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*Delenze and Guattari's*  
**A Thousand Plateaus**

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*Deleuze and Guattari's*  
A Thousand Plateaus

A Critical Introduction  
and Guide

BRENT ADKINS

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## *Contents*

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction: A Preceptual Semiotics	1
1. Rhizome	32
2. 1914: One or Several Wolves?	34
3. 10,000 BC: The Geology of Morals	42
4. November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics	65
5. 537 BC-AD 70: On Several Regimes of Signs	83
6. November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?	96
7. Year Zero: Faculty	108
8. 1874: Three Novellas, or "What Happened?"	120
9. 1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity	128
10. 1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible . . .	141
11. 1837: Of the ReRAIN	171
12. 1827: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine	191
13. 7000 BC: Apparatus of Capture	218
14. 1410: The Smooth and the Striated	251
Conclusion: The Ethics of Becoming	244
Suggestions for Further Reading	251
Bibliography	254
Index	260

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Brent Adkins  
September 2011

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## *Introduction: A Perceptual Semiotics*

Neither Félix Guattari nor Gilles Deleuze ever shied away from the label "metaphysician." This is a bold claim, particularly in a time when the "death of metaphysics" has been proclaimed so loudly and for so long, not only by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger but also by Deleuze and Guattari's contemporary, Jacques Derrida.<sup>1</sup> Since Deleuze and Guattari are unabashedly doing metaphysics, the place to begin understanding their work, as well as Deleuze's single-author works, is with metaphysics. I want to begin by briefly describing the metaphysics that I see at work across Deleuze's entire corpus, so that I can place *A Thousand Plateaus* in context.

If I were to describe Deleuze's metaphysics in a single word it would be "continuity." This, of course, raises numerous questions, chiefly, Continuity of what? We will get to these questions, but first in an effort to clarify what I have in mind by continuity, I would like to contrast it with discontinuity. I think the dominant word in Western metaphysics has followed from discontinuity. This discontinuity is most clearly and importantly seen in the work of Plato, who is at great pains to show the incommensurable distance between virtue and virtuous acts, between beauty and beautiful things, between the good and particular goods. These pairs cannot be merely different in degree, as if one could define beauty empirically if one looked at enough beautiful things. No, these pairs must be different in kind. There can be no common measure between them. Beauty and beautiful things belong to different orders of being.

This distinction between different orders of being becomes codified in philosophy as the distinction between the sensible and

intelligible. This is the fundamental metaphysical discontinuity that organizes much of Western thought. Discontinuity, however, raises the issue of relation. If these two realms are ontologically distinct, what is the nature of their relation to one another? The typical answer given, although the details vary widely, is some kind of hylomorphism. That is, the sensible and the intelligible are related to one another as content and form. Thus, in Plato the ability to recognize any sensible object as beautiful depends on its participation to some degree in the form of beauty. In this case the integrity and universality of beauty itself is maintained, while we can still admit that sensible objects can be more or less beautiful.

The problem with the discontinuity of the sensible and the intelligible and its concomitant hylomorphism is that it requires a doctrine of analogy or resemblance between the sensible and the intelligible. For Deleuze and Guattari, the difficulty with any doctrine of analogy is that it fundamentally fails at the task of metaphysics. If, for example, I claim that this statue is beautiful, several related corollaries necessarily arise. First, the statue is not beautiful in the same way that beauty is beautiful. (We'll leave aside for the moment Aristotle's objection that different beautiful objects are not beautiful in the same way.) Second, as a sensible object it cannot in principle be identical to the intelligible form of beauty, so it must be in some respects not beautiful. Analogy thus entails both affirmation and negation, and it is here that we can see the beginning of what will become negative theology in the Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup> The reason, then, that discontinuity (and its attendant hylomorphism and analogy) fails at metaphysics is that it ultimately cannot say what "is" is.

The solution to this difficulty for Deleuze is to reject the discontinuity of the sensible and intelligible and affirm instead their continuity. Not surprisingly this move has entailments that inversely mirror the entailments of discontinuity. Since continuity does not treat the sensible and the intelligible as different in kind it need not resort to a doctrine of analogy to account for their interrelation. The continuity of the sensible and the intelligible instead entails the univocity of being. Being is said everywhere in the same way. Being speaks with "one voice." Furthermore, continuity rejects hylomorphism and replaces it with hylozoism. "Hylozoism" is a term coined by Ralph Cudworth in his *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) to describe any position that held that matter is alive. Of course, to describe matter as living is to impute to it the power of self-movement or self-organization, a position that can only be seen



as inherently contradictory by those holding to any form of hylo-morphism, which held that matter received its creative force from an external principle. Kant is explicit about the contradictory nature of hylozoism in both the pre-critical *Lessons of a Spinozist* (1766) and the critical *Critique of Judgment* (1790). For Deleuze and Guattari the affirmation of hylozoism is crucial, because it avoids anchoring life in a transcendent principle and instead seeks purely immanent principles.

