

Between Individualism and Socialism:
Deleuze's Micropolitics of Desire

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Of the important French philosophers of the latter half of the twentieth century, Gilles Deleuze stands unquestionably as one of the most influential. Alongside contemporaries such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, Deleuze is generally considered an equal in terms of importance. Despite this recognition, however, Deleuze's philosophy has not left much of an impact upon contemporary political theory, which is ironic since Deleuze, along with frequent co-author Felix Guattari, dedicated large portions of a number of their books to political questions. One reason for this oversight, perhaps, is due to the at times obscure terminology used by Deleuze. It may also be due to the perception that Deleuze's political theory is not greatly different from Foucault's, and thus the work of the latter is given precedence. Whatever the reason, we feel that given the recognized importance of Deleuze there is a notable absence of attention given to his political theory. In this essay we will begin to rectify this situation.

Our effort to expound Deleuze's political theory will attempt to do three things. First, we shall offer an interpretation of several key concepts, concepts that are crucial to understanding Deleuze's political theory adequately. There are a number of concepts in Deleuze's work, especially in the books he wrote with Guattari, but for our purposes we will focus upon four – viz. immanence, multiplicities, assemblages, and function. By clarifying the role these concepts play in Deleuze's work we can then begin to place his thought in relationship to other political theories. Our second main objective will be to do

just this, to compare and contrast Deleuze's political theory with what we will describe as the individual-centered theory of Robert Nozick and the society-centered theory of John Rawls. By setting forth Deleuze's conceptual apparatus we will lay the groundwork for demonstrating the inadequacies, at least from Deleuze's perspective, of the alternatives offered by Nozick and Rawls. With this in place we will turn to our third and final objective, which will be to begin laying out what political activism will mean in the context of Deleuze's theory. What this will mean, we shall see, is that it entails finding the times, places, and circumstances to become revolutionary.

I

The most important concept in all of Deleuze's work is 'immanence'. Throughout Deleuze's published writings, immanence is repeatedly contrasted with the philosophies of transcendence, and the philosophers Deleuze frequently returns to – Scotus, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Leibniz, and Hume – each offers, as Deleuze understands them, important contributions to the philosophy of immanence. So what are these contributions and what is the philosophy of immanence? Put simply, a philosophy of immanence is an attempt to understand the emergence of identities, whether social, political, individual, ontological, etc., in a manner that does not entail a condition that transcends the conditioned. Plato, for example, would offer an explanation where the condition – the Forms or Ideas – does indeed transcend the conditioned. The Form of justice is separate from and is a truth that transcends each and every institution of justice that might emerge and approximate this Form.¹ A philosophy of immanence, by contrast, will speak of the condition as being in

¹ Not all commentators would agree that Plato was a philosopher of transcendence. Alain Badiou, for instance, argues that Plato's Forms are the immanence within which the things that participate in this form

the conditioned. Spinoza, for instance, is held up as the “prince of philosophers” by Deleuze,² and precisely because he argued that God is Nature (*Deus sive Natura*), or the condition (God) is in and inseparable from the conditioned (Nature). In clarifying this point, Deleuze differentiates between an “emanative” and an “immanent” cause. An “emanative cause,” Deleuze argues, “produces through what it gives, but is beyond what it gives”; an immanent cause, on the other hand, is one where “its effect is ‘immanate’ in the cause, rather than emanating from it. What defines an immanent cause is that its effect is in it – in it, of course, as in something else, but still being and remaining in it.”³

A consequence of this understanding of immanence is the equality of being, or the non-hierarchical nature of reality. Deleuze is clear on this point: “From the viewpoint of immanence the distinction of essence does not exclude, but rather implies, an equality of being: it is the same being that remains in itself in the cause, and in which the effect remains as in another thing.”⁴ In other words, unlike Plato’s Forms where the Form is the condition that is beyond (transcends) the conditioned and operates as the superior model the conditioned can only approximate, an immanent condition contains the conditioned within it, not as a degraded imitation but as a modification of the being of the condition itself. To cite an example, and an example that will become more important later on as we develop the political theoretical implications of Deleuze’s philosophy, capitalism is for Deleuze a system of immanent causation. In an essay detailing his affinity with Marxism, why in fact Deleuze and Guattari “remain Marxists,” Deleuze argues that it is

appear. See Alain Badiou, *Deleuze*, translated by Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

² *Spinoza: Expressionism in Philosophy*, translated by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁴ *Ibid.*

precisely because Marx offers an “analysis of capitalism as an immanent system that continually redraws its proper limits, and that always finds itself increasing by steps, for the limit is Capital itself.”⁵ Whenever a new market is discovered or opened, this market becomes incorporated into the Capitalist system itself, though an expanded system (e.g. the expansion of capitalism into China where labor and the products of labor become commodities). These expanded limits are an effect of capitalism but are within capitalism itself as an effect in the cause. Moreover, as an immanent system capitalism entails a fundamental equality of being in that all things are equal insofar as they are commodities – they can be bought and sold on the open market.

