Introduction: Into the Labyrinth

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Those coming to Deleuze's work for the first time (and even those returning to it anew) find themselves confronted by the dilemma of where to begin, of how to engage with it. Two difficulties present themselves. The first and more immediate one is that, conceptually, Deleuze's work is so richly detailed and complex. Thus on opening one of his books the reader is confronted by a plethora of concepts that already seem to presuppose on the reader's part an intimate familiarity with numerous other related concepts, theories, or thinkers. It is akin, perhaps, to a labyrinth in which one can easily become lost, or frustratingly disheartened at the prospect of navigating such a complex architecture.

This leads into the second, more dangerous, difficulty – the place of commentary in respect to such an encounter. Readers will, not unreasonably, peruse existing interpretations in search of guidance in relation to Deleuze's philosophy. But whatever reassurance they find will often prove misleading, for in the field that can, more or less, be called Anglo-American 'Deleuze Studies', an orthodoxy seems to have installed itself. This orthodoxy or 'Image of [Deleuzian] Thought' has multiple sources, and as a result requires detailed elaboration. In the first instance, it was the case for a long time that few of Deleuze's texts were available in English translation, making it difficult to determine any larger or more accurate 'perspective' on Deleuze's project. Related to this is the fact that the texts were translated in non-chronological order, which made it difficult to assess the development and overall significance of specific concepts and which led in turn to the distortion and sometimes misrepresentation of concepts or terminology (e.g. the 'body without organs') by various critics. Also, and perhaps most significantly, there is the acceptance at face value of Deleuze's own more 'personal' utterances in interviews (the invocation of 'buggery' as his proper method in respect to the history of philosophy, the claim that his philosophical work is to be treated as a toolbox, and so on). This last is a more significant problem than

the other two, whose force, in truth, has diminished in recent years, even if their consequences have not – particularly so in respect to the theoretical misconceptions that seem to have permanently lodged themselves under the name of Deleuze within the domain of (so-called) ‘cultural applications’ of theory. Too often misconceptions are perpetuated by appropriators’ reliance on a paraphrasing of Deleuze’s ideas drawn from secondary sources and other commentaries (although this is hardly a problem restricted to Deleuze).

In summary, the orthodoxy surrounding Deleuze consists of a hierarchy of at least three concentric rings. The outer and most general ring sees Deleuze’s work as advocating an ‘anything goes’ or ‘theory-shopping’ approach – an unsystematic, anarchic, ‘guerrilla warfare’ with concepts.¹ This approach tends to characterise the piecemeal appropriations of Deleuze’s concepts within an interdisciplinary field, such as cultural studies, where specific notions can be borrowed with little concern for their original context or their relationship to the writer’s *oeuvre* more broadly. In Deleuze’s case, this approach is usually mediated via the notions drawn from his later work of the ‘rhizome’ or the ‘nomad’. Indeed, Deleuze’s own comments about using theory as a ‘toolbox’, or of treating it as ‘cuts on a record’, have unfortunately been interpreted as licence from the ‘master’ to appropriate, deform, or outrightly abuse his ideas according to personal whim, without any prior understanding of their meaning or context.² This explains why at scholarly conferences one often comes across papers employing ‘Deleuzian’ vocabulary, usually wielded as cudgels or inhaled like hallucinogens, that immediately demonstrate a lack of understanding of the concepts being invoked.³

The middle ring or level of this orthodoxy is one which overestimates the significance of the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, representing them as the ‘essence’ or summit of Deleuze’s project, the core of the work to which everything else is related as either rehearsal, adjunct or auxiliary. Indeed some critics and commentators go further, often seeing *Anti-Oedipus* itself as but a draft for *A Thousand Plateaus*; the latter achieving a cathartic purging of the vestigial Freudian and Marxist encumbrances of the former – a sort of coital before and after (with a smoking gun replacing the post-coital cigarette). This particular belief, we would suggest, originally stems from, or is compounded by, the order of translation of Deleuze’s books overall and, relatively speaking, the long-deferred translation of several of the early works. This resulted in the development during the late 1970s and early 1980s of some very eccentric

readings and critical sawhorses that have not been overcome even today. To read such accounts one could easily have believed that *Anti-Oedipus* was an orphan text that had mysteriously appeared from nowhere, and worse, that Deleuze hadn't been writing about philosophy for at least 25 years before its publication. The notion of the 'body without organs' presents the most obvious example of this phenomenon, having largely been interpolated on the basis of crude, almost 'free associative', readings of *Anti-Oedipus*, removed from the historical context and the internal conceptual development and continuity of such earlier works as *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, or Guattari's pre-'68 essays. Another example concerns the overly literal interpretation and privileging of the concept of machinic desire introduced in *Anti-Oedipus*. Similarly, early responses to *A Thousand Plateaus* were often marked by whimsical or manic interpretations of key concepts and the reification and subsequent valorisation of its terminology.