### **DELEUZE'S EARLY WORK**

Deleuze's affirmation of the continuity of the sensible and intelligible manifests itself in different ways across all of his works. The first way it manifests itself is through the choice of subject matter. Deleuze's earliest books (1953–68) are monographs on individual philosophical and literary figures. Some of the choices seem obvious, especially Proust, Kant, and Nietzsche. Some of the choices, though, seem very strange, especially Sacher-Masoch, Spinoza, and Bergson. There are also what appear to be glaring omissions for a scholar in France after World War 2. There is no Hegel, no Marx, no Freud, and no Merleau-Ponty or phenomenology of any kind. My contention is that Deleuze chose those figures that he thought had something to contribute to the continuity thesis and avoided those that did not. Even in the case of Kant—who explicitly affirms the discontinuity of the sensible and intelligible as the starting point of the critical project in his “Inaugural Dissertation” (1770), and who Deleuze calls an “enemy”—Deleuze argues that the fundamental discontinuity that generates Kant's theory of the faculties presupposes a more foundational continuity in the “(but indeterminate) accord” of the faculties found in reflective judgment.<sup>2</sup>

Affirming the continuity of the sensible and the intelligible also manifests itself in the type of questions that Deleuze asks. The fundamental question type that arises out of discontinuity is, “What is . . . ?” “What is . . . ?” questions are questions about essence, about what does not change. In short, they are questions about the intelligible as distinct from the sensible. Since Deleuze's affirmation of continuity does not see the intelligible as different in kind from the sensible, he gravitates toward different kinds of questions and toward philosophers who ask these questions. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), for example, Deleuze shows that Nietzsche's primary question is not “What is . . . ?” but “Which one?” Notice, though, what Deleuze says about “Which one?” in response to Socrates' misunderstanding of

the sophist's question in his dialogues: "For it [ "Which one?" ] does not refer, as Socrates believed, to discrete examples, but to the continuity of concrete objects taken in their becoming, to the becoming beautiful of all objects citable or cited as examples." "Which one?" does not seek the universal, intelligible essences of things. Rather, the question in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche means: "what are the forces which take hold of a given thing, what is the will that possesses it?" "Which one?" allows Deleuze to ask the experimental questions, following Spinoza, What can a body do? What is a thing capable of? What are the forces that compose it and decompose it? These are questions of becoming in which essence is not seen as the ground but the temporary result of a continuous process.

For Deleuze, then, the history of philosophy, and the history of thought in general, expresses itself in these two tendencies, one toward discontinuity the other toward continuity. While the tendency toward discontinuity has always been the most dominant, one of the primary tasks of Deleuze's early work on philosophical and literary figures is to foreground (or tendency toward) continuity. We can see a clear example of this in *Proust and Signs* (1966). Here Deleuze takes up Proust's contention that philosophy is misguided by the assumption that the thinker "naturally seeks the truth."<sup>2</sup> For Proust truth is not naturally sought, rather one is involuntarily driven to the truth. Truth does not readily reveal itself; it is always a matter of signs, and it is always forced on us. The jealous man is forced to look for the truth of betrayal by the sign of lying in the lover's face. This is where thought happens for Proust: this is the moment of creation that far outstrips the work of philosophy. For Deleuze, *In Search of Lost Time* is a "search for truth" but it is also the recognition that the truth cannot be found by asking the question, What is the truth? Proust shows with great force that the more germane questions are: Who wants to know the truth? Under what conditions was this person driven to search for truth? These questions remove us from the realm of universal a priori truth that is discontinuous with sensible experience and place us squarely in a realm in which "truth has an essential relation to time."<sup>3</sup> Thus, on the presupposition of continuity even the age-old search for truth becomes transformed.

#### DIFFERENCE AND REPETITION

The notion of continuity has roots not only in the history of philosophy but also in the history of mathematics. One might view