Related to Deleuze’s emphasis on the philosophy of immanence are two further concepts – univocity and multiplicity. Univocity is simply the term Deleuze uses, borrowing it from Duns Scotus, to refer to the equality of being. There is not a hierarchy of being, but rather being is expressed in the same sense – the condition and conditioned each expresses the same being – whereas the Platonic position holds that some beings (the Forms) express more being than others. One cannot say, according to Plato, that the eternal, unchanging forms *are* in the same sense that the things of the mortal and changing world *are*, and yet this is just what Scotus (and Deleuze) argues. Tied to univocity is the concept of multiplicity. Multiplicity emerges as a necessary concept for Deleuze because of his philosophy of immanence and the attendant equality of being. As

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers* (Paris: Les Éditions des Minuit, 1990), p. 232. Translation mine. This same point was made several times in Deleuze’s early work, *Anti-Oedipus*. To cite just one example, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “It is in fact essential that the limit of the decoded flows of desiring production be doubly exorcised, doubly displaced, once by the position of immanent limits that capitalism does not cease to reproduce on an ever expanding scale, and again by the marking out of an interior limit that reduces this social reproduction to restricted familial reproduction.” *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* translated by Robert Hurly (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 304. The concept of “decoded flows” and “desiring production” will be clarified below as we discuss the concepts of multiplicity and assemblages.

Deleuze defines multiplicity, “it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, ‘multiplicity,’ that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world.”⁶ In other words, for Deleuze a multiplicity is what he would call a nomadic distribution of a fundamentally non-hierarchical being (univocity), a distribution that cannot be reduced to identifiable unities. Deleuze and Guattari are straightforward on this point:

The rhizome [or multiplicity⁷] is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One or to which One is added ($n + 1$). It is not composed of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows.⁸

To understand a multiplicity in terms of the One or as a multiple of units (the French word used here is *unités*, which means both units and unities) would be to relate it to a privileged form of being, to a being that operates as “emanative cause” in that the things that come to be identified come to be by virtue of a One or multiple that transcends them. Socrates makes this position clear in the *Euthyphro*. It is not the diversity and multiplicity of pious actions that interests Socrates, but rather he wants “to know what is characteristic of piety which makes all pious actions pious.” (6e). Whatever their apparent diversity, there is from the perspective of Plato a privileged unity that is superior to the diversity it conditions. In the context of political reality, to give another example, the view of the One or the multiple manifests itself within the theories that either see the State as based upon the rights and liberties of individuals (i.e., as multiple units) or they prioritize the welfare of society as a whole (i.e., the One). In either case, the problem with

⁶ *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 8.

⁷ Ibid. p. 9: “The point is that a rhizome or multiplicity never allow itself...” In numerous other places rhizomes and multiplicities are used interchangeably.

⁸ Ibid. p. 21.

this view for Deleuze is that it fails to recognize the fact that political identities, whether they be individuals, societies, classes, rights, etc., have to be constituted. Political identities (*unités*) are not a preordained given but are constituted and come into being by virtue of a multiplicity of contingent factors and conditions. “A people isn’t something preexistent,” Deleuze argues, but is something that “is constituted.”⁹ And it is with the concept of multiplicity that Deleuze begins to account for how identities come to be constituted without the need for a transcendent, emanative cause.

This brings us to the next concept that is crucial to Deleuze’s work – assemblages. An assemblage, as the name itself might suggest, is a constituted (assembled) identity that is inseparable from a multiplicity. To state this with concepts discussed above, an assemblage is an immanent effect of a multiplicity as immanent cause, and thus an assemblage is inseparable from multiplicities. We can clarify this point by turning to the analysis of desire that Deleuze and Guattari offer in their two *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books. In *Anti-Oedipus*, for example, desire is from the start argued to be productive. This was Freud’s great insight, at least as Deleuze and Guattari saw it, but the productions of desire came to be seen by Freud as predetermined by the Oedipal triangle of mommy-daddy-me – what Deleuze and Guattari call the “triangulation” of desire. For Deleuze and Guattari desire, far from being predetermined by identity, is understood to be the multiplicity that produces identities – “desiring-production is pure multiplicity, that is to say, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity.”¹⁰ Desire is for Deleuze an assemblage then to the extent that it *both* entails the production of an identity (i.e., as immanent cause) *and* it entails the desiring-productions (what Deleuze calls ‘lines

⁹ “Mediators,” in *Incorporations*, p. 285-6.

¹⁰ *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 42.

of flight') that elude and transgress the limits set forth by an assemblage. This limit comes to be identified by Deleuze and Guattari as schizophrenia. There is thus a dual aspect to an assemblage, or two poles – there is what Deleuze will call the fascist and paranoiac pole that returns every production to an all-determining identity, and there is the schizophrenic (sometimes also called cancerous) pole of a desiring-production that fails to maintain the immanent limits necessary for proper functioning. Desiring-productions forever risk collapsing into the stranglehold of fascism wherein desire desires its own repression, or it risks exploding into a self-destructive chaos. To state this point yet again but with a different example, artistic productions risk either collapsing into the cliché of repeating the same well-worn formulas, or they risk becoming so unconstrained and chaotic that they fail to say anything.

At this point a related concept, function, comes into use. It is also here where Deleuze's work dovetails with that of Foucault's. In particular, Deleuze finds an affinity between Foucault's efforts to account for the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices and his own efforts to account for an assemblage that entails *both* the bounded, consistent, and identifiable *and* the unbounded, nomadic, and non-identifiable (lines of flight). As Deleuze understands Foucault's attempt to give such an accounting, he believes Hjelmslev's notion of the sign-function clarifies Foucault's project. In particular, Deleuze develops Hjelmslev's notion that the distinction and relationship between expression (i.e., discursive) and content (i.e., non-discursive) *is made possible* by what he refers to as the sign function: "We have here introduced *expression* and *content* as designations of the functives that contract the function in question, the sign

