely begun and has no need to have a sense of an 'end'. It's interesting that none of us as students of philosophy were ever taught the texts of Spinoza and Bergson, and Nietzsche only figured as an anomaly and a curiosity. In this regard we have had to become our own educators. Is it not Deleuze's investment, albeit complicated and inventive, in ontology and metaphysics that makes him stand out as so peculiar in the contemporary practices of philosophy today?

*Who said that 'structure' would be the Earth's last word?*

There is an interesting feature of the essay on 'Immanence ... A Life', which is that Deleuze reconfigures the transcendental field beyond subject and object and does so by drawing both on influences on his work that are well-documented and influences that are not at all well-known, such as Fichte and Maine de Biran (and elsewhere, Schelling, which we are going to come back to). So it's interesting that part of Deleuze's attempt to get out of the 19th century actually involved reinventing the history of philosophy of this century. The relation between Deleuze and heretical strands of German Idealism is only now beginning to receive the kind of attention it merits.

Naturally, the question arises of whether there is something specific about our investment in immanence as a praxis of thinking compared with that of

the Spinozism which tore apart much modern German philosophy, which can then cast a light on the sense we are developing of the ‘contemporary’ - as, for example, perhaps, a question of difference.

EA: I think this is *tout court*, and for me, the real question. A great deal of my work has been concerned with the construction of a new kind of genealogy of modernity, where modernity is understood precisely as a field of forces. To resume my work, I could say on the one hand, a genealogical question of what modernity is, and on the other, a more strictly philosophical diagnostic regarding contemporaneity. In both cases the interrogations are working in the form of actualizing war machines against these grand narratives of pacification ... the best example of which is post-modern discourse.

*Is war the ‘object’ of the war machine? It is not at all obvious.*

*The very conditions that make the State or world war machine possible, in other words, constant capital and human variable capital, continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines.*

But let us come back to Deleuze for a moment. I think that one can say that Deleuze is a modern, both in a classical and in a contemporary manner - and this is perhaps the secret of his avowed metaphysical ingenuity. Which is why for Deleuze - as for Badiou also, though for an entirely contrary reason - both modern and contemporary philosophy (following the French name for these chairs in philosophy) do not start with Kant, with the modern definition of the object as constituted by a subject thereby discovering himself as transcendental, but with Spinoza. Because in his machinic ‘atheology’ ontology is the contemporary in/of [*de/dans*] philosophy which is what makes it essentially modern: undoing in the same gesture the great form of God and the small form of the Ego [*Moi*]. This also accounts for the fact that for Spinoza the most abstract is at once the most concrete; it follows that the Spinozist name of ontology as absolute plane of immanence articulates itself in terms of Ethics. For a new Constitution of souls will only be valid insofar as it is also a composition of bodies and expression of *natura naturans*... The same must be said of Deleuze in the extraordinary concrete wealth of his trajectories (the greatness of *A Thousand Plateaus*) which couldn’t but result in the

affirmation of philosophy as a 'superior ethology'- what I call an 'onto-ethology'.<sup>5</sup> I'd like to pick up your question in these terms: what is it in Deleuze which exceeds Spinozism as a historical formation? Answer: Deleuze will project a *Spinoza beyond Spinoza* by basing his entire philosophy on the great wager stated in the equation: EXPRESSIONISM = CONSTRUCTIVISM. Meaning that ever since the *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze never ceased to translate Spinozistic expression and 'naturalism' into constructivist terms. In other words, the greatest urgency is to thus to actualize in the most experimental fashion imaginable the constructivist virtualities present in Spinoza's work. In so doing, Deleuze tackles in a contemporary rather than historical fashion the identity that he's posited between philosophy and ontology. Granted that ontology is in itself the contemporary in/of [*de/dans*] philosophy as in-determination of the present, it is still necessary that it be so *for us*, for these times of capitalism and schizophrenia... I myself am inclined to introduce a real difference in the history of ontology. When in effect Deleuze projects in *Difference and Repetition* a sequence which is, all things considered, rather linear - Duns Scotus - Spinoza - Nietzsche - by means of a teleology conceived of as a form of gradual *incorporation*, for my part I see at least two axes which I will try to develop in the second volume of *Capital Times*. The first, of Scotist origin, revolves around the birth of ontology according to the methodological paradigm of a *Mathesis Universalis*, of an *Annihilatio Mundi* as extreme representation on the basis of which the object in its abstract modernity as subject of metaphysics can come to be thought; it *idealistically* puts into play the notion of modernity - between Duns Scotus, Descartes, and Hobbes - on the basis of abstract being and abstract time. The second axis, inaugurated by the Hobbes/Spinoza confrontation, can be understood as a second birth of ontology in the guise of Ethics, wherein the most concrete being and the most concrete time are affirmed on the sole horizon of philosophy ... which we could happily translate, in a Kantian terminology, in terms of the conflict between an Analytic and an Aesthetic! I'm thinking here of the third *Critique*, which will serve as the starting point for post-Kantianism, and which Deleuze has taught us to read as an extraordinary deconstruction of the first two.