Greek mathematics, in particular geometry, as having two poles. One pole, represented by Euclid, deals with the properties of static geometrical figures. The other pole, represented by Archimedes, concerns the construction of actual geometric figures. To apply the lens from the discussion of the history of philosophy, Euclid pursues a geometry predicated on discontinuity, while Archimedes pursues a geometry predicated on continuity. That is, Euclid is concerned about the universal, intelligible components of geometric figures, while Archimedes is concerned about the processes by which actual, different geometric figures might be generated. More important, however, is the way in which the Euclidean geometry of stable objects came not only to dominate geometry but also to be seen as the model for mathematics. Ultimately, this privileging of discontinuity expresses itself in mathematics as the preference for the discrete over the continuous. From the perspective of mathematics, the discrete has the tremendous advantage of making things countable and thereby subject to algebraic analysis. The continuous, in contrast to the discrete, is messy, slippery, and unstable. One doesn't extract timeless truths from the continuous; one intervenes strategically. The discrete is axiomatic; the continuous is problematic. The difficulty that Deleuze sees with the triumph of the discrete in mathematics is that life is not discrete. Life presents constant and continuous variability. It is for precisely this reason that Deleuze deploys the resources provided by calculus. Calculus thinks the continuous and variable without making it discrete. Calculus allows one to think without recourse to discontinuity. There is no immutable, intelligible component that the object of analysis more or less conforms to. There is only constant variability that tends toward infinity.<sup>5</sup>

This mathematical view of continuity drives much of the analysis in *Difference and Repetition* (1968). Deleuze is explicit that he is interested in a "metaphysics of differential calculus." What he means by this is threefold. First, Deleuze is not arguing that calculus is a metaphor, or that other disciplines including philosophy should become more "mathematical." What he is arguing is that thought itself is composed of differential relations (which Deleuze here calls both "dialectic" and "Idea"), and as a result all images of thought that attempt to ground difference in the unity of a representation (e.g., Spirit, Reason, Subject, etc.) thereby institute a discontinuity between the representation and what it governs.

Second, this metaphysics of differential calculus does not correspond to any historical incarnation of calculus, which Deleuze

sees as caught in the antinomy of the infinite and the finite. As he writes:

*The entire alternative between finite and infinite applies very badly to difference because it represents only an infinity of representation. We see this, moreover, in the case of calculus: modern finitist formalism has by the nature of the difference itself no less than the former infinitist interpretations, because both fail to measure ... the "problem" from which the calculus derives its name ... The reason is that this alternative [between finite and infinite] expresses only the oscillations of representation with regard to an always dominant identity, or rather the oscillations of the identical with regard to an always rebel transmatter.<sup>12</sup>*

Thus Deleuze takes mathematical calculus and creates the concept of metaphysical calculus out of it as a way of thinking difference in itself. "Differential calculus is not the unimaginative calculus of the utilitarian, the crude arithmetic calculus which subordinates thought to other things or to other ends, but the algebra of pure thought ... the only calculus 'beyond good and evil.'<sup>13</sup>

Third, once the temptation to subordinate difference to identity is removed, a metaphysical calculus can think continually as continuity. That is, the continuously variable nature of an idea can be thought as such.

At this point one might object that difference and continuity are mutually exclusive. Deleuze can either affirm continuity or he can affirm difference, but he cannot do both at the same time. If everything is thought on a continuous, isn't everything in some sense the same? As we saw above, the problem with an analogical account of being is that nothing "is" in the same way. On a univocal account of being everything "is" in the same way, but this seems to erase the very notion of difference that Deleuze is championing in *Difference and Repetition*. As numerous commentators have pointed out in response to Alain Badiou's criticism that Deleuze's doctrine of univocity erases difference, the oneness of being does not entail the sameness of beings. Univocity is not unity. In fact, it is only on the supposition of univocity that difference can be real at all. Univocity ensures that things differ in exactly the same respect, while a doctrine of analogy can never get to the point of real difference. Analogy can never describe real difference because analogical difference seeks to compare objects that are thought to differ in ontological kind. If things differ in ontological kind, though, their true difference (if it exists) can never be known. One is left comparing objects that seem to be similar in some respects but dissimilar in

others. Only if continuous variation is continuous variation of one and the same being can the real difference between any two points on the continuum arise.

## THE LOGIC OF SENSE

In *The Logic of Sense* (1969), Deleuze draws on both the Stoics and Lewis Carroll in order to think the relation between sense and non-sense. Not surprisingly, articulating this relation centers on a "series of paradoxes." The purpose of exploring these paradoxes is to show that the separation of sense and non-sense into differing ontological kinds only results in reproducing Platonism. In opposition to Platonism Deleuze takes up the Stoics (due to their having been the initiators of a new image of the philosopher.)<sup>12</sup> Deleuze takes up the continuity thesis from the very first series, "paradoxes of pure becoming," in the distinction between "good sense," which "affirms that in all things there is a determinable sense or direction," and paradox, which is "the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time." Here Deleuze equates "pure events" with "becoming" and notes that it "pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once."<sup>13</sup> The very thought of becoming eludes "good sense" and suggests not a transcendence that would anchor becoming and always reduce it to a *telos* toward which all becomings must tend, but an immanent becoming that tends in opposite directions at the same time.