function.”¹¹ Expression corresponds roughly to what Ferdinand de Saussure referred to as the signifier, and content corresponds to what he had called the signified. Hjelmslev, however, will break with Saussure’s claim that there is an amorphous, unformed meaning or content which precedes the language which will mold and form it.¹² Saussure, in other words, adheres to the view that meaning is the “emanative” cause of our actual language and discourse. For Hjelmslev, however, thoughts do not precede their expressions. The meaning is always already produced within a language (as immanent effect), a language that is paradoxically both the discursive and non-discursive). For this reason Hjelmslev will further subdivide expression and content, a division which occurs by virtue of the sign function alone, into content-form/content-substance, and expression-form/expression-substance.¹³ Thus, for example, the content-substance of the English expression “I don’t know,” is the meaning which can be expressed in other languages - e.g., “jeg véd det ikke” (Danish), “je ne sais pas” (French). This content-substance, however, does not exist independently of a content-form, or as an amorphous, unformed meaning. The language itself, therefore, already presents a given content-substance with a particular form, a form which Hjelmslev points out can differ dramatically from one language to the next - i.e., grammatical structures or forms can vary greatly (e.g., the difference between French and English with respect to negation, “I do not know”, “Je ne sais pas”). On the other hand, the expression also has both a substance and a form. The expression-substance of the word “Berlin,” for example, is simply the word itself as expressed by different people in different languages; and the expression-form is the word

¹¹ Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 48.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

“Berlin” as expressed with the phonetic habits and traits of a particular language - i.e., it is “Berlin” expressed with an English or Spanish *accent* for example.

Deleuze finds this same pair of distinctions in Foucault’s work. In particular, Foucault’s distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices is understood by Deleuze to be made possible by a function analogous to Hjelmslev’s sign function. There is thus a *discursive practice* concerned with discipline, the substance of which is, among other things, the criminal/delinquent; and there is a form to these discursive practices, i.e., the expressed aims, purposes, and procedures for punishing the delinquent. The same holds for non-discursive practices: the substance for example would be the concrete structure of the prison where criminals and delinquents are held; and the form would be the manner in which such people are held, such as Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon design for the prison.¹⁴

The importance of function as that which gives rise to the distinction and relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices is central, according to Deleuze, to Foucault’s attempts to overcome the dilemma of subjectivism and structuralism, or what Deleuze argued (discussed above) was the dilemma of thinking of multiplicities either in terms of an indentifiable subject or object, in either case not as multiplicity but as One or multiple. The system of expression and content, or the system of discursive and non-discursive practices, should be understood then as products (functionives to borrow Hjelmslev’s term) of a more primary function that allows for the relationship between the two systems without presupposing the priority of one system over the other (as in subjectivism [subject] and structuralism [object]). This is the new reading which Deleuze

¹⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 33.

gives to Hjelmslev's claim that expression and content are functives of the sign function. The sign function is not to be confused with its functives; likewise, the diagram, which is Foucault's term for what Deleuze calls function, is not to be confused with the systems or strata it makes possible. As Deleuze puts it, "the diagram always represents the outside of the strata,"¹⁵ or it is always outside identifiable discursive and non-discursive practices. The term diagram in Foucault's work thus plays an important role, and its importance should not be underestimated; furthermore, the terms diagram (or diagrammatics) and abstract machine play an equally important role in Deleuze and Guattari's chief works. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, for example, they situate their own term "abstract machine" in the context of their effort to understand, *à la* Foucault, the fundamental condition for the possibility of the relationship between discursive and non-discursive systems:

...the two forms [of content and expression] are in reciprocal presupposition, and they can be abstracted from each other only in a very relative way because they are two sides of a single assemblage. We must therefore arrive at something in the assemblage itself that is still more profound than those sides and can account for both of the forms in presupposition, forms of expression or regimes of signs (semiotic systems) and forms of content or regimes of bodies (physical systems). This is what we call the *abstract machine*, which constitutes and conjugates all of the assemblage's cutting edges of deterritorialization.¹⁶

We can now begin to put together the conceptual pieces of Deleuze's complex philosophical apparatus (i.e. assemblage). Desire, as we have seen, is a multiplicity, meaning that it operates as an immanent cause and does so without being reducible to the predetermining unity of the One or the multiple. Because it operates without the predetermining causation ("emanate causation") of the One or the multiple, desiring-

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 140-1.

production is forever a two-fold assemblage (or assemblages), an assemblage with two sides. On one side there are the identifiable elements and on the other the non-identifiable, or again there is one side which allows for the constitution of identity and then there is the other which constantly undermines and dismantles these identities.¹⁷ And it is the abstract machine, or Deleuze and Guattari's version of the sign function, that constitutes an assemblage; it is the abstract machine that is the function that enables an assemblage to have a relationship to those elements that are identifiable and to those nomadic lines of flight that undermine and transform these identifiable elements.

II

We have sufficiently discussed the concepts necessary to turn now to Deleuze's political theory, and in particular to a comparison of this theory with those of Nozick and Rawls. As we do so we find yet another concept making its appearance – segmentarity. This concept, however, simply extends Deleuze's understanding of an assemblage, as becomes apparent when the concept is first discussed: “the notion of segmentarity was constructed by ethnologists to account for so-called primitive societies, which have no fixed, central State apparatus and no global power mechanisms or specialized political institutions. In these societies, the social segments have a certain leeway, between the two extreme poles of fusion and scission.”¹⁸ In other words, ethnologists confronted social “assemblages” that could not be fit into the predetermining identities and unities of

¹⁷ See, for example, *Thousand Plateaus*, p. 4: “One side of a machinic assemblage faces the strata, which doubtless make it [the assemblage] a kind of organism, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a body without organs, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate...”

