

# *The Relevance of Nietzsche to Democratic Theory: Agonism as an Affirmation of Difference*

**NATHAN WIDDER**

Department of Government,  
London School of Economics

e-mail: [n.e.widder@lse.ac.uk](mailto:n.e.widder@lse.ac.uk)

Paper for the *Political Studies Association-UK* 50th Annual Conference  
10-13 April 2000, London

## **Abstract**

Against those who would treat him as nothing more than an enemy of democracy to be warded off, this paper argues that Nietzsche presents an ontology of excess that, by problematizing the logic of identity, can positively contribute to democratic theory and practice. While Nietzsche himself may not extend this ontology onto the political domain, the writings of Foucault and Deleuze & Guattari demonstrate how it can provide greater appreciation of the subtleties and complexities of both power relations and politics.

We want *equality* without its compelling us to accept identity; but also *difference* without its degenerating into superiority/inferiority. (Tvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, p. 249)

The familiar argument of tolerance, that all people and all races are equal, is a boomerang. (Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, n. 66)

Ideas need not be ‘democratic’ in order to be relevant for democratic concerns, especially where there is a desire to rethink the nature of democratic theory and politics. Given the latter, it is particularly important to be wary of reducing a seemingly anti-democratic conception to being an enemy to democracy, useful only to illustrate what democracy must avoid. This is certainly the case with Nietzsche, who has lost his reputation, at least within academic circles, as a forebearer of fascism, but has still not been generally considered a thinker who can be of positive value for democratic theory. Nietzsche’s political pronouncements are clearly hostile to modern mass democracy. And yet, his virulent attacks embody a suspicion that, it seems to me, should be at the forefront of any democratic thinking: the suspicion that the democratic call for equality papers over an intolerance for difference, and so an immorality built into a purportedly democratic ethos. The object of Nietzsche’s most specific attacks is one which is perhaps more recognizable now than in the late 19th century: the close link between the liberal demand for equality and the nationalist demand for purity, sameness and identity. It is precisely in the insistence that two individuals must be the same to be treated equally and, as a corollary, that what is different must be resolved into a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority, that Nietzsche launches his most vitriolic attacks. In this respect democratic equality is no different from the aristocratic hierarchies it opposes, insofar as both are premised on a logic of identity, and why Nietzsche can hold that democratic politics rests upon the same metaphysical assumptions that modern, Western society, celebrating the death of God, purports to move beyond.

Nietzsche speaks of a “democratic idiosyncrasy” that betrays “a prejudice in the modern world toward all questions of origin”,<sup>1</sup> that, in the realm of science, “opposes everything that dominates and wants to dominate” and so conceives of a mechanistic world

---

<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), I.4, p. 28.

view which replaces all action with reaction and adaptation;<sup>2</sup> which infects scholars who “consider a problem almost as solved when they have merely schematized it”;<sup>3</sup> and which, in the realm of morality, reflects a herd mentality that proclaims, “I am morality itself, and nothing besides is morality’.”<sup>4</sup> The democratic movement is thus condemned as a sign of declining life.<sup>5</sup> Yet Nietzsche also levels criticisms at traditional social hierarchies, just as he attacks the metaphysical hierarchies of Platonism and Christianity. He speaks of “ages when men...simply refused to acknowledge the element of accident, role and caprice...[and] managed to erect those monsters of social pyramids that distinguish the Middle Ages.”<sup>6</sup> Against such rigid orders, which did have the virtue of “durability,”<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche distinguishes

opposite ages, really democratic, where people give up this faith, and a certain cocky faith and opposite point of view advance more and more into the foreground — the Athenian faith that first becomes noticeable in the Periclean age, the faith of the Americans today that is more and more becoming the European faith as well: The individual becomes convinced that he can do just about everything and can *manage almost any role*, and everybody experiments with himself, improves, makes new experiments, enjoys his experiments; and all nature ceases to become art.<sup>8</sup>

The danger of the democratic herd complex can be glimpsed in its discontinuity with this brave individualism. For as a result of the latter, in its modern incarnation, “What will not be built any more henceforth, and *cannot* be built any more, is — a society in the old sense of that word; to build that, everything is lacking, above all the material. *All of us are no longer material for society.*”<sup>9</sup> Yet the democratic idiosyncrasy presses for such a society, and it is

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, II.12, pp. 78-79.