<sup>5</sup> Onto-ethology is contrasted with onto-theology and developed at length in É. Alliez, *La Signature du monde* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), pp. 67 ff. (an English translation of this work is forthcoming from Athlone Press). Alliez engages in a wide-ranging treatment that configures Deleuze and Guattari in relation to work by Steven Rose, Ruyer, Varela, Whitehead, etc.

AT: With regard to the third *Critique*, it is perhaps in investigating its articulation with that virulent Spinozism which we've already referred to, that something other than the usual tired sequences could be extracted from the trials and tribulations of post-Kantianism. For what we encounter in the reception of the questions of the organism and of intellectual intuition forwarded in the *Critique of Judgement*, namely in Schelling's case, is in fact an ontological and constructivist transmutation of the Kantian framework. Lo and behold, who is to function as a catalyst and operator for this attack? - Spinoza - but a Spinoza shorn of the 'objectivist' costume foisted upon him during the Pantheist controversy, a Spinoza with whom Schelling can affirm "the identity of being and producing" (as in the great operation done on Marx in the first chapter of the *Anti-Oedipus*). It is Spinoza again who will 'legitimate' Schelling's blueprint for a philosophy of nature *beyond subject and object*, 'indifferent' to the compromise formation which Kant erected between morality and faith (theism) on the one hand and a mechanistic natural science on the other; a philosophy which grasps nature as production, modulation, metamorphosis (NATURE = PRODUCTION, again the *Anti-Oedipus*). Could we not then perhaps speak of an 'impersonal turn' in a certain post-Kantian philosophy, whose Spinozist and constructivist transformation of the transcendental problematic belonged, admittedly for a brief spell only, to the contemporaneity accessed and expressed in Deleuze? In light of this 'kinship' Deleuze's repeated cautions regarding the either/or between representational dualism and absolute indifferenciation and the guerrilla tactics employed against an *organicist* pacification and its correlate re-introduction of transcendence become quite significant, indexes of an intimate acquaintance with the black holes which repeatedly came to swallow the attempts to undo or escape the Kantian edifice towards a philosophy of impersonal production (a transcendental materialism). As Adorno puts it, in his 1961 essay *Vers une musique informelle*, with regard to musical composition, "it would be necessary to eliminate quite un sentimentally every vestige of the organic that does not originate in its *principle of artifice*, its thoroughgoing organization".

