

Gilles Deleuze in Social Science: Some Introductory Themes

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The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) wrote about innumerable things. Early in his career, he wrote about other philosophers, including Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche and Baruch Spinoza. He wrote books about the author Marcel Proust and the painter Francis Bacon. He wrote two books about cinema. And, in collaboration with Félix Guattari, he wrote the two main works *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which stretched across social analysis, linguistics, the history of warfare, psychoanalysis, geology and anthropology. It is no simple task to summarize this diverse, and divergent, body of work.

Once one takes an interest in the philosophy of Deleuze, it is furthermore common to find it quite difficult to comprehend. Deleuze is often described as a ‘poststructuralist,’ a category that covers other great French thinkers like Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), all of whom challenged the structuralism that reigned in the 1950s and 60s. Another characterization, used by Deleuze himself, is that he engaged in a philosophy of *difference*; an effort, that is, to take difference rather than identity as the primary problem for philosophy. If Deleuze is difficult to read, it is thus not only due to the many technical concepts he develops, but also because his project is concerned with the transformation of deeply rooted cultural and philosophical patterns of thought.

Michel Foucault once predicted that the 20th Century would once be considered ‘Deleuzian.’ It remains uncertain whether this will one day be the case. Even so, it can be presently observed that a wide range of Deleuze’s concepts and concerns have been taken up in a range of social sciences—in anthropology, sociology, in cultural studies and cultural geography, in science and technology studies and, to a limited extent, in psychology, sometimes directly, but more often indirectly.

This introduction is organized around a series of thematic discussions that aim to connect Deleuze’s philosophy and concepts with on-going discussions in contemporary social science and cultural theory. The first section discusses Deleuze’s Spinoza-inspired conception of *bodies* and their *affects* as the central problem for

philosophy. The following section introduces his quite heterodox understanding of *materialism*, a theme that I briefly connect to his views on the relation between the *actual* and the *virtual*. This discussion leads to a consideration of his contrast between major and minor sciences, or as Deleuze also calls them, the royal and the nomad sciences. I continue to examine Deleuze and Guattari's notion of art as the *exhibit of affect*. I then consider Deleuze's micro-political interpretation of *power* in relation to the famous analysis by Michel Foucault. This paves the way for a final discussion of the *performative* role played by the social sciences in relation to the societies in which they are embedded.

We Do Not Yet Know What a Body Can Do

Today it is impossible to read many pages of social and cultural theory before encountering the concept of 'affect' (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Among other things, affect indexes an effort to recuperate embodiment as a site of concern, and to break with the discursive orientation of much social theory in the 1980s and 90s (Massumi 2002, Blackman 2008). At issue, however, is not a return to the idea of a 'natural' body, since we have learned that the very idea of the natural is an effect of social, political and historical processes (Lorraine 1999). Even those actions and feelings that appear most 'natural' are also loaded with 'unnatural' bits of culture, power and discourse.

Affect bears connotations of 'emotion.' Yet, the turn to affect does not signal an orientation towards any form of conventional psychology (Brown and Stenner 2009). Affect, we are told, operates through largely imperceptible registers, lying 'under,' or moving across, subjects. The concept reaches us via Deleuze and Spinoza.

In *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy* (1988) Deleuze defined bodies by their capacity for being affected. Bodies, rather than minds, take over the role as a "new model" for philosophy (17), and each body must be considered as an "expressive centre" (Deleuze 1990a: 327). But even though the centre is the 'individual' body, this is no conventional individualism. For one thing, the concept of the body extends beyond humans, to include animals, plants and minerals. For another, Spinoza's interest is in the distribution of affect across bodies and in how new relations and possibilities for action emerge due to their reciprocal influences.

A very similar idea has been central to actor-network theory, Bruno Latour's relational anthropology. Like Spinoza, Latour (2004a) deployed the formula: the more

you are influenced by other entities, the more you are able to act yourself. Without qualification, however, this is obviously a problematic formulation, since it is far from all influences that increase one's capacity for action. To the contrary, many interactions with other bodies bring about limiting, or what Spinoza called 'sad,' consequences.

Even so, the interaction of bodies is also central for Deleuze's depiction of Spinoza's *ethics*. Contrary to its usual meaning, this ethics does not revolve around the question of good and evil (Spinoza would hardly be impressed by today's rhetoric about terror). What is relevant, rather, is to learn to distinguish good and bad encounters. At issue is the process of gradually learning that this particular body diminishes my capacity to act, while this one, over here, increases it.