In addition to good sense, paradox also eludes "common sense." The distinction between good sense and common sense is already present in *Difference and Repetition*, and here Deleuze uses it in the same way.<sup>14</sup> Common sense articulates the world in terms of stable identities. Becoming, or the pure event, "destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities."<sup>15</sup> For Deleuze this continual destruction and repositing of both good sense and common sense manifests itself in the paradoxes of language, and it is precisely at this point that Deleuze posits language itself as a continuum with two opposed and abstract poles. Commenting on Plato's *Cratylus*, Deleuze writes, "Or further still, is it not possible that there are two distinct dimensions lateral to language in general—one always concealed by the other, yet continuously coming to the aid of, or assisting under that other?"<sup>16</sup> Language is always subject to the pull of both poles simultaneously. Philosophy has seen this pull but has tried to master it through the metaphysics of discontinuity by subordinating language to both good sense and common sense.

Deleuze's metaphysics of continually rehabilitates the subordinated pole "expressing the movement of rebel becomings."<sup>17</sup>

Deleuze's discussion of the event in *The Logic of Sense* is also structured as a continuum. In this case the poles of the continuum are Chronos and Aion, two opposed conceptions of time. Chronos is the eternal now that excludes both past and present, while Aion is the unlimited past and future that never lets the present appear. In orientating the logic of sense, Deleuze discovers that it is paradoxical and involves one in differing "series." These series are both corporeal, concerning the mixtures of bodies, and incorporeal, concerning meaning. These series are incompatible with one another, which is why language continually generates paradoxes. Chronos is the temporal series of corporeal mixtures, while Aion is the temporal series of incorporeal meanings. Philosophy by and large has been unable to think the event because it has subordinated Aion to Chronos. Chronos is privileged precisely because it requires both good sense (a single direction) and common sense (stable identities) to time. Aion destroys both good sense and common sense by continually reintroducing becoming, events, into Chronos.<sup>18</sup>

#### ANTI-OEDIPUS

Deleuze and Guattari were first introduced to each other in 1966 by their mutual friend Jean-Pierre Muryard. Over the next twenty-five years they collaborated on four books together: *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), *Kafka* (1975), *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and *What is Philosophy?* (1991). Deleuze was already well known for his work in the history of philosophy, as well as his more recent works, *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. Guattari was also well known, but for very different reasons. He was a practicing psychoanalyst at La Borde clinic and was also being groomed as Jacques Lacan's heir apparent.<sup>19</sup> At the time Deleuze was becoming increasingly interested in psychoanalysis, and Guattari was already beginning to rethink psychoanalytic concepts through the lens of Deleuze's work in *Difference and Repetition*. Of particular importance was a paper that Guattari wrote in 1969 entitled "Machine and Structure," which introduced the idea of the "machinic unconscious" that would be taken up in Deleuze and Guattari's last collaboration, *Anti-Oedipus*.

From their first meeting in 1969 to the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* in 1972, Deleuze and Guattari worked intensely together on the project. The result detonated on the French intellectual scene with

the "two of a kind." It rearranged the landscape and forced one to choose sides. Psychoanalysts, particularly Lacanians, were incensed by the attacks on psychoanalysis. The book itself is certainly an attack on psychoanalysis. What Deleuze and Guattari object to in psychoanalysis is its attempt to apply both good sense and common sense to the unconscious. The common sense that they see being applied to the unconscious is the Oedipal drama whereby by every component of both psychic and social life is refracted through the Oedipal angle of "mommy-daddy-me." Everything in one's life must coalesce around one of these three stable identities. Anything that does not conform to these identities is aberrant and in need of analysis. The good sense that Deleuze and Guattari see psychoanalysis applying to the unconscious is the practice of analysis itself. The single meaning applied monotonously to all patients by psychoanalysis is Oedipus. When Melanie Klein is faced with a young patient, for example, she insists that the toys he's playing with are really him, or his father, or his mother. As far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, the answer to every analyst's question is already set, "Answer daddy-and-mommy when I speak to you!"<sup>29</sup>

In response to the good sense and common sense of psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari propose schizoanalysis. Unlike psychoanalysis, which functions on the discontinuity between the universal, a mini-Oedipus and individual unconsciousnesses, which are fleeing and imperfect representations of Oedipus, schizoanalysis sees the unconscious as a series of machinic connections, disjunctions, and conjunctions, which do not represent anything. More importantly, though, not only is the unconscious a series of machinic connections but society as a whole is constituted by a series of machinic connections. Thus, not only is the Freudian thesis that society is the unconscious writ large undercut, so is the Marxist thesis that the unconscious is simply a reflection of material, economic conditions. Here we return to the continuity thesis that undergirds Deleuze's metaphysics. In this instance the social and the unconscious are thought as the result of the same "process of production." There is only one kind of production, what they call here "desiring production," and desire produces the real whether it is social, political, economic, familial, sexual, or unconscious. The questions of schizoanalysis, the questions that can be asked of any entity (regardless of its scale or scope) are: What are the connections that constitute this entity? What further connections are made possible and impossible by this particular set of connections? These questions are only possible on the supposition of metaphysical continuity.