EAlb: Given that Éric started off by suggesting that twentieth century philosophy can be characterized as a choice between two essentially nineteenth century alternatives: Husserl or Frege, we can locate the extreme radicality of Deleuze's project as a rejection of these two

alternatives. A profound rejection then of the two major, essentially still theological, responses to the various crises of conviction that wracked the nineteenth century. This is essentially what Toni Negri is arguing when he says that *A Thousand Plateaus* attempts to “construct the terrain upon which to redefine the materialism of the twenty first century”,<sup>6</sup> a philosophy adequate to the challenges of a complex future: the only serious philosophical project that attempts to think that future. Badiou’s claim that Deleuze’s greatness lies in his attempt to think as if Kant had never existed gives us a clue to how Deleuze escapes these theological determinations; for it is a *point reçu* that Modernity begins with Kant’s claim to be effecting a revolution in philosophy equivalent to that of Copernicus in cosmology. Copernicanism however must be reconfigured so that it is seen not as a revolution, not as a firmament shattering event, but rather as a Vatican sanctioned holding device. Copernicanism amounts to a cosmic place swapping, a location of the centre of all things in the Sun rather than the Earth, it is the maintenance of hierarchical, stratified and sedentary thinking. When understood in this way, we can indeed see Kant as parallel to Copernicus, but to be Copernicus’s analogue is no longer to make a revolution in thought, it is rather, to create a “renovated theology”,<sup>7</sup> Kant’s invention of the philosopher as judge, the critical enterprise as an attempt to hold back the tides of atheistic, hylozoic materialism configured under the sign of Spinozism. To read the history of philosophy with Deleuze, to make it stratiographic is to scour it for those singularities where heretical thought seeks to challenge the thought of the State the “tradition that justifies Power and exalts the State”,<sup>8</sup> it is to attempt to marshal the resources of that thought as part of a war machine to mobilise on the terrain of contemporary philosophy. This hidden, or heretical, tradition is the means given to us by Deleuze to enable us to leap over, and out of the theological mire in which the philosophical alternatives are stuck - the perpetual ruminations over the ‘death of’ this, the ‘end of’ that - and into the twenty-first century. So, we can invent new beginnings, activate potentialities from the rubble of the contemporary, and reinvent philosophical history which is and will be the future - a counter-

<sup>6</sup> ‘Gilles-Félix’, in *Gilles Deleuze: Immanence et vie*, special issue of *Rue Descartes*, ed. Éric Alliez, 20 (1998), 77-92, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone, 1983), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Notes on the Evolution of the Thought of the Later Althusser’, trans. Olga Vasile in Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio, eds, *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Althusserian Tradition* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 51-68, p. 61.

philosophy of the schizophrenic laughter and revolutionary joy of the great books.<sup>9</sup>

EA: In the history of philosophy the so-called “materialist” philosophers have too often been the shame of philosophy. See in comparison the absolute beauty of the so-called Idealist tradition.

EAlb: This is precisely Bataille’s argument that in spite of itself, most materialism has adopted the image that it has been given by idealism. Most materialists, even though they may have wanted to do away with all spiritual entities, ended up positing “an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it out as specifically idealist” (Bataille *OC I* 179). As such, materialism must be continually reinvented on its own terms. It is for precisely this reason that Deleuze has such a fascination for those thinkers usually thought of as being idealists, mystics or vitalists, those “always subject to the charge of pantheism”<sup>10</sup> - Spinoza, and Bergson for example.

EA: Neoplatonist philosophy, as it has been appropriated by Deleuze, is paradigmatic in this instance insofar as emanation never ceases to *counter-effectuate* transcendence, which no longer conjures much... Which is why Neoplatonism is this tremendous endeavour of liberation of/from Platonism *and* Aristotelianism, and why it ceaselessly recurs in the history of philosophy as a major agent of destabilization (Bruno, Spinoza, Schelling) as this point wherein the philosophical endeavour is less concerned with the affirmation of a new Man (from Saint Paul to Kant) than with the liberation of Life itself...

KAP: I’m interested in the rapport Deleuze constructs between this conception of philosophy as liberation (as its utopian impulse) and Adorno’s negative dialectics in the text *What is Philosophy?* The sense of this rapport is far from being obvious, and Deleuze does not give us much to go on, so we are compelled to invent it in some crucial way. But I think the need to invent this rapport, only implicit in the text, is in part to do what we have been talking about so far, to think the relation between the

<sup>9</sup> See Deleuze’s ‘Nomad Thought’, trans. David B. Allison, in David B. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1992), pp. 142-49, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* (Paris: Minuit, 1968), trans. by Martin Joughin as *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone, 1992), p. 12/16.

modern and the contemporary.