The central and last ring of this set of orthodoxies is that which prides itself on being the most informed and familiar with the actual body and intricacies of Deleuze's work, and yet which grants an inordinate amount of significance to the influence of Nietzsche and Spinoza in retrospective interpretations of the *oeuvre* as a whole, often to the exclusion of other influences – a view that, to be fair, is in many respects validated by Deleuze himself. Given that neither of these figures have a chapter devoted to them in this volume, it should be clear that in an important respect we do not consider Deleuze necessarily to have been the best judge of his own work's development or significance. Like the second, this last approach often tends to demote or dismiss any notion of genuine development within the *oeuvre*, or to misunderstand the nature of its 'continuity', instead 'flattening' the actual work out into a de-historicised plane, as if the concepts it articulates had always been 'there' as an essence merely awaiting simple realisation or identification.

Contrary to this orthodoxy, and to Deleuze's own intermittent descriptions of his work, we would present the following three characterisations of Deleuze's philosophy, under whose aegis the current volume is presented.

First, Deleuze's thought is one which unfolds internal to an examination of the thought of others. The breadth and depth of the engagements that constitute this method remain an object of serious scholarship, and it is possible that we are just now beginning to

come to grips with the strata of Deleuze's own set of investments and interests. In other words, Deleuze's method is primarily a *method of reading*. Although rarely discussed in any direct fashion, his reading practice is clearly one of close, attentive excavation, a careful sieving of the conceptual top-soil in search of latent or even nascent elements beneath. It is a regrettable truth that often too much time is spent by commentators on parroting Deleuze's concepts (and worse still, aping his style) and not enough on grasping their significance, context, lineage, and the manner of their emergence. His reading style is, we believe, as significant for contemporary philosophy and its future as Derrida's better-known approach. However, whereas the latter's is largely etymologically oriented and given to exploiting semantic ambiguities, traces and aporias, Deleuze's strategy is more geared towards conceptual and functional differentiation, exploring the horizons of Ideas (in the Kantian sense) and bringing forth the machinic and operative features of the philosophies with which he engages. Deleuze teases out the text in such a way that the thinkers he engages with express meanings (that is, potential lines of development) which perhaps they never intended, but which striate or traverse their thought, nonetheless, like fissures within glass. It is important, however, to emphasise here that in doing so Deleuze never puts words into the mouths of others – he merely draws forth and synthesises latent strands of implicated meaning, unconscious differences that the thinkers themselves could not or would not discern within their own thought.

One striking piece of evidence in this regard is the extent to which Deleuze will go to extract a structure from the thought of even the most unlikely figures. We need only think of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, whose systematicity is (in)famous, or his magnificent, and still underrated, reading of Proust. In a quite traditional philosophical fashion, Deleuze's reading of others often unearths an implicit structural level to their work, which is then brought into resonant and dramatic contact with his own (a point that emerges repeatedly throughout the papers in this volume). In this sense there is indeed an implicit or immanent systematicity and structure to Deleuze's approach in general, but there is no system or unity as such. It is neither freewheeling nor fixed, neither homogeneous nor contained. Thus, although the work has an internal consistency and continuity, it is paradoxically also differential in nature.

That is why, despite the fact that Deleuze himself was 'more or less bludgeoned to death with the history of philosophy', (N 5) what

we find in his work, given this method of reading, is something very much like the history of philosophy itself – prosecuted, it is true, in a novel and sometimes even perverse fashion, but nonetheless one that does not dispense with the diligent care, attention to detail and contextualising practice that the best examples of works in the history of philosophy demonstrate. In short, we believe that there is no way to grasp the philosophy of Deleuze in itself. It must be approached through the many doorways and intersecting paths provided by the multitude of others with whom Deleuze's work engages.

Second, this volume is concerned to properly locate Deleuze as a philosopher and his work as a genuinely philosophical undertaking. One of the consequences of what we have termed the first level of orthodoxy with respect to Deleuze has been that his thought has much too easily been located outside or beyond philosophy. On the contrary, it is said, to claim that Deleuze is a systematic metaphysician is to risk sounding like the very figure that Deleuze's thought wanted to break away from. Of course, to reject this is not to suggest that Deleuzian thought has not had, or should not have, effects beyond the regime of philosophy. Indeed, Deleuze himself increasingly insisted on the importance of other discourses and practices for philosophy, and of the creative capacity of philosophy to 'interfere' with extra-philosophical points of view.