Spinoza used this mode of thought in a surprising analysis of Adam's fall from grace (Deleuze 1988: 31). In his 1664-6 correspondence with the Dutch grain trader and amateur theologian Willem van Blijenbergh, Spinoza insisted that god did not *forbid* Adam to eat the apple. All god did was to *reveal* the bad consequences Adam would suffer if he were to partake of it. Eating the apple would generate a passive affect, diminishing his capacity to act, since he would be evicted from paradise! In this analysis, the moral question of good and evil fades from view. Just like consumption of bad oysters is not a moral concern but a bodily one, since it can lead to stomach problems, Adam's eating of the apple is also evaluated in bodily terms.

As this illustrates, Spinoza's ethics has nothing to do with establishing a proper morality. No ultimate criteria allow us to determine *what* the good is. Instead, Deleuze's Spinoza is very close to a Nietzschean conception of interacting forces (see Deleuze 1983, Nietzsche 1999, also Jensen & Selinger 2003). Excepting very unusual circumstances, such as god's unique capacity to 'reveal' to Adam the dire consequences following from his bite of the apple, we have no possibility of knowing *in advance* which relations will turn out to be good or bad. Accordingly, each of our existences appears as an unfolding experiment concerned *with* finding out (Deleuze 1988: 40).

At stake is a double relation. On the one hand, the ways in which the body is influenced and modified by its many encounters is the only arbiter of the good and the bad. On the other hand, however, our bodily experiences of particular affects can only guide our lives to the extent that they crystallize as *ideas* (Deleuze 1990a: 220). This is why what we call 'mind' is neither more nor less than the 'idea' we are able to form

about the body. And, just like the newly born body is helpless because it has not yet been shaped by many bodily encounters, the freshly minted idea remains insufficient until it has gradually been modified refined by many encounters and affects. At the aggregate level of society, Deleuze (1990a: 119) speaks of a *collective* refinement of ideas as ‘common notions.’

Deleuze’s focus, then, is on bodies conceived as expressive centres influenced and modified by other bodies and in turn influencing and modifying them. There is no ‘essence’ since the body is continuously shaped and modified by the many relations in which it becomes involved. Considered in terms of bodily affects, an oxen and a workhorse is closer to one another than a workhorse and a racehorse (Deleuze 1988: 124). Accordingly, also, a fish, a rock and a human can all change each other, but the changes will be different (Deleuze 1990a: 217). In relation to any specific body, we must therefore conclude that we do not know what its set of affective influences and modifications are. *We do not yet know what a body can do but it will gradually show* (Deleuze 1990a: 226).

Bodily capacities tend to appear much more undefined in the early stages of physical development than later on. Even aging bodies, however, are constantly transformed as they enter into new relations, from medical treatment to yoga or meditation, to the banal experience of moving outside their habitual settings or coming across new objects. Moreover, the question of modification goes beyond physique, for at issue is also the possibility of abandoning old ideas and developing new ones.

Throughout their lives, bodies are thus transformed by their combined set of relations. And if this is the case for the ‘individual’ body, a more extended perspective makes the point even clearer. If we consider the ‘human,’ the ‘robot,’ or the ‘planet’ as relational categories, we must conclude that we truly cannot know what they (or we) are capable of.

This experimental and relational approach forms the basis for what Deleuze calls Spinoza’s ‘new naturalism’ (Deleuze 1990a: 232), a quite peculiar, or ‘unnatural’ materialism.

An Unnatural Materialism

In recent years, versions of materialism have returned to the forefront of much social science. It would of course be an exaggeration to claim materialism had every

completely disappeared. Yet, it seems safe to say that materialist approaches, notably Marxism, have been under sustained pressure ever since the varied ‘linguistic turns,’ affiliated with the later Wittgenstein and with Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida.

In general, the linguistic turn revolved around the insight that language, classification and discourse shape subjects, society, culture and power. It is impossible to get a glimpse at things as they are in themselves, since it is only through language that we are able to create any knowledge of things. Material entities from genes to computers must necessarily be described in language for us to be able to relate to them, and thus our linguistic repertoires invariably colour material objects.

The return of materialism is due to a dawning realization of the limitations of the linguistic turn. Undoubtedly, it remains important to understand the multifarious and complex relations between language, power and culture. Yet, in a world where nuclear power and climate change show their teeth, it seems increasingly important to find new ways of relating to the *force of things*. This is the shared background of the actor-network focus on ‘nonhuman agency’ (Latour 1993), of philosophical trends like speculative realism (Bryant et al. 2011) and of the emerging ‘new materialism’ affiliated with certain strands of feminist theory (Coole & Frost 2010, Alaimo & Hekman 2012). Common to these approaches is an effort to define things, objects and materials in more expansive and freer ways than has hitherto been the case (see also Pickering & Guzik 2008, Bennett 2010). The philosophy of Deleuze is a precursor for several of these developments.