The reference is not just to utopia, and the utopian dimension of philosophy, but also concerns the attempt to construct philosophy and the creation of concepts beyond a logic of the proposition in which the event cannot be thought - the concept of the event and the event of the concept - because it has been made identical with a 'state of affairs'. The *critical* function of philosophy is to think beyond this naïve empiricism, this reduction of concepts to a reflective relation with the actual and the real, and in this way to take us beyond the common life: the common opinion or *doxa*, the common sense, common feelings, even common language. And for me, this task is essentially Bergsonian in inspiration and motivation: to think beyond the human condition (utility) and to do this by providing a generative account of that condition (how we have become those that we are, creatures of habit and intellect), and to explore the possibilities of *creative energy*. So Deleuze locates another utopian moment – a moment of this thinking beyond – with modern German thought, within Adorno, to construct a new philosophy, a philosophy beyond the logicism of Hegel, the mysticism of Heidegger, and so on. It's curious, however, that Deleuze should make this reference to Adorno. Is it a mere gesture? For me, it's a provocation to think what is going on in Deleuze's heresies. If one looks at Adorno one finds a complete pessimism about moving beyond the double bind of thinking beyond the concept *through* the concept and activating a thinking which is NOT bound to, or by, the human condition. Adorno appears to hold that the logic of philosophy is irrevocably contaminated with an anthropologism (a certain moment of Nietzsche in Adorno, in which Nietzsche is reduced to representing another post-Kantian limit). So, in Adorno philosophy cannot escape the domination of the philosophical concept, and yet Deleuze says that his mode of thinking comes close to the moment of 'negative dialectics'. What is going on? I would suggest that something fundamental has changed in Deleuze's own practice of thinking. Deleuze, I think one can say without too much contention, was a Bergsonian, a fantastic reader of Bergson as Badiou points out, but was Bergson not also suspicious of a philosophy of the concept?! Adorno-Bergson-Deleuze, this constitutes an interesting nexus for the issue of the contemporary. I think we can say that in Adorno the traditional concept of the concept is accepted and taken as given, just as it is, but perhaps more equivocally and openly, in Bergson: that by definition the concept articulates a tyrannical drive to capture and dominate the

singular, the unique, and so on. *What is Philosophy?*, then, as an affirmation of philosophy and liberation - as a thinking of absolute deterritorialization - amounts to a major move beyond Adornian pessimism (the melancholy science) and a major reactualization of the potentialities of Bergsonism. As Bergson himself put it, the philosopher of intuition *par excellence* of our contemporary modernity:

The concept generalizes at the same time that it abstracts. The concept can symbolize a particular property only by making it common to an infinity of things [...] The simple concepts, therefore, not only have the disadvantage of dividing the concrete unity of the object into so many symbolical expressions; they also divide philosophy into distinct schools, each of which reserves its place, chooses its chips, and begins with the others a game that will never end. Either metaphysics is only this game of ideas, or else, if it is a serious occupation of the mind, it must transcend concepts to arrive at intuition [...] it is strictly itself only when it goes beyond the concept, or at least when it frees itself of the inflexible and ready-made concepts and creates others very different from those we usually handle [...] flexible, mobile [...] (Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*).

Such a passage is interesting to me since it demonstrates both the need to think beyond the concept *and* to create new concepts. It is this tension that is at work in Adorno's project of 'negative dialectics', that informs Deleuze's 'Bergsonism' - let us also note that in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze speaks of empiricism creating the most 'insane' concepts imaginable - and which illuminates for me the radicality and novelty of the move made - towards and yet still away from Hegel, that other major philosopher of the concept - in *What is Philosophy?* In this 'late' Deleuze the concept is the event, it is beyond a logic of propositions and irreducible to the state of affairs, but it is also a way to think immanence and to posit a 'political' moment in philosophy (that which takes criticism of the present to its 'highest point').

*Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a 'fabulation' in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning.*

*In this case what is the 'critical' task of philosophy in relation to*

*modernity, capital if not to resist the reduction of thought and life to the realm of doxa and perceptual and affective clichés?*

AT: Isn't the difference you have, which may be the significant one with regards to Adorno that once you don't accept the all-encompassing legitimacy of the philosophy of the concept in that Kantian mould that Adorno is always struggling with, you no longer have this merely negative position of critique, especially in function of the major reformulation of the notion of the transcendental. At this moment the critical and the constructive become indiscernible. So one no longer has a negative relation to the concept. This is perhaps why Deleuze's project is so alien to something like deconstruction.

KAP: I agree that the word 'critical' here has to be used with care and caution, since philosophy is no longer in any simple-minded relation, say temporally, with the present. The notion of the 'untimely' character of philosophy - the excesses of its intensity - is once again affirmed in the 'late' Deleuze, namely, *What is Philosophy?* The emphasis is on the 'new earth' that is to come and with it a 'new people' or population. I'm attached, however, to this idea of philosophy taking the criticism of its own time to the highest point conceivable (and not conceivable!).

AT: This maybe touches on the point where Deleuze realizes that there isn't always a Hegel round the corner that you have to be constantly paranoid about. Thought, given a certain method or style, doesn't have to fall into the Hegelian trap. Does Deleuze not start *Nietzsche and Philosophy* by saying that the problem with Kantian critique is precisely that it is not 'total critique'? The criticism of our time, as you put it, is indissociable from an investigation and experience of *its* transcendental field(s), of the (impersonal) tendencies and hecceities which traverse it, as well as the potentialities, utopian ones perhaps, with which our present can be *composed*. This 'geological' aspect of 'total critique' is of course essential to a *dislocation* of the present as atrophy and stultifying repetition of *doxa*.

KAP: I also think that there is a pedagogic aspect to Deleuzian critique which is to make an intervention into modernity by taking to task certain transcendental illusions, such as the specifically modern ones like entropy exposed in *Difference and Repetition*. Why take to task these illusions -

which also reappear in *What is Philosophy?* - unless one holds that they exert a powerful hold over the imagination and block access to immanence? These illusions - of entropy, of the death-drive, of capital, just to mention three that strike me as always being close to Deleuze's concerns - constitute a crucial aspect of our modernity and contain so many theological residues.

EAlb: It is this issue of critique that Éric identifies as being so crucially stated in Neoplatonism. In *Capital Times* he argues that there is a massive scandal in the prevailing assimilation of Neoplatonism to Christianity and to Judeo-Christian readings, for at the heart of this beautifully complex venture is the thought of the immanent soul. So once again it is a question of opening up the immanence that has been shut down by the onto-theological tradition and which is never pursued in materialism except in the immanent expressivism common to the heretical materialist tradition that encompasses Bruno, Spinoza, Schelling, and Bergson. For these figures it is never a question of a demiurge, a transcendent force, activating and external to matter. These philosophies of immanence are locked in mortal combat with theological reason in all of its different forms.

EA: I'd like to return to the question of the Bergsonism of Deleuze. Let me refer to that very strange passage in *Negotiations* where Deleuze develops this famous metaphor of 'taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring and yet something monstrous', and gives the example of Bergson.<sup>11</sup> This is the key selection to make, in fact, since many people would say, excuse me but I do not understand - is Bergson not the spiritualist thinker *par excellence*? How can Deleuze be a Bergsonian *and* a materialist? The enigma is interesting but it has to be worked out to understand the kind of operation Deleuze made upon Bergson. The problem with Bergson - let's say his limitation - is that he is producing a strong hiatus between concept and intuition, while simultaneously constructing an extraordinary form of vitalism. The genius of Deleuze was to say: what are the conditions to produce the speculative identity between a philosophy of intuition and a philosophy of the concept? It is important here to touch on the question of pessimism. Because I think that if you are fixed in one of the terms of the alternative - intuition *or* concept - you are going to be a prisoner of some kind of pessimism:

<sup>11</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 6.

historically and/or philosophically. My way of understanding what I call a 'superior materialism' is as one that starts from this identity of intuition and concept, expression and construction. Perhaps the most important pages of *What is Philosophy?* are the ones which address the question, what is a concept? It's an extraordinary move which takes place there because all the potentialities of a philosophy of intuition are used to rethink in the most rigorous way the nature of a concept. It is from this Bergson beyond Bergson that Deleuze can begin where the late Merleau-Ponty stopped...