Finally, rather than moving quickly and unquestioningly towards an applied reading of Deleuze that would betray the very spirit of inquiry that motivates a philosophy of difference – as if all the spade-work was done and our understanding of his work now complete, with little remaining other than some vague obligation to act upon it – this volume is founded on the opposite orientation. There is still so much about Deleuze that remains to be explored, let alone understood. Rather than expanding our vision away from the text itself, we would claim that it is time to turn inwards, and to tread carefully the sometimes obscure pathways that constitute the simultaneous singularity and multiplicity that is Deleuze's philosophical project.

The goal of this book is, then, to place emphasis on these three issues, and to foreground as strongly as possible this approach to reading Deleuze. In what follows, this is undertaken with respect to twenty of Deleuze's key points of reference. Broadly speaking, they fall into two categories. On the one hand, there are those thinkers who are well known on their own terms, but whose role in the Deleuzian text is, or has been, difficult to determine. We might consider Leibniz,

Kant, Marx and Freud to be exemplary in this respect. On the other hand, there are those figures who are not themselves well known in the Anglo-American context, because they are seemingly more historically 'distant' from us, and their work is largely not available in English. As such, Deleuze's use of them presents two levels of difficulty – first in ascertaining the sense of their own thought, and then in regards to examining the way in which Deleuze relates them to his own philosophy. Here, we might note in particular Solomon Maimon, Raymond Ruyer, Gabriel Tarde and Gilbert Simondon. With respect to both groups, and indeed all of the figures who fall between or on either side of them, the approach taken in this volume is the same: to attempt to demonstrate the role and significance they hold for Deleuze's *metaphysics*, and to encourage the reader to explore these connections further.

This volume then is aimed at providing various clear points of entry into the labyrinth of Deleuze's thought, but without sacrificing any of its philosophical complexity or integrity in doing so. Furthermore, it is intended as more than just another addition to the ever-growing flood of introductions that too often serve as a replacement for thinking. As such, this volume of essays is a call to arms on behalf of a philosophy of difference that is only now emerging into the light, and which is too often side-tracked by misguided, utilitarian attempts to appropriate, render and reduce Deleuze's philosophy to a grab-bag of tools, slogans and manifestos for the promotion of this or that cultural agenda. Instead, like 'Ariadne's Thread' (one of the alternative titles for this volume) this collection will ideally provide alternative paths of exploration, all valid yet none of which can be said to be definitive, encompassing, or complete. As a result the reader will encounter in these essays differing, unfamiliar, even controversial versions of Deleuze – an ultra-rationalist Deleuze, a mathematical Deleuze, an esoteric or mystical Deleuze, and so forth: in short, a differential and problematic Deleuze. No longer a 'subject' but a veritable field of endeavour in respect to a philosophy of difference. Not just an ideal Deleuze or a Deleuzian ideal but 'Deleuze' as *Idea*.

Notes

1. This notion appears to have been attached in turn to several different Continental thinkers – Derrida, Agamben, Badiou, etc. – until it is subsequently proven inaccurate by close critical reading, whereupon the characterisation is then attached to some other 'rising star' of theory.

2. Deleuzian studies, as with any field, has attracted its eccentrics (perhaps even a higher proportion than most). Too often, it is true, Deleuze has become the fetish of the 'crank', his philosophy taken up and trumpeted by those who respect and understand it least. The blame for this, however, can hardly be laid at Deleuze's own feet, for his work is never anything other than rigorous in its analysis, development, synthesis and proliferation of concepts. It is, we suspect, merely a phenomenon due, on the one hand, to the nature of public discourse and the demand for 'communication' at any cost and, on the other, to the simple fact that philosophy is too often appropriated, adulterated and *commodified* so as to slake the never-ending thirst of an 'intellectual' market driven by, and pretentiously desperate for, fashionable slogans.
3. This is not to suggest, of course, that there is only one true 'Deleuze' whose real meanings should be preserved and policed at all costs for fear of their prostitution or profanation, but simply an acknowledgment that even a plurality of readings must bear some stronger relation to the original texts than the mere citing of terms and issues. Nor are we suggesting that attempts at 'applying' Deleuze's concepts or terms are necessarily misguided or worthless. Clearly, such undertakings have their place – we are simply advocating that they be pursued with appropriate respect for the original text.