## A TELLOR SAND PLATEAUS

Between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari collaborated on a book about Kafka. *Kafka* continues many of the themes found in *Anti-Oedipus*, such as Oedipus and desire, and anticipates many of the themes that will be taken up in *A Thousand Plateaus*, such as minority, immanence, and assemblage. *A Thousand Plateaus* is also profoundly concerned with thinking through the implications of a metaphysics of continuity. If one could characterize Deleuze's early works as seeking out exemplars of this metaphysics of continuity, then *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* become a positive working out of this fundamental idea. In a similar vein *Anti-Oedipus* appears as a scathing critique of the deployment of a metaphysics of discontinuity to both the individual and society, while *A Thousand Plateaus* pursues the positive expression of the metaphysics of continuity. I think much of the strangeness and difficulty of *A Thousand Plateaus* arises precisely from this shift in metaphysics. We are so used to thinking in terms of good sense and common sense that when these are replaced by stabilities that are the product of a process rather than the ground of that process, the resulting claims can be difficult to integrate. Just as any good triathlete might, Deleuze and Guattari destroy the world in order to rebuild it. The difficulty is that what they have rebuilt is so at odds with our traditional way of thinking about the world that we are not entirely sure whether the world is ours or some alien visa.

While I do not want to alleviate fully the strangeness of *A Thousand Plateaus*, I do want to show in this introduction that it shares the same metaphysics as Deleuze's other works. Furthermore, I want to show that the concept of "assemblage" (*agencement*) provides the book with its thematic unity. Deleuze himself is quite explicit about this. When asked in an interview about the unity of *A Thousand Plateaus*, he replies, "I think it is the idea of an assemblage."<sup>2</sup> At this point, though, while "assemblage" appears as an answer to a question about the thematic unity of a book, the more important question is, What philosophical question is "assemblage" an answer to? Bearing in mind that Deleuze and Guattari want to scrutinize the question as much as the answer, we can think of "assemblage" as an answer to the venerable philosophical question, What is a thing?

The trouble with "things," as philosophy soon discovered, is that they seem to combine two contradictory properties: stability and change. Identifying a thing as a table entails both the recognition that the object possesses some kind of permanence but also that it is



also subject to modification. The desk in my office, for example, has numerous scars and stains on the top, and a couple of the drawers are missing their pulls. It's still recognizable as a desk, but it's also easy to imagine this sort of decay happening to the point where the desk is no longer recognizable as a desk. Furthermore, long before that happens, it will be no longer usable as a desk. While Heraclitus and Parmenides sought to minimize either stability or change, Plato responded to the problem by strictly separating these two properties into the discontinuity of the sensible and the intelligible. The establishment of the discontinuity between the sensible and intelligible, as we have seen, is the inaugural gesture of Western philosophy and has been the predominant way of dealing with the paradox of the "thing." The stability of a thing is attributed to its intelligible nature, while the thing's ability to undergo change is attributed to its sensible nature. For the most part, the properties related to the thing's intelligible nature are its essence, while the properties related to its sensible nature are its accidents.

Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages addresses the paradox of the thing in a radically different way. First, they replace the discontinuity of the sensible and intelligible with a continuity of the sensible and intelligible. It is at this point that one can begin to see what Deleuze means by "the reversal of Platonism," heralded in an essay from 1967.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in his "Inaugural Dissertation" (1770), Kant explicitly invokes Plato and the discontinuity of the sensible and intelligible as the origin of his critical project. Kant argues this against the backdrop of modern philosophy, which saw a brief reassertion of the continuity of the sensible and the intelligible. Rationalists such as Spinoza and Leibniz argue that the sensible is continuous with the intelligible but the sensible does not reach the same clarity and distinctness of the intelligible. Empiricists such as Berkeley and Hume hold to the same continuity of the sensible and intelligible as the rationalists, but reverse the priority. For the empiricists what certainly one can have arises from the sensible, and the further one moves from the sensible into the ungrounded speculation of the intelligible, the further one moves from certainty. I think Deleuze's interest in early modern philosophers such as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hume stems from this continuity, that all affirmed the continuity of the sensible and the intelligible. Even in his book on Kant, which purports to give Kant a "monstrous child," Deleuze argues that the fundamental discontinuity that generates Kant's theory of the faculties presupposes a more foundational continuity in the free play of the faculties.<sup>23</sup>