*Bergson presents one of the first cases of self-moving thought. Because it's not enough simply to say concepts possess movement; you also have to construct intellectually mobile concepts. Just as it's not enough to make moving shadows on the wall, you have to construct images that can move by themselves.*

AT: What are the reasons and the consequences of entering into Deleuze's work in terms of a concern with aesthetics, even as a concern with politics? (Thinking again of Adorno: "Political practice influences aesthetic modes and it does so precisely where the latter are at their most intransigent and at their furthest remove from normal cultural practice", *Vers une musique informelle*.) This is linked with another question: what is the relation between the two articulations by which you characterize Deleuze's work both as an onto-ethology and as a materialism of the virtual? If you like, this is to refer to the Spinozist tendency and the Bergsonian tendency in the work that seem to complement one another. There seems to be a Bergsonian operation done on Spinoza. I am thinking of the seminars, for example, where Deleuze says that in Spinoza nature is what is completely actualized, which is both a subtle critique and an avowal of why Spinoza is perhaps not sufficient, just as he wasn't for Schelling, insofar as he conceived Spinoza's God as *being without potentiality*.

EA: Let me first come back to the question of the history of philosophy. I think Deleuze always invested the effort in reading a philosopher in what he took to be their most powerful tendency, without being intimidated by historical limits. For example, consider the main objections produced against the Deleuzian reading of Spinoza. 'Pay attention to the relation between the substance and the attributes and between the attributes and modes, etc., etc.'. First of all we can play the game and contest the reading

of the text and show that it is not impossible to produce a more complicated Spinoza than the dominant readings preoccupied with the solution of transcendence. But, in a second way: is the meaning of a text absolutely sufficient, and closed in on itself at any point in time? Of course not! The third thing is to point out how any philosopher uses the texts of his illustrious predecessors as materials for thinking actuality and, in consequence, for altering the history of philosophy itself. We are back with the question of the contemporary. What can we do with the history of philosophy in the field of forces that constitutes the contemporary if not, first of all, to pay attention to the different and diverse ways a certain 'heretical' tradition has tried to address the nature and character of a thinking of immanence? There is no other reading available or possible when you realize the extent to which all attempts to subordinate immanence to transcendence have been exhausted (God, World, Ego). One could oppose, to the hackneyed theme of an end of philosophy, the necessity of its absolute re-birth. I think that Merleau-Ponty had glimpsed something of this sort when he wrote in his *Working Notes* of the very early 60's that the crisis had never been so radical, and that one had to know how to create new concepts, abandoning to the history of a modernity which had run its course consciousness, subject, object, etc. You will have noticed that the philosopher who wrote these lines wholly immersed himself in the 'schizoid' nature of Cézanne's colours, and that it is obvious to any minimally attentive reader that the essay "Cézanne's Doubt" speaks to us first and foremost of Merleau-Ponty's own doubt with regard to the project of a phenomenology of perception. To get to the crux of the matter, which the late Merleau-Ponty largely foresaw, the essential relationship between art and contemporary philosophy is to my mind determined by the fact that aesthetics - in which we should here the *aisthesis* of the sensible - is itself this experiential domain where one could not conceive of an expression which is not immediately construction. In this sense Cézanne is the Spinoza of art. As for politics, my God, how could it not be the precise *milieu* for all these considerations! Inversely, it follows that political philosophy cannot exist as a separate discourse. That which is true of Plato and *a fortiori* of Hegel be less so of Habermas and Rorty does not exactly seem to pose a problem...