Deleuze was a dedicated materialist. His work overflows with discussions of materials and their capacities: the smith shapes iron that shapes wars; lightning creates relations between the sky and the earth; genetic mutations transform organisms. He wrote of humans, that they are “made of contracted water, earth, light and air” (1994: 73). Our material composition *precedes our senses*, and comes far earlier than our linguistic abilities. For Deleuze, language is itself a fundamentally material system (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 75-111, de Landa 1998: 183-257).

At the same time, Deleuzian materialism has a number of quite unorthodox traits, many of which are related to his distinction between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real.’ Here we must be careful, for Deleuze wrote of the virtual decades before the World Wide Web, and current understandings of ‘virtual reality’ are in some ways diametrically opposed to his idea of virtuality. Rather than turning to Twitter or Facebook, we will have to pay attention to one of Deleuze’s favourite quotations by

Marcel Proust (1871-1922), who said of the virtual that it is “real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” (Deleuze 1991: 96).

According to Deleuze (1991: 97), the idea of “realization” assumes a particular conception of the relation between the possible and the real. Obviously, not everything that is possible comes to be realized. Instead, the idea of the ‘possible’ operates as an abstract limit to what *can* happen. This is the premise, for example, when scientists tell us what is physically or biologically possible. And this sense of possibility forms the backdrop to our very idea of what it means to be ‘realized.’ The philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whose work was very significant for Deleuze, criticized this idea of possibility, developing the concept of the virtual as an alternative. For Bergson, the emergence of new situations should not be seen as a realization of possibility, but rather as an actualization of the virtual.

Although this may sound like terminological quibbles these are radically different conceptions. While the realization of the possible defines a fundamentally ideal and passive relation, the actualization of the virtual is a material and creative process. The difference can be elucidated with a biological example. Not long ago, it was assumed that DNA contained a ‘blueprint’ for the development of organisms. They were simply realized out of the space of possibilities defined by the DNA.

In contrast to this idea, the concept of the actualization of the virtual entails a *concrete* and partly *unpredictable* process of differentiation (see e.g. Gilbert and Epel 2009). A whole range of bodily materials or entities create complex relations that generate a final outcome, and this outcome bears no *similarity* to an original form. Accordingly, one can speak of proper *novelty*. (As I discuss below, this approach can also be used for non-biological phenomena. For example, Deleuze describes Foucault’s epistemes as ‘virtual diagrams’ that trace the emergence of new relations between power and knowledge). Rather than a general, abstract model, the virtual thus characterizes a material force field, the interactions and modulations of which *generate* realities. In yet other words, the virtual is a *multiplicity* that operates as the motor for what Bergson (1944) called “creative evolution,” an infinite process that creates the actualized pluralism of the world.

Common to the new materialism (and to some object-oriented approaches) is the idea that the soft and fuzzy social sciences must become better at learning from the natural sciences. At stake is a confrontation with the scepticism towards scientific explanations that has marked much social and cultural theory since the 60s. Thus,

there are suggestions that social sciences can be strengthened with insights from neuroscience, biology, physics or mathematics (see e.g. Barad 2007, Grosz 2008). Moreover, thinkers like Manuel de Landa (2002) and Keith Ansell-Pearson (1997) have interpreted Deleuze on the basis of particular kinds of science. And certainly Deleuze was very interested in the natural sciences. Yet, his thinking remained resolutely independent of any particular scientific paradigm. His interest was to continue the ‘creative evolution’ of ideas in a movement—invariably also a transformation—from the sciences and into philosophy.

Concepts cannot be moved between practices without transformation due to the fundamental divergence of the latter. No practice can function as an abstract model for any other, since each has its own problems and must develop its own form of creativity adequate to them (Deleuze 1994: 105). Accordingly, the adoption of generic concepts from e.g. biology or physics in sociology or psychology, accomplishes nothing but stifling the creative evolution of these fields.

Indeed this goes for all actualizations: the capacity of flowers to live from water and light *and* the capacity of the biologist to understand this process—are *equally* subject to experimentation and risk. But, again, the specific kinds of experimentation and risk differ, because the concrete set of relations and problems that make up different entities, practices and knowledges do. Since an irreducible pluralism reigns in the world (Deleuze 1991: 104) it is fruitless to search for any ultimate explanation. Indeed, as Deleuze (1994: 106) wrote: behind the masks shown to us by phenomena “are further masks ... and so on to infinity.”