As we have seen, the same battle between continuity and discontinuity is also played out in the history of mathematics, first in the distinction between axiomatic and problematic geometry and more recently in the attempt to ground calculus in set theory. If we recast this battle as a response to the question, "What is a thing?", we discover that the same tension between stability and change is at work. The preferences for axiomatic geometry and for grounding calculus in set theory both reflect the idea that mathematics properly deals with the discrete, the quantifiable, that for which we can produce an axiom. Thus, the "thing" in mathematics is the countable. Deleuze's use of mathematics, particularly his use of calculus in *Difference and Repetition*, shows that he remains interested in that "lost" object of mathematics, the intensive, continuous, abstract "thing." The reasons behind the choice of calculus in that book are still operative in *A Thousand Plateaus*. These reasons become explicit in Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between royal science and minor or nomad science. "Royal science is inseparable from a 'hylomorphic' model implying both a form that organizes matter and a matter prepared for the form" (TP 368). Royal science is designed to work in concert with the state and deals in discrete and ideal essences, such as circles. In contrast to this, nomad science is inseparable from a "hylozoic" model in which matter is self-organizing and generates its own form. Nomad science is not interested in circles as an ideal type, but it is interested in "roundness," the continuous curve, which sometimes appears as a circle. But, for nomad science, the circle is not what roundness necessarily or even ideally tends toward.<sup>21</sup>

For Deleuze and Guattari, what has counted as properly philosophical and properly scientific has been determined by a fidelity to the fundamental discontinuity of the sensible and the intelligible. One of the great virtues of *A Thousand Plateaus* (and of Deleuze's work in general) is its creation of a philosophy that is predicated on the continuity of the sensible and intelligible. This basic supposition allows Deleuze and Guattari to reread not only the history of philosophy but the history of thought in general through a new lens. New connections are made. New concepts are created. Ideas are rescued from obsolescence and given new life. Within the context of fundamental continuity, we can make sense of a whole host of inter-related terms crucial to Deleuze and Guattari's project: immanence, life, chaos, schizophrenia, event, etc.

Even supposing that we accept the continuity of the sensible and intelligible along with Deleuze and Guattari, the ontological status of these two terms remains unclear. What must be avoided at all

costs—if the continuity of the sensible and intelligible is to be maintained—is subordinating these terms under different orders of being. They must be seen as differing in degree but not differing in kind. Deleuze and Guattari's system is one of ontological univocity, which means that being is said in the same way of everything. To trade in ontological equivocity, as all forms of thought that begin with the discontinuity of the sensible and the intelligible do, is always a theological move that requires a doctrine of analogy to explain the relation between the sensible and the intelligible.<sup>39</sup> But if they do not belong to different orders of being, then how are we to think them? The sensible and the intelligible, along with all the other binarisms proposed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, should be thought of as abstract and opposing poles of the continuum to which they belong. For example, returning to Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of royal and nomad science, they write, "What we have, rather, are two formally different conceptions of science, and, ontologically, a single field of interaction . . ." (TP 367). The ontologically single field is the univocal continuity on which we might find two very different conceptions of science. I would argue that in this case these two different conceptions of science are two different orientations toward which particular scientific assemblages may tend. Royal science thus names that tendency of scientific practice toward universal axioms and ideal, discrete objects (the circle). Nomad science, in contrast, names that tendency of scientific practice toward continuous events (routiness). What we discover beginning with the first plateau is that these two orientations constitute a "perceptual semiotics." The task is not to categorize science as either royal or nomad, but to recognize that all scientific practices will involve some combination of both royal and nomadic tendencies. The project of becoming, of creating the new, begins with seeing the nomadic in everything.

This brings us at last back to assemblages as a response to the paradox of the thing as possessing in some respect both stasis and change. For Deleuze and Guattari this paradox is solved not by assigning stasis and change to two ontologically distinct properties that happen to come together in a particular thing, but by claiming that an assemblage always possesses tendencies toward both stasis and change as the abstract poles of a single continuum. Just as for Spinoza a body is a ratio of motion and rest, an assemblage is a ratio of its tendencies toward both stability and change. The more that a particular scientific practice, say Euclid's geometry, tends toward universal axioms as its proper expression, the more resistant to change it will become. On the other hand, the more that a

particular scientific practice is counteracted in what constitutes its "proper expansion" and instead develops and changes its method in response to the problems it is trying to solve, say Archimedes' geometry, the more such a practice will tend toward change. However, any particular practice will display both of these tendencies in a certain ratio. Furthermore, the privileging of one tendency over another may be the result of a whole host of "extra-scientific" pressures placed on scientific practice (e.g., state regulation, economic interest, etc.). Finally, it would be naive to assume that there is a single monolithic "scientific practice." It is more likely that there are multiple competing scientific practices, each with a different ratio of the tendencies toward stability and change. As a result, Deleuze and Guattari continue, "royal science continually appropriates the contents of vague or nomad science, while nomad science continually cuts the contents of royal science loose" (TP 367). Royal science is that tendency to take the vague (roundness) and make it discrete (the circle) so that it can articulate the eternal, intelligible core. Nomad science is that tendency to take the discrete (the circle) and see it as an instance of the continuous (roundness) that presents an ever-changing problem for thought (the event).