AT: You've emphasized the *operational* centrality of the equation CONSTRUCTIVISM = EXPRESSIONISM as well as Deleuze's concern with the *aisthesis* in aesthetics, with art as composition of sensations in

terms of percepts and affects, as a ‘sensational’ experiment... Perhaps this could be the privileged site for the Deleuzian operation on the transcendental - there is a line from one of Deleuze’s seminars which comes to mind, as a sort of motto: *Il faut changer l’air des categories*. If we think back to the *Critique of Judgement*, that precarious separation it effects between form (whose ideal and empirical aspects are in constant miscegenation) and physiology, which leads Kant to the grotesque claims on music as an aid to proper digestion, comes to be completely undone if we introduce an impersonally transcendental treatment of *aisthesis*. There is however a moment (§ 14) in which Kant seems to come close to this latter approach, and it is when he refers to the possibility of a reflexive or thinking sense, a sense which would itself compose vibrations into sensation, a sense for which construction would truly equal expression. Likewise Merleau-Ponty in the working notes to *The Visible and the Invisible*, where he writes of the senses as “*appareils à faire des concrétions avec de l’inépuisable*”. In your seminars here you’ve spoken of ‘the eye and the brain’ and if I see this correctly it is perhaps at the intersection of a constructivist sensorial intelligence and an artistic experience of composition under the aegis of a *principle of artifice* that we can finally come to think an aesthetics *beyond subject and object*...

DT: I wanted to throw in a question from a sociological point of view concerning this point about the end and beginning of philosophy. You have been working a lot on Gabriel Tarde recently, who is also the subject of some new important editions in France and the focus of work being done by graduates in philosophy and sociology at Warwick.<sup>12</sup> How would we describe, if we recall the heated exchanges between Tarde and Durkheim, the tension between sociology and philosophy? To give a hint here: you mention the problem of collective constitution in your preface to *Monadologie et sociologie*, which seems to be the location for problematizing this contemporary continuity against which modern ruptures occur. Articulated in this continuity are forces - social forces - that seem to break open and lead to the ruptures which perhaps can then be reflectively overlaid with consciousness. But what is of most interest is what takes place prior to that. The debate between Tarde and Durkheim seems to revolve around the question of how you conceive of these social forces. We find a basic disagreement over whether the perspective of

<sup>12</sup> See David Toews, ‘The Renaissance of *philosophie tardienne*’, this volume, pp. 164-73.

constraint or the perspective of vitality or activity is to be privileged. This also appears to be bound up with Bergson's critique of Durkheim in the *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, including the criticism of the notion of constraint. According to the method of intuition Durkheim fails to comprehend the difference in kind between constraint and productive vital force. Would it be possible, is my question, to further specify Deleuze's relation to sociology in terms of the molecular and the molar in a way that might echo what was at stake in the Tarde/Durkheim debate?

EA: The fact is that Deleuze and Guattari did construct the well-known opposition between the molar and molecular from the rediscovery of Tarde. One might wish to consult in this regard the long note in *Difference and Repetition* about Tarde. This is twelve years before the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus* where we clearly see Tarde's influence exemplified. Did not Durkheim attack Tarde for being a philosopher, a bad philosopher at that, *and a biologist*? Durkheim is constantly saying: 'this is not sociology but a biological philosophy. a strange bio-philosophy'. In Durkheim the aim is clear: to establish sociology as an effective social science that is autonomous and enjoys an irreducible logic. For Tarde things are very different. Not because, as it has been repeated for too long without regard for his texts, because his sociology is irremediably tainted with the sin of psychologism, but because for him the social is a matter of molecular processes investing the universe in the entirety of its extent and in the whole scale of its intensities. Whence the formula SOCIOMORPHISM = PSYCHOMORPHISM, insofar as neither the one nor the other are particularly reserved for the human, but rather for any form of collectivity whatsoever. It is this which makes Durkheim pounce: that Tarde thought of himself as founding a sociology as a science no longer exclusively concerned with the human and nevertheless completely 'constitutional', as a bio-politics which extends the socius to the whole universe on the basis of a putting into tension of these two vectors: Belief and Desire... So, Tarde: philosopher or sociologist? But both, your Honour, both... For just as philosophy would die of asphyxiation if it were not continuously re-inventing new relationships to non-philosophy, nothing forbids the supposed empirical science from cultivating an intra-philosophical level of *hypotheses* without which they'd be nothing but the restricted variations of a single positivism. *Hypotheses fingo* - Tarde could not have found a better epigram for the entirety of his work.