Here, he has recourse to a figure, the masquerade, which connotes representation, and the symbolic. Yet, this only serves to make his materialism even more *unnatural*. For extended ‘to infinity’ the masquerade depicts not an exclusively human activity, but the generic way in which all phenomena of the world operate and interweave. And it is indeed precisely because there is *no end to the masquerade* that no scientific discipline can claim to hold the master key to ‘material reality.’ This is why one becomes *neither more nor less* of a materialist by exchanging the concepts of social science for those of molecular biology or nuclear physics.

Deleuze (1994: 75) wrote about human subjects that: “underneath the self that acts are little selves which contemplate and which render possible both the action and the active subject.” Within the subject there is always a multiplicity of other ‘selves’, ‘mini-me’s,’ which is not a metaphor for biological *mechanisms* but rather implies the

existence of multiple thinking and acting agents operating under the radar of human consciousness, together producing the subject. And for Deleuze this is not unique to human subjectivity, as indicated by the approval with which he quotes the author Samuel Butler's (1835-1902) description of *corn*:

even the corn in the fields grow upon a superstitious basis as to its own existence and only turns the earth and moisture into wheat through the conceit of its own ability to do so, without which faith it were powerless (Butler [1890] in Deleuze 1994: 75).

Formulations such as these make abundantly clear that Deleuze's materialism is altogether different from conventional social science dualisms, including subject and object, culture versus nature, and human versus thing. *Both* objects (corn) and subjects (humans) are *both* matter and mind, in their very different ways.

Within the realm of this distinctly unnatural materialism (unnatural, precisely because it fails to comply with standard dualisms with which we normally think the material), we are far from the linguistic turn's insistence that, unable to reach things in themselves, we will have to make do with 'perspectives' on them. It is not at all that perspectives do not matter. It is rather that, in a situation where even *corn has perspectives* (indeed *superstitions!*), the dichotomy between the thinking, language-using subject and the inert and mute object is unmoored.

For the same reason, however, we are *equally* far from any new materialist aspiration to bring the 'natural' insights of the sciences home to 'culture.' What is brought into focus is rather the reciprocal but differentiated processes that create the relations, which we conventionally name 'subject' and 'object,' or 'nature' and 'culture.' But then what image of the sciences does this entail?

Sciences, Minor and Major

In the long chapter "Treatise on Monadology: The War Machine" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a theory of the state and the nomad war machine that counters it. Somewhat surprisingly, this is also where we find a discussion of science. The location of the analysis within a disquisition on the state seems to define the problem of science in terms of power rather than knowledge. But this does not mean that Deleuze and Guattari, like later science critics, seek to

denounce science for its institutional blind spots, its racism and sexism. Instead, they propose that: “the exteriority of the war machine is also attested to by epistemology, which intimates the existence and perpetuation of a ‘nomad’ or ‘minor science’” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 361). This ‘eccentric’ minor science is fundamentally different from what they call ‘royal,’ ‘state’ and ‘major science.’

While major science is built on a “theory of solids treating fluids as a special case” (361), minor science is based on a hydraulic model, which takes flows and fluxes as its point of departure. Referring to Lucretius’ famous depiction of the *clinamen*, “the smallest angle by which an atom deviates from a straight path,” Deleuze and Guattari observe that the minor science always operates with elements of becoming and heterogeneity. Moreover, whereas royal science, always in “search for laws” based on “extracting constants” has a legalist underpinning, nomad science is experimental and based on following the connections between material forces (369). While the architect, exemplifying the royal approach, lays out a metric plane on paper, the erection of cathedrals by the Gothic master builder working directly on a material plane exhibits nomadic traits (368).

It is not random that these two kinds of science are also called minor and major, for their relationship to the state is not at all equal. Since the *modus operandi* of the state is control, it is incumbent upon it “to maintain a legislative and constitutive primacy for royal science” (367). In the eyes of the state, minor or nomad science, with its attentiveness to flow and becoming and its aversion to—or disbelief in—laws, thus always tends to be relegated to a pre- or sub-scientific position. It is not that the state aims to quash or eradicate the minor sciences, however, for the state also has need for its insights. Instead, the minor sciences are simply maintained in a subservient position, enabling royal or major science to continuously extract their contents. Thus, while minor science takes an interest in rivers due to their chaotic vortices and turbulent flows, major science immediately sets to work on making dikes and embankments to control these forces (363).