¹⁸ *Thousand Plateaus*, p. 209.

the State or political institutions, and these assemblages, moreover, have as one potential fusion (fascism) and scission (chaos) as the other. The assemblages are therefore assemblages of “loose” identities (“segments have a certain leeway”) that are identifiable to an extent but at the same time entail nomadic elements that fail to fit a rigid predetermination. As examples of segmentarity, Deleuze and Guattari speak of how our lives are segmented into work and play, men-women, adults-children, family and friends and strangers, classes, races, etc. Not all segments are alike, however, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, for there are what they will call molar and molecular segments. The molar/molecular distinction is not to be mistaken for a fundamental either/or; rather, the “loose” identities that are segments can be more loose, more supple, than others, and some in fact, the molar, can become quite rigid.¹⁹ “Woman” as an assemblage, can be a molar segment if the practices, behaviors, expectations, genetic predispositions, etc., are rigid and resistant to change. On the other hand, “woman” can be a molecular segment if it is supple and subject to frequent and perhaps unanticipated variations. Some attitudes and expectations of “women” as a segment may be much more supple – e.g., mannerisms, fashion, taste, expression, etc. – and they may be applicable in a way that is much more supple than would be allowed by molar segments. Homosexual men and women may be divided as molar segments, but they may each share molecular segments such as expressions, taste, desire for men, etc. More basically, man in general, as a molar, rigid segment, may become feminine, or become assemblages with feminine segments that are supple and flexible (e.g., emotionality, nurturing, etc.). Each society is constituted of both molar and molecular segments, or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, “every politics is

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 210: “we should make a distinction between two types of segmentarity, one ‘primitive’ and supple, the other ‘modern’ and rigid.”

simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics.”²⁰ Moreover, macro and micropolitics cannot be reduced to being constituted upon the basis of the identity of individuals or society (One or multiple), but rather to being a multiplicity of variations and flows – i.e., flows of desiring-production. Deleuze and Guattari are clear on this point:

...in the end, the difference is not at all between the social and the individual (or interindividual), but between the molar realm of representations, individual or collective, and the molecular realm of beliefs and desires in which the distinction between the social and the individual loses all meaning since flows are neither attributable to individuals nor overcodable by collective signifiers.²¹

This statement follows from the claim that

Desire is never separable from complex assemblages that necessarily tie into molecular levels, from microformations already shaping postures, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, semiotic systems, etc. Desire is never an undifferentiated instinctual energy.²²

Desire is an assemblage. As such the products and identities that are inseparable from desire are forever subject to the undermining effects of nomadic flows, lines of flight, that transgress the segments and cause a transformation of the assemblages. This is the creativity of desire, the possibility it has to transform assemblages, whether they be political, artistic, philosophical, etc., but this creativity also runs the risk of fascism, and the reason for this is simple. Since the molar, rigid segments maintain the identity of our desires, they keep our desires in check, they also prevent desire from exploding into chaos and disorder. As a result we all, at some level, have a potential, molecular desire for fascism: “Our security, the great molar organization that sustains us, the

²⁰ Ibid. p. 213.

²¹ Ibid. p. 219.

²² Ibid. p. 215.

arborescences we cling to, the binary machines that give us a well-defined status, the resonances we enter into, the system of overcoding that dominates us – we desire all that.”²³ At the other end the capitalist system, and here Deleuze and Guattari’s interest in Marxism becomes prominent, is a system of immanent causation and creativity that forever attempts to stave off its ultimate limit, which is the unlimited, unchecked transformation of everything into commodities. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari identify this unchecked limit as schizophrenia, or the chaos that is the possibility of every assemblage. In both cases, whether fascism or capitalism, creativity, the creativity that avoids the two poles, is sundered. It is to the restoration of this creativity that Deleuze’s micropolitics is directed. But before we turn to the proposals Deleuze offers in this regard, let us first compare and contrast Deleuze’s political theory with that of Nozick and Rawls.

Robert Nozick’s highly influential book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, is an unabashedly outspoken manifesto in defense of individual liberties. Nozick makes his starting point perfectly clear: “we shall begin with individuals in something sufficiently similar to Locke’s state of nature so that many of the otherwise important differences may be ignored here.”²⁴ Of particular application to Nozick’s theory is Locke’s starting assumption that individuals in a state of nature are in “a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or dependency upon the will of any other man.”²⁵ Nozick then uses this basic premise to then criticize governmental action

²³ Ibid. p. 219

²⁴ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 9.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 10. This citation is from Locke’s *Second Treatise*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 269.

that is justified for the sake of a greater, social good. A welfare state, for instance, that justifies the redistribution of wealth on the grounds that society as a whole will be better served in this way ultimately violates the freedom of individuals to “dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit.” Yet “why not,” Nozick asks, “hold that some persons have to bear some costs that benefit other persons more, for the sake of the overall social good?”²⁶ Nozick answers his own question, and makes his position quite definitive: “But there is no *social entity* with a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good. There are only individual people, with their own individual lives. Using one of these people for the benefit of others, uses him and benefits others. Nothing more.”²⁷

From the perspective of Deleuze’s political theory, Deleuze would agree that there is no social entity that transcends the desires, interests, and freedoms of individuals; however, Deleuze also argues, as we saw, that neither are there are individuals as transcendent predetermining unities. Both individual entities and social entities are created, or they are assemblages (i.e., assemblages of molar and molecular segments). How are they created (assembled)? To answer this question we adopt our earlier conclusions regarding Deleuze’s understanding of the concept function, using here the term creative-function (as will become clear why later). The creative-function operates as what Deleuze and Guattari referred to as an abstract machine, and what it does is to allow for multiplicities to become identifiable as an assemblage of segments (molar and molecular), and it allows for the multiplicities immanent to these segments to transform the segments themselves – in other words, the creative-function is the condition for the possibility of identifying individual and social entities and it is the condition for the

²⁶ Ibid. p. 32.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 32-3.

impossibility of these entities maintaining these identities. The creative-function (the abstract machine) assures the becoming-other of any and every identity. Contrasting this view of the creative-function with other contemporary views of creativity, in particular Milton Friedman's libertarian (and hence Nozick inspired) arguments.