AB: This is especially true considering that Tarde's theory aims at answering the question of how and in what conditions is the production of the new possible? This question placed at the frontier of all disciplines and operating their multiple junction, is the ground from which the hypothesis of an ontology of affective forces emerges. And, following Éric's definition of ontology as the contemporary in/of [*de/dans*] philosophy, it is the site pulsing the time that is 'our' time. The question of the new, of innovation, is the pragmatics of thinking the contemporary, of creating concepts and thus beginning philosophy anew in our case, 'us' philosophers. For Tarde, although it was a matter of founding the new science of sociology, it was his monism that made him view all disciplines from an equally constitutive standpoint. For example his incorporation of scientific discoveries into a wider problematic brings him to conclude that the elements found by science are not things but forces. The introduction of the infinitesimal in the world translates into its general molecularization, 'small infinitesimal beings' are agents and the small infinitesimal variations that characterize them are actions. Contrary to what it seems, this pulverization of the agent enlarges its sphere of action to the most imperceptible layers of life making its propagation pervasively efficient. It is on this basis that we can certainly talk of Tarde's sociology as a biopolitics, as a political vitalism wherein life is immediately political as opposed to Foucault's bio-political which, as Maurizio Lazzarato rightly points out, is the political government of life.

DT: There is one possible line of thought to follow here. This concerns the distinction Bergson makes between closed and open societies, and which exerts a powerful influence on the cartographies of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Is there not some transformation of sociological terms going on in this thinking, such as a breaking up of what are held to be certain sociological facts? The crucial link is between the articulation of a social ontology and the question of collective constitution. It is this link which provides a rapport with philosophy, I would contend, since it is the willingness to open up the question of collective constitution which shows that social theory occupies the same field as philosophy since both recognize that elements of the human and nonhuman have to come together.

EA: I completely agree. This is part of the question of the relation between philosophy and non-philosophy. What is fascinating in Deleuze is the real necessity to include in his books all this material coming from all the

possible fields of knowledge. Philosophy is nothing else other than a certain precise ontological investigation and prioritization of this open totality.

AT: At this point, I'd like to come back to the point about Hegel not really having a veritable 'political' philosophy which could be distinguished from the rest of his philosophy. As Negri remarks in *Il Potere Costituente*, "metaphysics is the only genuine political science of the modern era": there is no such thing as an applied philosophy and all questions of *legitimation* fall by the wayside. It's interesting to note that in *What is Philosophy?* you have this tripartite division of modes of thought, modes of drawing the plane of immanence - science, art, and philosophy. This is unlike in Badiou, where you have philosophy and then science, art, love, and politics, and one could see philosophy still functioning in a way to 'capture' the other practices. The interesting question - and going back to the link between aesthetics and politics in Deleuze - is precisely to see how the politics, as ontology, runs through art, science, and philosophy. The fact that politics is absent from the tripartite schema makes it ubiquitous throughout *What is Philosophy?*. In other words, as ontological modes of thought (as theoretical practices, to use the old Althusserian term), art, science, and philosophy are all political.

EA: What is funny is that whenever the question of political philosophy is dealt with institutionally, everything happens as if there was no link with any kind of ontological investigation. But see: opinions and empirical data ... why have we to call this political philosophy? On this issue there is absolute confluence between Deleuze and Negri, opposing to this philosophical journalism ontology as politics of being. Contemporary philosophy devotes itself in the richest and most rigorous way to a thinking of immanence then it is immediately political. Let us not be naïve; the thinkers of 'transcendental' mediation or the nostalgics of the onto-theological compromise are no less political than we are. They are so otherwise, that's all.