Deleuze and Guattari are thus faced with two interrelated problems. First, they must (re)articulate things in terms of assemblages. These assemblages, furthermore, are to be thought as concrete collections of heterogeneous materials that display tendencies toward both stability and change. The second problem is that because Deleuze and Guattari are uncovering the tendency toward change as crucial to understanding assemblages, one might take them as arguing that the task of philosophy is to pursue the tendency toward change to the exclusion of the tendency toward stability. While it is certainly true that what is new in Deleuze and Guattari's work is an account of assemblages as having opposing tendencies, and that this account does in fact change the ratio for assemblages by increasing the degree to which we think about change, it is absolutely critical that both tendencies be thought. The danger of an unrestricted tendency toward change is just as great as that of an unrestricted tendency toward stability. To adapt a line from late in *A Thousand Plateaus*, never believe that change alone will suffice to save us.<sup>28</sup>

## PLATEAUS

Within the context of the continuity thesis and assemblages, we are now finally in a position to answer the question, What is a plateau?

As we've seen, the very question, *What is...?* is already ill-formed with respect to Deleuze's overall philosophical trajectory. However, for the purposes of this introduction we can say that a plateau is an assemblage. That is, a plateau is a particular way of answering the question, *What is a thing?* that allows Deleuze and Guattari to pursue the more germane questions: *Which one? What can it do? What connections are made possible or impossible by it, or through it?*

The term "plateau" comes from Gregory Bateson's work in anthropology, and Deleuze and Guattari describe it as "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end" (TP 29). There are two important things worth noting at this point about their appropriation of the term. First, a plateau is constructed of intensities. The notion of intensity, of course, brings us right back to the continuity thesis. Intensities exist as continuous gradations rather than discrete points. Thinking of a plateau in Bateson's sense is a way of thinking about assemblages from the standpoint of continuity rather than discontinuity. Second, plateaus are non-teleological. There is no proper end toward which plateaus tend. Plateaus do not naturally seek the complete expression of their form, nor are they judged by whether or not they have achieved that form. The reason that plateaus are non-teleological is that they are *hybridic, self-organizing*; they generate their own form, not as an eternal essence but as a stable state.

But, stable states of intensity differ profoundly from traditional accounts of things. As we have seen, traditional accounts of things focus on the stable, the discrete, the universal, and the eternal. Deleuze and Guattari's use of the concept of the plateau seeks to replace this with the continuous. A plateau is a temporary coagulation of intensive processes into a stable state. Different plateaus will, of course, exist on different temporal and spatial scales. The intensities of tectonic movement that stabilize into mountain ranges exist on a vastly different temporal and spatial scale compared to the intensities that stabilize into a person's mood. The important thing for Deleuze and Guattari is to be able to speak about the processes that create the mountain range and the processes that result in a particular mood without resorting to the imposition of a universal form that is ontologically different in kind from the process that it's informing.

Another important aspect of plateaus that arises from this account is that they are "dated." One of the interesting features of A

*A Thousand Plateaus* is that every chapter (except the last, for reasons we'll discuss) has a specific date attached to it. Deleuze and Guattari date their plateaus in an effort to think assemblages as the result of intensive processes. Intensively is nothing other than continuity itself. It is a way of talking about movement, development, becoming, without subordinating these primary processes to the discrete and quantifiable. Deleuze and Guattari contend that under certain conditions the intensive can produce the extensive. An egg provides a ready illustration this idea. Prior to hatching the chick develops out of the white of the egg, while the yolk provides nutrients. If we examine an egg white prior to this development, though, there is no indication which part of the white is to become the beak, or a wing, or a heart. The egg white contains nothing like discrete parts that knit themselves together in the process of maturation. There is nothing discrete about an egg white at all. It is a continuous gradient of protein intensities that under the right conditions of warmth and additional nutrients shift from the intensive to the extensive. As these shifts occur the chick growing inside the egg becomes increasingly stable, increasingly quantifiable, increasingly discrete.

For Deleuze and Guattari any given thing thus exists on a continuum that lies between the fully intensive and the fully extensive. Take a human body, for example. A fully grown adult has converted most of its intensive processes into stable extensities. An adult won't grow anymore, change eye-color, or develop gills. Some processes, though, remain at the intensive level even in an adult. Chief among these are biological metabolism, which takes flows of nutrients—themselves converted from food, which is extensive—-and through the process of digestion absorbs the nutrients to maintain the stability of the adult human body.