The claim that competition in a free market generates creativity and innovation is accepted by many as an uncontested fact. As Milton Friedman discusses the importance of a free market in his book, *Capitalism and Freedom*, he states that what is crucial to it is that it be based upon voluntary exchanges. Only then can one prevent a totalitarian (or what Friedman will also refer to as a "socialist") state where exchanges are predetermined and/or restricted. In a free market economy a consumer is not coerced into buying a product unless they want to, and as long as there are other consumers selling the same product they will not be coerced into buying from particular sellers. A free market economy, Friedman states, has two necessary conditions: "(a) that enterprises are private, so that the ultimate contracting parties are individuals and (b) that individuals are effectively free to enter or no to enter into any particular exchange, so that every transaction is strictly voluntary."²⁸ In such a free market economy, a seller of goods must compete with other sellers, and it is this competition, as the general argument runs, that generates creativity and innovation.

Friedman's assumption, in short, is that individuals function as an already constituted given, and it is the freedom of these individuals to enter into voluntary exchanges that gives rise to the creativity and innovation of capitalism. Deleuze's point, however, is that individuals are not an already constituted pre-given; moreover, in many

²⁸ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 9.

ways individuals themselves, their desires, beliefs, etc. (i.e., their molecular segments) are constituted and reinforced by what Felix Guattari refers to as the “steamroller” of capitalism.²⁹ In order to guarantee a return on an investment a capitalist investor must predict the desires and choices of individuals, but if the system of capitalism can itself produce within individuals a homogenized set of predictable desires, choices, and beliefs, then the capitalist reduces their risk. The ideally constituted and assembled individual will be one who keeps coming back for more of the same. This gets to the heart of Deleuze and Guattari’s aesthetic critique of capitalism and their call to instill art into everyday life. In *Difference and Repetition*, for example, Deleuze argues that

there is no other aesthetic problem than that of the insertion of art into everyday life. The more our daily life appears standardized, stereotyped and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects of consumption, the more art must be injected into it in order to extract that little difference which plays simultaneously between other levels of repetition, and even in order to make the two extremes resonate – namely, the habitual series of consumption and the instinctual series of destruction and death.³⁰

The injection of art into everyday life is thus a form of revolt to the tendency of capitalism to create a “steamrolled” individual, and individual with homogenized, predictably segmented desires. And what this injection entails is “to make the two extremes resonate.” These extremes are the two sides of any and every assemblage – on the one side is the identifiable and predictable, the repetition of the same; and on the other is the chaos and unpredictability that results in destruction and death. The creative-function, as the insertion of art, will bring these two sides together in such a way that they are able to resonate within an assemblage. The name Deleuze and Guattari will at times

²⁹ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 123-4.

³⁰ *Difference and Repetition*, p. 293.

use to refer to this assemblage that relates, by virtue of the creative-function (the abstract machine as function), stability and identity to chaos is “chaosmos.”³¹

One can therefore not prioritize the individual over the social, if by the social one means the multiplicity wherein molar representations, individual or collective – e.g., class consciousness, gender, nationality, etc. – and molecular beliefs and desires flow, transforming and transformed. At the same time one should not prioritize the social as a predetermining identity and unity. This is where the influence of Foucault becomes most apparent. Foucault’s analysis of various disciplinary institutions such as prisons, barracks, schools, medicine, etc., exhibits a profound recognition of the social and institutional factors that make certain knowledge claims possible, or that make certain desires normal or deviant. Foucault will refer to this as the “historical a priori,”³² by which he means that the knowledge claims of individuals, their assertions, beliefs, desires, and judgments, are conditioned by historical conditions which allow for some of these to gain currency and flow while others will not. What interests Foucault are the historical conditions that allowed, for example, the human body to be perceived as a docile body, and hence as a body more subject to the active gaze of a medical doctor; or, to use another example, he was interested in how the decline of leprosy and the vacancy of the great leper houses became a historical condition that made possible the perception of another population as being in need of “enclosure,” and how this enclosure in turn made possible the emergence of psychiatry as a science that in some instances freed people from the physical enclosures only to put them in the enclosure that is their medical

³¹ See *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 6: “Radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos.” Guattari’s title to his book, *Chaosmosis*, also reflects this position.

³² See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp. 126-131.

condition. These studies are well known and have received much attention, but for our purposes, and for the purposes of Deleuze, what is important in Foucault's work is the underlying assumption that these social factors are not already constituted givens but are themselves constituted on the basis of an assemblage of historically contingent factors. More to the point, these assemblages, what Foucault will call episteme in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, are open to transformation; and it is precisely this outside, the immanent otherness to any episteme, that becomes the more express concern of Foucault in his later work, and it is certainly what interests Deleuze in Foucault. Thus in discussing Foucault's understanding of discursive and non-discursive practices (formations), Deleuze utilizes both the concept of a multiplicity and the notion of exteriority – i.e., the otherness or outside identifiable regimes presuppose. As Deleuze puts it,

if the visible and the articulable elements enter into a duel, it is to the extent that their respective forms, as forms of exteriority, dispersion or dissemination, make up two types of 'multiplicity', neither of which can be reduced to a unity: statements exist only in a discursive multiplicity, and visibilities in a non-discursive multiplicity. And these two multiplicities open up on to a third: a multiplicity of relations between forces, a multiplicity of diffusion which no longer splits into two and is free of any dualizable form.³³

It is this third multiplicity, the multiplicity of lines of flight, of exteriority and creativity, that is what Deleuze a few pages later will identify with thinking: "If seeing and speaking are forms of exteriority, thinking addresses itself to an outside that has no form. To think is to reach the non-stratified."³⁴

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, pp. 83-4.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 87.