For all this, Deleuze and Guattari are not dismissive of major science. Nor are they even advocating some fair-minded balancing of power between the major and the minor. Instead, they insist each has its own mode of operation and its own form of creativity. Furthermore, these are, to an extent, complementary. Thus, whereas minor sciences “confine themselves to *invent problems* whose solution is tied to a whole set of collective, nonscientific activities,” the capacity of developing such

solutions depend on how royal science manages to fit the problem “into its theorematc apparatus and its organization of work” (374). Despite their affinity for, and tendency to celebrate, the nomad and the minor, Deleuze and Guattari make explicit that it is “not better, just different.”

This brief corrective takes on additional importance once we fast-forward to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) final work *What is Philosophy?* The reason is that the analysis of science offered there appears almost diametrically opposite to the nomad sciences as depicted in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Thus, we read that while philosophy has the creation of concepts as its object, science communicates through functions (117). Although philosophy and science works on the virtual (or “chaos”) their orientations are entirely different, philosophy aiming give to it conceptual consistency, while science strives to actualize it (118).

Shocking to the admirer of *A Thousand Plateaus*, it seems as if the nomad sciences have all but vanished, the whole field taking over by royal science. Moreover, as Isabelle Stengers (2010: 39) observes, the admonition to not mix the creations of science and philosophy “sounds like a biblical prohibition.” It is certainly also very different from science and technology studies’ ethnographic descriptions of the actual, messy practices of science.

As Stengers’ argues, however, it would be a mistake to interpret this change as a nothing more than a belated, conservative retrenchment. Instead, she argues, the discussion in *What is Philosophy?* can be understood as Deleuze and Guattari’s response to the realization that science has come to be threatened by forces against which it lacks resistance (Stengers 2010: 40). But, it will be objected, billions of dollars go into scientific advancement every year; white-coated scientists constantly appear in the news. In what possible way can science be seen as under threat?

To answer this question it must first be noted that science has generally been happy to welcome an ‘epic’ characterization of its own practices as vectors of progress. As science was turned into a respectable profession (a ‘caste’ in Stengers’ (2010: 4) words), scientists gained increasing resources and prestige. In turn, scientists, whether physicists, biologists, anthropologists or psychologists, did the state’s bidding. Generally, they showed little hesitation before trampling over any practice that appeared superstitious, backwards or otherwise troublesome to the state itself. Today, scientific practices are precariously balanced on top of the smoldering ruins of the practices, which they have succeeded destroying in the name of progress.

But this leaves the sciences vulnerable against attacks on their own objectivity and rationality. And indeed the problem is worse than might be assumed, for as science and technology studies have shown these were never the real basis for scientific accomplishments. As we know, Republican spin-doctors and oil companies have long been successful in painting global warming as a politically motivated hoax despite the loud protestations of climate scientists (see also Latour 2004b). Without any other defenses than the illusory one of ‘objectivity,’ the sciences thus find themselves increasingly helpless against anti-science ideologues. In the same movement, they become easy targets for an advancing knowledge economy that has no need for rationality or truth either, since it operates on a purely instrumental basis. What is thus threatened with extinction is science as an adventure of ideas (Whitehead 1933).

In this light, the discussion in *What is Philosophy?* can be understood not only as offering recognition of the creative achievements of science but also as a gesture of friendship extended at a vulnerable moment. But as Stengers insists, this gesture is also meant to compel scientists to learn to define their practices and aspirations in terms other than heroic progress, which includes facing up to and transforming their own destructive habits.

Were this to happen, the sciences would recognize themselves to be situated amidst a differentiated ecology of practices, not organized according to any hierarchical principle. It would then become possible to take up the problem, raised at the end of *What is Philosophy?* of potentially fruitful mutual interferences between practices: a return to the Spinozist theme of establishing common notions, or, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 216) put it, to the question of how divergent practices of art, science and philosophy might “join up in the brain.”

Art: Making Affects Perceptible

In the encounter with foreign constellations of bodies and the ‘signs’ they generate, the philosopher is *forced* to think, writes Deleuze (2000: 97). Such *thought-provoking* constellations can be found anywhere—in the destructions of the Japanese tsunami, an inexplicable look in the eyes of a lover, or in the observation of a new particle—but it is the special role of *art* to actively create such constellations (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 175-176). Hence, it is not coincidental that Deleuze wrote two books on cinema, and dedicated works to the painter Francis Bacon and the authors Franz

Kafka and Marcel Proust. Indeed, in the context of arguing for a general transformation in the use of the film media in the 20th Century—from a focus on movement to a focus on time—Deleuze (1986a, 1989) developed a general taxonomy of signs and images.