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), n. 348, pp. 290-291.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), n. 202, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> *Genealogy*, op cit., III.25, p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> *The Gay Science*, op cit., n. 356, p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 302-303.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 303.

not surprising that its calls for equality also reflect an intolerance towards anything brave enough to be democratic in the sense of being aggressively individual. In the democratic herd, as in the theatre, “one is honest only in the mass; as an individual one lies, one lies to oneself.”<sup>10</sup>

The politicization of Nietzsche’s thought can therefore take the form of a critique of the closures inherent in the democratic herd mentality. And this can be done not to assert the identity of the individual against that of the collective but instead to debunk the logic of identity itself, and thus press for a democratic theory and practice which moves beyond good and evil. In this regard, Michel Foucault’s Nietzschean-inspired examinations of modern disciplinary society, and Gilles Deleuze’s studies (with and without Felix Guattari) of the patterns of reterritorialization within late capitalism, are useful not only in exploring the pervasive mechanisms of normalization which continue within societies that celebrate themselves as liberal and free, but also in introducing distinctive conceptions of selfhood and of individual and collective practices, which can help reshape the democratic imaginary. It should not be surprising that Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean thought have become salient precisely where the dangers of exclusion within identity-based political thought and action, have become most apparent: feminism, gay and lesbian politics, post-Marxism, and the New Left generally. For this reason, the importance of such thinking for democratic politics ought to be obvious.

Nietzsche’s critique of identity is certainly serviceable for the development a political and ethical affirmation of relationality and difference, but the relationality and difference are subtle ones. They embody an inequality in power, but one which is itself always in a state of disequilibrium and flux. The relationality thereby presented is a dynamic of force and resistance that Nietzsche calls agonistic, which underlies meaning and identity but also undercuts the logic of identity by exposing its limited and reductive mechanisms. Nietzschean genealogy aims to uncover this agonism, while showing how it has been forgotten or denied by a slavish form of thought that infects religion, philosophy, science and politics. But it also outlines alternative possibilities for both politics and ethics. While these alternatives — in both Nietzsche and those who extend his thought further into the political domain — do not add up to a political theory in the ordinary sense of a worked-out ideal society, it must be kept in mind that the latter, with its refusal to put into question the logic of

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, n. 368, p. 325.

identity and to theorize the ineliminable inequality of power relations, is anathema to the critical task which genealogy executes.

### **The Dynamics of Agonism and its Oblivion**

Genealogy is not simply history, as should be clear from Nietzsche's opening volley in the *Genealogy of Morals* at the English utilitarians. Their moral history takes as given the contemporary meaning of 'goodness' as unegoistic action, and seeks its origin through a timeless principle of utility. Thus they argue that unegoistic actions were originally called good by the recipients of action, and that the specificity of this utility was progressively forgotten, until the actions were called good per se. Aside from the "inherent psychological absurdity"<sup>11</sup> of this view — since unegoistic action is by definition beneficial only to the receivers, how could the specificity of its utility be forgotten? — it is further condemned for repeating the great error of all rationalist thought: understanding history through ahistorical laws, it posits the eternal, identical or final, as governing the world of becoming. Such a manoeuvre, designed to comprehend change, illustrates the first idiosyncrasy of philosophers: "their lack of historical sense, their hatred of even the idea of becoming, their Egyptianism."<sup>12</sup> Historical sense here is more than an awareness of past events, and even their contingency. It also involves a refusal to interpret the past according to familiar representations.<sup>13</sup> It contests the will to truth in philosophy, which operates through a domestication of becoming to make it intelligible in terms of identity.