Both Deleuze and Foucault, therefore, would be critical of John Rawls' basic programme, as set forth in his *A Theory of Justice*, where Rawls states that he "shall be satisfied if it is possible to formulate a reasonable conception of justice for the basic structure of society conceived for the time being as a closed system isolated from other societies."³⁵ Although Rawls formulates the "closed system" of society as a provisional step, he makes it clear that other problems will "prove more tractable in light" of the given assumption, and so in the end society is understood to be a closed, predetermining identity. And this is where Nozick correctly, in our opinion, criticizes Rawls. The criticism, in short, is that Rawls bases his call for a redistribution of wealth as a fair proposition on the basis of claiming that there are benefits of social cooperation that transcend and are greater than the sum of the individuals who cooperate. Nozick has numerous problems with this position, but ultimately they all go back to his original claim that there is no social entity, just individuals.³⁶

Deleuze would agree that there is no predetermining social entity, an already constituted, closed system, but this is not to say that Deleuze would embrace Nozick. In fact, there are important ways in which the concerns of Rawls are precisely the concerns of Deleuze. One could say that Deleuze too is concerned with what Rawls calls the "basic structure of society," by which Rawls means the idea of a "structure [that] contains various social positions and that men born into different positions have different expectations of life determined, in part, by the political system as well as by economic and social circumstances."³⁷ To state this in Deleuze's terminology, Deleuze is interested in the assemblage of segments, both molar (class, economic position, etc.) and molecular

³⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 8.

³⁶ For Nozick's critique of Rawls, see *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pp. 183-197.

³⁷ *A Theory of Justice*, p. 7.

(beliefs, desires, expectations, and hopes), whereby some groups and individuals are constituted in such a way that they become excluded from various other dominant positions of power. To the extent then that social assemblages produce hierarchies of entrenched power that predetermine the hopes and expectations of what one can do and become – e.g., the traditional rigid segmentation of women as inferior to men which led women to set their sights lower than men – then Deleuze shares Rawls’ efforts to critique and undermine the effectiveness of such entrenched powers.³⁸ What Deleuze does not agree with, however, is Rawls’ basic premise that whatever solution one attempts must assume the already existent identity of society as a “closed system.” If one makes such an assumption one inevitably becomes, according to Deleuze, a reformer. A reformer seeks change for sure, but a change that will make of a unity a true, proper unity. There are the political reformers such as Rawls, but there are others who call for reform in the family (return to its true unity as the nuclear family), morals (return to the true set of morals), etc. Deleuze argues that reformers are fundamentally limited because they presuppose the closed unity and seek simply to establish such a unity.³⁹ They fail to think the “outside,” to be truly creative and cause the system to become *other*. Rather than becoming a reformer, Deleuze’s political theory calls for becoming revolutionary. It is to this call that we now turn.

³⁸ Deleuze will most frequently refer to this group that is excluded by the dominant power as the “minority.” A minority need not be a numerical minority, as the inclusion of women should make obvious, but instead are minor with respect to the major, dominant controlling powers. This theme is discussed most extensively in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Although about a literary figure, Deleuze and Guattari relate Kafka’s writings to many of the political concerns addressed in this essay, employing along the way many of the concepts sketched out above – e.g., immanence, assemblage, abstract machine.

³⁹ *Pourparlers*, p. 241: “We are in a general crisis of all sites of enclosure, the prison, hospital, factory, school, and family. The family is an interior [i.e., closed unity] in crisis like all other interiors, scholarly, professional, etc. Competent ministers constantly announce reforms that are thought to be necessary. To reform the schools, industry, hospitals, the army, the prison; but each minister knows that these institutions have been finished for a long time.” Translation mine.

III

What one who reads Deleuze's writings on politics notices is the frequency with which he speaks of the revolutionary. The revolutionary, however, is contrasted with revolutions. In discussing the tendency to speak of revolutions as destined to come to a bad end (Deleuze cites Stalin and Cromwell though he could have cited Robespierre⁴⁰), Deleuze admits that "It is said that revolutions have a bad future," but adds that "one never ceases to confuse to choices, the future of revolutions in history and the becoming revolutionary of the people. They are not the same people in the two cases. The only chance for man is in becoming revolutionary, for only then can the shame be averted so that one can respond to the intolerable."⁴¹ To understand this point, we need first to recall the necessity for Deleuze of the creative-function as that which allows for the emergence of identifiable assemblages and that which assures the transformation of these assemblages. Consequently, what becoming revolutionary entails is becoming creative. It entails tapping into a line of flight, shamelessly asking the right questions, in order to transform the system or assemblage of power.