Film directors from Sergei Eisenstein and Luis Buñuel to Jean-Luc Godard and Pier Paolo Pasolini created new kinds of images. The author, for Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 174), “invents unknown and unrecognized affects and brings them to light as the becoming of his characters.” As Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 182) further wrote in *What is Philosophy?* art makes “perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become.” In turn, this forces the philosopher, and, let us add, the social scientist, to use own their conceptual means to make sense of the ‘imperceptible’ forces that art makes available for inspection.

Although art takes innumerable forms, Deleuze (2003: 56) maintained that they have a “common problem:” The question of how the forces of the world can be captured and exhibited. Given this definition, it is clear that the use of art as political commentary is wholly uninteresting to Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 188), who indeed asserted that art, contrary to “bad novels,” has nothing to do with “the opinions held by characters in accordance with the social type.” Moreover, art neither represents nor mimics, or symbolizes, reality. Instead, artists experiment with using cameras, words, or paint to make imperceptible affects available *in another form*.

Accordingly, the primary problem is never to ‘get a good idea,’ which can be transferred to metal, paper, or linen. The problem rather, is to *cleanse* oneself of the conventional ideas that always threaten to take over one’s attention.

As Deleuze wrote (2003: 86)

It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface. The figurative belief follows from this mistake. If the painter were before a white surface, he — or she— could reproduce on it an external object functioning as a model. But such is not the case. The painter has many things in his head, or around him, or in his studio. Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work. They are all present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface, but rather

would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it

The point of this cleansing is precisely to prevent the painter or poet from merely reproducing ideas already in circulation, only with the addition of a symbolic layer. This provides the context for understanding Deleuze and Guattari's (1986: 22) sympathy with Kafka's exclamation: "Metaphors are one of the things that makes me despair of literature." Rather than supplementing reality with a metaphorical addition, the task of art is to exhibit diverse forms of becoming.

As this also makes clear, Deleuze's conception of art entails a critique of notions of representation that have traditionally informed aesthetic theory and the philosophy of art. Within these approaches are lodged forms of evaluation that measure quality in terms of its conformance with an ideal model. At bottom, the question remains whether art is a good or a bad copy of a static and extant reality (1990b: 254). But since art is a singular domain in its own right, this evaluative criterion is misguided (Deleuze 2003: 2, 91). Indeed, it *as* a singular domain that art gains the capacity to challenge or transform existing conventions, including the very idea of the 'true model' as a relevant aesthetic criterion.

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 164) wrote that art is about extracting a "bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects." Thus, Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) work is described as a "literary machine" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18). What the literary machine produces and exhibits are the non-human or more-than-human affects that the protagonist K experiences at the castle.

Deleuze and Guattari further argue that Kafka developed a *minor literature* (not the conformance with the distinction between major and minor science). His literature was minor, among other things, because as a Czech Jew from Prague, he wrote in German, a language not his own. At first glance, though, this sits oddly with the aforementioned argument against political commentary and in favour of a view of art as the elicitation of more-than-human affects. Heightening the confusion, Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 16-18) even add that minor literature always has a collective value, and that it is *always political*. Yet, they continue to insist that Kafka's minor literature cannot be understood with reference to his social 'type.' The situation is rather the opposite: it was necessary for Kafka to set up "a minor practice of major

language from within” (1986: 18), and it was this experimentation requirement that enabled him to give the novel a new, minor form. Accordingly, Kafka’s work does not illustrate the ‘problem of the minorities’ in conventional political terms.

Although we now speak of a ‘Kafkaesque bureaucracy,’ K, the identically names protagonist of *The Castle* and *The Trial*, is indeed far from a typical ‘revolutionary.’ Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 82) describe him as an “an engineer or a mechanic who deals wit the gears of the machine”, a “jurist or legal investigator who follows the statements of the assemblage.” His ideal library, they write, would “include only texts for engineers or machinists or jurists” (1986: 83). Rather than filling a role pre-determined by his social identity, they suggest, Kafka’s shows the process—at once scary and humorous—through which K becomes part of an incomprehensible machine, “a polyvalent assemblage” (85).

An important characteristic of minor writing is that it does not *aspire* to become major at a later point. At each point, its vitality is articulated through the hidden or unperceived. On this background it is more than a bit ironic to consider Kafka’s current iconic status within the canons of critical theory. When the experiences K undergoes in *The Castle* or *The Trial* are interpreted as a metaphor for modern alienation and dehumanization in general, he is turned into just such a majoritarian figure.