In the same way, we might also think about thought itself as an intensive process. Thoughts seem to percolate in and out of conscious awareness for the most part. However, thoughts can also coalesce around a particular idea. Such an idea can graft other ideas to itself and ultimately develop into what we might call a mindset or habit of thought. Deleuze is already thinking in these terms in his early work on Proust, as we saw above. It's only when jealousy becomes fixed as an idea (extensive) that it begins to orient one's other thoughts and behaviors. Furthermore, since mindsets are so difficult to change it is tempting to focus on the ideas, what's stable, rather than the intensive processes that produce them. Plateaus are Deleuze and Guattari's way of accounting for the moments of stability within any intensive process, and more importantly the process

itself. Thus, every plateau will have three components: 1) The amount of stability under consideration. 2) One pole on an intensity continuum that marks the plateau's limit in terms of stability. 3) Another pole that marks the limit of change.

Each chapter of this book will seek to make explicit these three aspects in every plateau in *A Thousand Plateaus*. As a brief example of what I have in mind, let's look at language. Language is a concrete assemblage that exhibits tendencies toward stability. This tendency toward stability in language Deleuze and Guattari call the being-major of a language. In order for a language to be major it must have the support of numerous other assemblages, particularly a government powerful enough to declare a language "official" and pass laws with regard to what language a government's business is to be conducted in. Government-sponsored education bolsters the language's status by ensuring the teaching of the "proper" rules of grammar. At the same time, however, other forces destabilize a language. Everyday usage, borrowings from other languages, literature, and slang continually disturb the stability of a major language. As a concrete assemblage, a language is the dated, singular zone of stability that is the result of intensive processes with tendencies toward both stasis and change. *A Thousand Plateaus* is the exploration of assemblages or plateaus in which Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate how to create concepts in a way that does not presuppose a metaphysics of discontinuity.

#### *DELEUZE'S LATER WORKS*

After *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze began working on several projects, including essays into art in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981), and film in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1985). He also turned his focus to issues in contemporary philosophy in *Foucault* (1986), written not long after Foucault's death, as well as returning to his longstanding interest in Leibniz in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988). Before Guattari's death in 1992, Deleuze collaborated with him on one final work, *What is Philosophy?* (1991). The metaphysics of continuity remains as a point of orientation in all of these works. In the *Cinema* books, for example, Deleuze writes that "cinema is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as a conceptual practice."<sup>17</sup> Here we see the creation of concepts confirmed as the task of philosophy, and if we pursue the nature of these concepts we discover once again the continuity thesis. The concepts of the

"movement-image" and the "time-image" rely heavily on Bergson's conceptions of movement and duration. What is crucial about both of these concepts for our purposes here is that Bergson is explicit that neither movement nor duration can be thought as a succession of discrete points. On this point Deleuze quotes Bergson approvingly, "The real whole might well be, we conceive, an indivisible continuity."<sup>28</sup> Within this context Deleuze turns to the work of C.S. Peirce to construct a taxonomy of images and their semiotic interrelation. That is, both movement-images and time-images are assemblages, which generate questions related to their capabilities and connections with other images.

*What is Philosophy?* was Deleuze's final work with Guattari. In his biography of Deleuze and Guattari, Dosse suggests that Guattari's failing health meant that the work was largely Deleuze's.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless the book returns to languages and themes present in *A Thousand Plateaus*. What becomes explicit in *What is Philosophy?* is the grounding of the distinctions among philosophy, science, and art in terms of what each produces. Thus each of these is a creative endeavor, each is concerned to create something new, but what is created is different in each case. Philosophy creates concepts. Science creates functions, and art creates sensations. "With its concepts, philosophy brings forth events. Art erects monuments with its sensations. Science constructs states of affairs with its functions."<sup>30</sup> This conception has the advantage that it eliminates the need for these creative processes to compete with one another, while at the same time acknowledging that their boundaries are porous. As we saw in the brief discussion of film above, Deleuze doesn't seek to give a theory for film. He seeks to create concepts out of what film gives him. At the same time, however, insofar as he's creating concepts, he's doing philosophy. Philosophy, art, science can all borrow from one another, but the borrowings are necessarily transformed by what each seeks to create.

The continuity thesis arises at multiple levels in *What is Philosophy?* To take very briefly the "concept," as Deleuze and Guattari describe it: concepts are never simple, they are always complex, composed of many parts. The components of a concept, however, are not to be thought of as discrete but as "intensive ordinates." Thus the concept for Deleuze is not the name of a set that contains a numerable series of discrete components. The concept is a selection of intensive elements that are continuous with one another. Furthermore, since intensities are constantly in flux, the concept itself is constantly becoming. In philosophy, a concept will always



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