It is at this point where Deleuze's distinction between becoming a reformer and becoming a revolutionary becomes prominent. As mentioned earlier, reformers seek to establish what is believed to be a pure, true unity. A conservative or reactionary reformer calls for a return to a past unity that has been lost – for example, a return to the nuclear family, to traditional morals, to a true religious faith and practice, etc. A liberal and

⁴⁰ *Pourparlers*, p. 231.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

perhaps radical reformer calls for the realization of a future condition that will be more true and pure (or fair) than the present state of affairs. Rawls would fit into this category. But what about Marx and Marxism? An argument could be made that Marx too was a reformer, albeit a radical one, insofar as he called for the realization of a communist state that would resolve and surpass the contradictions and alienation of the present capitalist system. Would Deleuze, who considered himself a Marxist, then be unwittingly hitching his wagon to a reformist agenda rather than a revolutionary one? The answer is a resounding “No.” Deleuze claimed, as we have seen, that the reason for his interest in Marxism was with Marx’s analysis of capitalism as an immanent system, and a system that generates its own limits. More importantly, the reason these limits are generated is to ward off the immanent tendency of capitalism to undermine its very ability to function. Put simply, by continually creating and encouraging a multiplicity of desires – i.e., the tendency of capitalism to carve out niches where they target individual consumers and encourage them to differentiate themselves from other consumers with their purchases – capitalism forever pushes the envelope in its ability to produce a predictable consumer who continually returns to buy more of the same. Capitalism risks unleashing desire as pure multiplicity, a revolutionary desire that will undermine and transform the immanent system of capitalism. In *Anti-Oedipus* this unleashed desire, this pure multiplicity that cannot be normalized and homogenized, is referred to as schizophrenia, and thus early on they state, and in terms that echo Marx’s revolutionary thought: “The schizophrenic deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel.”⁴²

⁴² *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 35.

Capitalism is quite a vigorous system, however, and many today, especially in the wake of the events of 1989, have dismissed Marxism as a revolutionary philosophy that is no longer relevant. Deleuze would agree with this dismissal if to be revolutionary means operating only at the level of molar representations – that is, at the level of class consciousness, ideology, and the State. As a macropolitical project Marxism is destined to become a failure, and for the very straightforward reason that for Deleuze becoming revolutionary entails first and foremost the becoming revolutionary of the molecular segments. Just as Deleuze argued that individuals come to be constituted (assembled) such that they desire their own repression – i.e., desire the fascist within them, the fascist that prevents the wayward becomings, the lines of flight – so too a transformation of capitalism entails first a transformation of the molecular segments. We must cease desiring our own normalization, our homogenization.⁴³

How then do we come to desire our own normalization, our homogenization? For Deleuze the short answer to this question is that we have come to desire the very mechanisms that control us. In particular, it is precisely the notion that we achieve excellence, that we become most creative and perform at our peak, when we are placed in competition with others; it is this idea that prevents more than any other the becoming revolutionary that will allow for the transformation, rather than reformation, of the capitalist system. A trivial though quite telling example of our desire for being controlled is the popularity of game shows. In shows such as *Survivor*, *For Love or Money*, and the *Bachelorette*, contestants are set at odds against one another and come to see others as a competitive hurdle to overcome on their quest to gain the financial prize, or even love in

⁴³ Here we can begin to see where Deleuze's interest in Nietzsche, in particular Nietzsche's critique of slave or herd morality, comes together with his Marxism.

the case of *For Love or Money* (although some chose the money). In commenting on game shows, Deleuze argues that “if the most idiotic game shows are such a success, that is because they adequately express the situation of the enterprise.”⁴⁴

By enterprise Deleuze is referring to what he believes has come to replace the disciplinary societies of enclosure – in particular, the society of control. A society of control, Deleuze argues, no longer functions “by enclosure but by continuous control and instantaneous communication.”⁴⁵ Disciplinary societies operate on the principle of moulds and enclosures, such as schools, factories, and barracks where a set model is imposed (molded) upon those who are enclosed within the system. This molding requires the disciplinary techniques of the institutions, including methods of observation. A society of control, by contrast, operates by the principle of “constant modulation, like a casting that self-deforms and changes continuously, from one instant to another, or like a sieve where the mesh changes from one point to another.”⁴⁶ In particular, the society of control operates through constantly testing and comparing information, and it uses this information both in setting forth targets and goals and earmarks for employees and then it uses instantaneous communication for the continuous monitoring of the progress one is making towards these goals. This set-up Deleuze refers to as an “enterprise,” which, he points out, “never ceases to introduce an inexpiable rivalry as healthy emulation, as excellent motivation that opposes individuals from one another and which traverses the individuals, dividing them in themselves.”⁴⁷ The popularity of game shows and reality shows only goes to show that many have come to desire this inexpiable rivalry and

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 242.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 236.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 242.

⁴⁷ Ibid. pp. 242-3.

perhaps have come to believe that this motivation and competition is reality, and that reality is good and desirable.

For Deleuze, however, the societies of control seek to ward off the creative-function by claiming that they themselves are the true source of creativity. Put in other terms, they resist becoming revolutionary by constituting, at the molecular level, the very desires and beliefs that further this resistance. We can now see the profound reason for Deleuze's linkage of becoming revolutionary with becoming creative. As Deleuze might put it, the societies of control allow for creativity, but only of a very limited kind. It is true that individuals and enterprises in competition with one another will create and innovate in order to increase efficiency, productivity, and hence profits; and the individuals who implement or carry out such processes are paid, based on an analysis of information, accordingly (the "merit-based" pay system). Efficiency, productivity, and speed then become not only what we come to be judged and paid for, but it also becomes what we desire. Moreover, with the constant return of information we are also continuously presented with our next target, our next aspiration, and luckily with another burst of "creativity" we can achieve these goals. In short, the societies of control utilize constant and rapid communications (memos, emails, advertisements, etc.) to inform people where they stand in the constantly shifting field of interpersonal relations, a field viewed fundamentally as competitive. If one does not continuously work and express themselves in such a field of interpersonal relations, they will escape being monitored and become an unknown variable, or they are told they will fall behind. The parents of a first grader are told that their child is behind (a judgment reached through continuous testing and monitoring and a comparison of the resultant information with similar results

gathered from others in the class), and that they should be held back a year so that their self-esteem is not effected. This example could be multiplied many times and in countless other contexts.⁴⁸ The net result is that we come to desire the very systems that control and monitor us.