Power: We Must be Egyptologists

What does it mean to have power? Who has power in society and how did they get it? How is power maintained and reproduced? How are power relations changed? For obvious reasons, these are important questions for the social sciences. Thus, it is relevant to consider Deleuze’s notion of power. Bodies are defined by their capacities to act, and these capacities vary depending on the constellations of which they are part. But the constellations change over time, and cannot, therefore, be understood as stable structures. It becomes untenable to search for definitions of power in terms of supposedly unchanging variables such as institutions, classes, gender, or race.

Here we find a close alignment between Deleuze and Foucault’s (1991) analyses of the microphysics of power. There are also obvious links between his view and that of actor-network theory, since the early Bruno Latour (1986) depicted power as the consequence of network relations between human and nonhuman agents. Thus, power, like society itself, emerges from continuous negotiations, which involve many

other elements than people, their interests and discourses.

In the slim *Foucault*, Deleuze (1986b: 82) wrote that power is like a “mole that only knows its way round its network of tunnels.” As a mole, power “comes from below,” operating “on the basis of innumerable points.” In a famous formulation, Foucault (1990: 89-91) had stated that an adequate analysis of power demands that we “cut off the king’s head.” What he thus pointed to was the necessity to dispense with a substantive conception according to which the ‘king,’ prime minister, or CEO would ‘hold’ power in smaller or larger quantities. In terms of a microphysics of power, it is rather the case that the power ‘held’ by any person is an *effect* of the relations that create and maintain their position within a network. If these relations break or change, something that happens with great regularity, even the king may quickly find himself powerless.

Though we can examine power relations empirically, we cannot know *a priori* what they are. Sometimes power is created through flows of money, while at other times it may be generated in discourses or by visions. At yet other times, it may be the effect of technology, the forces of nature, or perhaps ritual and magic. But no matter how open-ended, this series is also misleading, as long as it suggests an either-or relation: either economy, or knowledge, or technology or... Reality is even more complex, because constellations of power do not respect such divisions, and because they are themselves subject to change over time. As in the case of bodies and the ideas to which they give rise, Deleuze’s analysis of power thus consistently avoids the assumption of any fixed position or hierarchy. One should never assume that power is always be found in the same place, or will always take the same form.

Deleuze is particularly interested in what he calls Foucault’s ‘diagrammatic’ method. Since our perceptual abilities slide into our languages and concepts (Deleuze 1986b: 66) and vice versa, what we are able to see and what are able to say is invariably tied together. Perceptions, rather than naturally given by our sense organs, are “complexes of actions and passions, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes” (1986b: 59). Foucault, he argued, drew virtual ‘diagrams’—epistemes—that mapped these changing configurations of power and knowledge; perceptions, words and things. These diagrams were thus images of historically variable ways of “of saying and seeing” the world (Deleuze 1986b: 48). Contrary to some interpretations of Foucault, there is never any *identity* between knowledge and power, and the latter can never be *reduced to* discursive effects, since “visibilities will remain

irreducible to statements” (49).

Deleuze (2000:4) wrote that: “everything that teaches us something emits signs.” This covers not only text messages from friends, but also signs emitted from a rare plant, toxic mines, or train networks. Such signs can take innumerable forms, and are received in a multiplicity of ways—with nausea and dizziness, or with irritation, exuberance, or anger. If, therefore, we want to understand the relations between what we can see and what we can say, what we can know and how we can act, we are obliged to find new ways “to break things open” (Deleuze 1986b: 52), a formulation that strikingly resembles Bruno Latour’s (1987) later call to ‘open the black-boxes.’ If one has been trained to decode language, the injunction to ‘open things’ may not seem very intuitive—perhaps even very problematic. Yet, Deleuze (2000: 97) insists that the passions that drive people to act are shaped by encounters with the most diverse objects. Thus, the study of the microphysics of power demand that we explore, and learn to analyse, the multiple ways in which things—from rivers to stocks to CO₂—influence and modify peoples’ passions.

In a formulation directed at Marxism, Deleuze (2004: 264) wrote that ideology is a matter of “smoke and mirrors.” However, the only real illusion is the notion of illusion, which means ideology, itself. For neither Foucault nor Deleuze (1986b: 54) does power operate behind peoples’ backs. To be sure, power is an effect of relations, which can be unpacked. But as there is no screen and no mirrors, there is no hidden logic. For the analyst of power, the detective is therefore a bad model. Instead, Deleuze (2000: 92) suggested that: “we must be Egyptologists.” Face to face with what initially appears as meaningless scribbles, that is, the social scientist must patiently learn to decipher the hieroglyphs of power. But though this may be a daunting task, there is no reason to assume that the signs cover over a conspiracy.