Here can be glimpsed an excess and thus a difference that is erased. And it follows that the becoming that escapes such principles of identity must be very different from that which remains governed by them. Nietzsche therefore poses the idea that the logic of identity, which understands discontinuity only in light of continuity, and difference in light of sameness, rests upon a profound forgetting that does not forget established memories and events but is rather constitutive of the experience of memory and identity, of the unhistorical within history.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Genealogy*, I.3, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, 1968, 1990), "Reason in Philosophy," 1, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> See Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), n. 83, pp. 136-138 and n. 337, pp. 267-269, where the 'historical sense' is understood as the capacity to bear within oneself fundamentally alien and heterogenous elements. For Nietzsche's attacks on a false historical sense used either to secure a divine truth (a la Hegel) or the purity of a national identity, see n. 357, pp. 304-310 and n. 377, pp. 338-340.

Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming: like a true pupil of Heraclitus, he would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger...A man who wanted to feel historically through and through would be like one forcibly deprived of sleep, or an animal that had to live only by rumination and ever repeated rumination. Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory and live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting.<sup>14</sup>

Without this amnesia, neither the self nor the objects around it would have sufficient unity to be grasped. They could not be identified and placed upon a temporal continuum, understood as having once existed but no more, or being currently in a process of development towards a finished form in the future, and so on. It is in this way that identity, knowledge and chronological time are intertwined: “The principle of identity has behind it the ‘apparent fact’ of things that are the same. A world in a state of becoming could not, in a strict sense, be ‘comprehended’ or ‘known’.”<sup>15</sup> For this reason, the forgetting Nietzsche describes runs deeper than the memory which Augustine pointed out was indispensable for the perception of the chronological passage of time.<sup>16</sup> And the becoming it suppresses cannot be understood as occurring within past, present or future. It is rather an unrepresentable and *untimely* becoming, domesticated to the degree that it is compressed onto a linear continuum. And while it is certainly the case that forgetting in some form is essential to life,<sup>17</sup> it is insufficient to settle on this point when a revaluation of values is necessary.

Nietzsche thus demands an engagement with this unrepresentable becoming. On one level this means refusing to exhaust the meaning of events in terms of their place in linear

---

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, New York and Victoria: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 57-123, p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), n. 520, p. 281.

<sup>16</sup> See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), XI.14-31, pp. 263-280.

<sup>17</sup> “And this is a universal law: a living thing can be healthy, strong and fruitful only when bounded by a horizon; if it is incapable of drawing a horizon around itself, and at the same time too self-centred to enclose its own view within that of another, it will pine away slowly or hasten to its timely end” (“On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” *op cit.*, p. 63).

time, and instead treating them as untimely. Examples here include the ‘death of God’, an event which has already occurred and yet will remain unrealized by the murderers for centuries;<sup>18</sup> or the ‘overcoming of man’, an event that is always futural. Genealogy itself participates in this move by tracing developments from a “prehistory” which “is in any case present in all ages or may always reappear.”<sup>19</sup> On another level engagement requires a displacement of identity and its correlate, opposition. Against metaphysical philosophy, which answers the basic question of change, ‘How can anything come from its opposite?’, by elevating one of the oppositional terms to the status of thing-in-itself, ideal Form, or Being, Nietzsche does not suggest a dialectical mediation by which any being would be shown to invoke and thereby pass into its opposite, establishing an identity of opposites to relate and reconcile them.<sup>20</sup> Instead he holds that “Historical philosophy...has discovered in individual cases (and this will probably be the result in every case) that there are no opposites, except in the customary exaggeration of popular or metaphysical interpretations, and that a mistake in reasoning lies at the bottom of this antithesis.”<sup>21</sup> The task of genuine historical philosophy — that is, genealogy — is to demonstrate how identity, opposition, continuity and chronological ordering, are products of a limited perspective which demands representability. In doing this, it concomitantly reveals that which surpasses such a viewpoint.

The result is an ontology of becoming which denies both the purity of a thing-in-itself and the harmony of dialectical relationality. First, a being can only gain specification through its relations with other things, and so removing these others would leave nothing at all.

The properties of a thing are effects on other “things”:  
if one removes other “things,” then a thing has no properties,  
i.e., there is no thing without other things,  
i.e., there is no “thing in itself.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *The Gay Science*, op cit., n. 125, pp. 181-182, n. 343, pp. 279-280.

<sup>19</sup> *Genealogy*, II.9, p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> This is a fundamental aspect of Deleuze’s analysis of Nietzsche, by which he separates the latter from Hegelian dialectics. See Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1986), n. 1, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Will to Power*, op cit., n. 557, p. 302.