We are now in a position to understand some of the claims Deleuze makes as the practical issue of becoming revolutionary comes to be addressed. First and most importantly Deleuze argues that creativity, the creative-function, does not occur within the limited scope of the immanent system of capitalism and its recent manifestation as a society of control. In typical Nietzschean fashion, Deleuze is of a mind to argue that creativity occurs away from the marketplace.⁴⁹ Deleuze thus, in reference to the continuous communication and flow of information within societies of control, argues that “Perhaps speech, communication, are rotten. They are already penetrated by money...A turning away from speech is necessary. To create has always been something other than communicating. What is important would perhaps be to create voids of non-communication, interruptions, in order to escape the control.”⁵⁰ And this same thought is expressed in an earlier essay:

⁴⁸ To add just a few examples to indicate the pervasiveness of the control society Deleuze believes we are in, one can find, among churches, specialists dedicated to analyzing all the information deemed relevant regarding a congregation in order to communicate to the church leaders how they may best attract and retain parishioners (i.e., compete with other denominations). Politicians frequently rely on public polls as feedback to determine what policies are to be pursued and when. And finally, within academics an untenured professor must accumulate a portfolio documenting the relevant information by which they are to be judged relative to their tenured peers. The cliché, publish or perish, captures both the powerful motivating factors for publishing (fear of death) and, though not as explicitly, the competitive nature of the publishing field (other academics are competing with you for limited publication space).

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On the Flies of the Marketplace”: “Where solitude ceases the market place begins; and where the market place begins the noise of the great actors and the buzzing of the poisonous flies begins too...Little do the people comprehend the great – that is, the creating. But they have a mind for all showmen and actors of great things.” *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, p. 163.

⁵⁰ *Pourparlers*, p. 238.

So the problem is no longer getting people to express themselves, but providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people from expressing themselves, but rather force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, or even rarer, the thing that might be worth saying.⁵¹

To instill creativity into our lives, to become revolutionary, does not then entail constant, unceasing communication and expression of ourselves. Rather, it involves breaking with the flow of communications, interrupting them, so that one might instill a question that has transformative (i.e., revolutionary) potential. Jane Jacobs, a well known economic historian, has offered a similar argument regarding creativity. She argues that an economically successful city does not become successful because it is efficient and productive; quite the contrary, she states unequivocally that “I do not mean that cities are economically valuable in spite of their inefficiency and impracticality but rather because they are inefficient and impractical.”⁵² The reason for this, she goes on, is because the process of trial and error, the process of experimenting and trying things out, while not in itself very productive or efficient – at times it is quite inefficient – is nonetheless just what makes possible the creativity that can transform a city into an economically vibrant place. Which experiments will work is not predetermined, but discouraging experimentation altogether is, for Jacobs, bound to lead to the economic ruin of a city. Similarly for Deleuze, he too will repeatedly call for an experimentation and seeking out of questions and problems wherein the consequences of such a pursuit are in no way known or predictable. In speaking of literature, Deleuze makes a comment that is quite relevant: “The

⁵¹ “Mediators,” in *Incorporations*, p. 288-89.

⁵² Jane Jacobs, *Economy of Cities*, p. 86.

conditions for literary creation, which emerge only unpredictably, with a slow turnover and progressive recognition, are fragile.”⁵³ In other words, one cannot target and call for the efficient and timely production of creativity. It always emerges in an un-timely fashion, with conditions that are fragile precisely because they are inefficient and counter to many of the pressures of society that resist such conditions (i.e., the capitalist desire for predictable efficient sources of revenue from “creative” work).

This explains why Deleuze contrasts the political left and right as he does. The left, as Deleuze sees it, seeks to transform the given system, to ask the questions and spark the creativity that will cause the system to become other. The right refuses these types of questions. “So the job of the Left,” Deleuze concludes, “whether in or out of power, is to find the sort of problem that the Right wants at all costs to hide.”⁵⁴ Moreover, what the Right seeks to resist and hide “at all costs” are just the mechanisms of power, the molecular desires and beliefs, that support and reinforce the current system and discourage if not prevent its transformation. For Deleuze, then, the revolutionary potential to transform the current system involves a becoming revolutionary of our desires. It requires taking a time out, an interruption, a self-imposed leave of absence from the continuous processes of control and communication. This is not in order to glorify a reclusive aestheticized existence as some have claimed Deleuze argues, but rather it is to encourage the conditions whereby the questions that set revolutionary movements into effect can arise. The results of such movements are not predetermined, just as one cannot predict or know

⁵³ *Incorporations*, p. 287.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

what the next great creative work of art will be like, but one thing is certain for Deleuze – the current economic and social system of capitalist control presupposes the very limit it attempts to avoid (i.e., schizophrenia), and it is precisely the reluctant approach to this limit that will allow for the overcoming of the system. It will allow for the solitude, the interruptions and time out, that will make possible the very questions, experimentation, and creativity that will transform capitalism. Deleuze was indeed a Marxist.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ If we return to the texts of Marx in light of our reading of Deleuze, this conclusion becomes apparent. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, translated by Martin Milligan (New York: Prometheus Books, 1987), Marx argues that while the animal “produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, [man] produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.” (p. 77). To state this in Deleuze’s terms, it is only when we are freed from the continuous processes of control that we are then able to be truly creative and productive. Both Marx and Deleuze, on this reading, desire the revolutionary undermining of repressive controls, controls that hinder the creativity necessary to transform ourselves and society.