Conclusion: Extracting a Little Thought

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari (1994, see also Stengers 2010) aimed to specify the characteristics of science, art and philosophy. The social sciences didn’t appear in the discussion (Brown 2010). And although the large trans-disciplinary works *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* abound in references to society and culture, anthropological, historical and psychological observations were there detached from their original intellectual contexts and used only as ‘input’ for the ‘creative evolution’ of philosophy (Jensen and Rödje 2010: 1-37). Accordingly, just

as we are unable to find ready-made answers to social inquiries in the handbooks of natural science, we also cannot turn to Deleuze with the hope of finding the problems of social science solved in his philosophical writings. But they can be opened up, enriched, or redefined. As I have tried to indicate here, whether one is interested in understanding bodies and their affects, materiality, knowledge, art, or power, Deleuze's thought has a lot to offer.

Rather than a set of hierarchical structures, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 30) gave us 'rhizomes'—networks of roots, spreading underground—as an image of the world's complex, entangled relations. Due to the difficulty of delimiting objects and contexts, the aspiration to analyse 'rhizomes,'—or networks, assemblages—creates methodological problems. We simply cannot know in advance which things are related to which, and how, or why. Taking this 'indeterminate' starting point seriously has been fundamental for actor-network theory (Latour 1993), which shares Deleuze's ambition to describe and conceptualize complex networks of people and things (see also Mol 2002, Jensen & Gad 2008). The 'radical empiricism' of these approaches offers refreshing alternatives to any kind of scientism or positivism *and* to any kind of social constructivism or discursive idealism.

It must also be emphasized, however, that Deleuze's *approach* to the empirical is at significant variance with social science, even in the forms otherwise most resonant with his ideas, like Latour's actor-network theory or Andrew Pickering's *Mangle of Practice* (1995). Where the latter use ethnographic and historical methods to trace the changing relations between people and things, Deleuze drew on a massive set of secondary sources from history, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, not to mention several natural sciences. But in contrast with the social, cultural or psychological questions that one way or another motivates the social scientist, Deleuze used this material exclusively with a view to creating philosophical concepts. Accordingly, it requires a certain care and a bit of finesse to feed Deleuzian concepts 'back into' social science.

Since the American feminist theorist Judith Butler (1990) wrote *Gender Trouble*, cultural and social disciplines have become increasingly attentive to the 'performative' effects of discourse. Everyone now knows that discourses not only describe phenomena but also shape them. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: 77) "theory of the performative sphere," however, reaches further than discourse. Preceding Latour's actor-network theory, the new materialism, and object-oriented philosophies,

it extended agency to nonhumans, from plants to technologies and animals to minerals. Rather than arguing that bodies are shaped, not to say determined by discursive representations, their performative theory thus proposed to see even representations and discourses *as bodies* with varied, initially unknown, capacities for being affected and modified (1987: 86). To understand them, we have to constantly move back and forth between the “constant noise” of words and the “silent order” of things (1987: 87, see also Gatens 2000).

Since even representations are bodies that interact with other bodies, we cease to be located within an epistemologically defined ‘perspective.’ Instead, we find ourselves situated within practical ontologies, where worlds are made and re-made in encounters that do not respect divisions between nature and culture, object and subject, or discourse and materiality. We are in the midst of on-going ontological *experiments*. Transformation is the order of the day, since it is impossible to find any system not subject to “continuous variation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 103, see also Jensen 2012, 2014).

A performative consequence of this image of ontological transformation is that the effects of (and for) social and cultural inquiry are also unpredictable. They will *also* gradually show, as our own descriptions and analyses interact with other materials, agendas or problems. This is probably one reason why one finds in Deleuze no attempt to build a full-fledged theoretical system analogous to the efforts of a Hegel, a Kant, or a Luhmann. Instead, one finds a set of concepts, which are *expected* to behave rhizomatically, spread unpredictably, and make surprising connections. If you do not like one chapter, wrote Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, then move on and see if you can’t find something interesting in the next. Concepts, after all, are neither more nor less than tools with which to experiment.

The event, Deleuze (1990b: 220) wrote, is a machine for the extraction of a little thought. At once humble and open-ended, this is an appealing image with which to end. Social scientists, too, can experiment with extracting from the event a fresh little thought. It would have to be a thought, obviously, attentive to the unpredictability of bodies and their affects. The ability to extract such little thoughts would not at all be insignificant.

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