But second, the relations that constitute any being cannot be reduced to equality, for this manoeuvre similarly invokes a Sameness, identity or ground. Relations are therefore necessarily unequal, always relations of domination and submission, but also force and resistance. Resistance here is not simply a counteraction to force, but a consequence of the discontinuity in relations of force themselves. It is thereby implicated even in relations that can be characterized as ‘cooperative’, as with “the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another.”<sup>23</sup> Relations are in this sense *never* oppositional, for they can be neither strictly separated nor resolved through a movement of becoming-other followed by a becoming-same. And so power, strife, heterogeneity and reversal are implicated in all relations as basic components.

From this base a genealogical investigation can begin. In unequal relations within and between beings, there must necessarily be a dominator and dominated. The results are given in the form of qualitatively different, relationally-constituted wills to power. It is then simply a matter of asking what relations would constitute a being that, rather than acknowledging ineliminable inequality and heterogeneity, insists upon the logic of identity? Or what sort of will would establish oppositions between a goodness seen as pure, unadulterated and unrelational, and an evil seen as the former’s lack or absence? The answer Nietzsche gives: such a will could only be that of a being unable to affirm relationality, or unable to *affirm itself in its relations* — in other words, a being that can only be described as weak, dominated and slavish. The obviously narrow viewpoint from which such demands are issued, however, indicates another mode of valuation from beings who act and dominate. Here, then, are the wills to power that express noble and slave moralities.

Nietzsche’s endorsement of master morality is hardly unambiguous: he refers to the masters as crude and rather stupid, while maintaining that it was with slave morality “that man first became *an interesting animal*, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil* — and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts!”<sup>24</sup> What does interest him, however, is a certain way in which a master affirms himself, and so gives himself the name of ‘noble’ or ‘good’. For what characterizes noble affirmation is precisely its non-oppositional character. The master declares himself good, but in doing so does not affirm a self-identity but rather an agonistic competition by which he transcends his limits and overcomes himself. The master can

---

<sup>23</sup> *Genealogy*, II.1, p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, I.6, p. 33.

therefore only affirm himself through conflict with a worthy adversary — another noble who need not be recognized as a being of the same kind, but only as sufficiently strong to offer a challenge.

How much reverence the noble has for his enemies! — and such reverence is a bridge to love. — For he desires his enemy for himself, as his mark of distinction; he can endure no other enemy than one in whom there is nothing to despise and *very much* to honor.<sup>25</sup>

In this way strife and conflict are affirmed, whereas what is weak, base and therefore unworthy, is labelled ‘bad’, but good and bad are not defined through comparison to one another: hence the nobles’ valuation results from their high station — “It was out of this *pathos of distance* that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values: What had they to do with utility!”<sup>26</sup> — but, crucially, their affirmation does not come from any comparison with what they stand above. The name ‘good’ *identifies* the noble, but does not establish his *identity*, and in this way expresses not a mediation between self and other but rather an overcoming which dissolves this binary relationship. Noble morality, in short, pays homage to excess.

All this is quite the contrary to the slaves who, too weak to affirm themselves in conflict, call themselves good only by first defining ‘evil’ as a popular opposite. While the nobles do not concern themselves with the slaves caught beneath their fray, the latter remain fixated upon the nobles as the cause of their suffering and weakness. And, in a move reflecting a perverse paranoia, they declare the nobles to be evil beings who *intentionally* cause them pain. Slave morality, driven by *ressentiment* to demand a justification for suffering and being forced into inaction, thereby wills an equality in the face of difference that allows them to label aristocratic actions unjust, and creates a strict divergence between good and evil. The slaves secure their own name through a distortion of noble affirmation, one that pins the latter within boundaries that parallel those the slaves seek to establish for themselves. Slave morality thus functions by a *reduction* of noble affirmation: the self-overcoming of the latter so exceeds the slaves’ capacities that it is ultimately distorted onto the oppositional schema of good and evil. It is compressed onto a moral logic of identity, just

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, I.10, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, I.2, p. 26.

as untimely becoming is forgotten in order to constitute the identity requisite for the chronological understanding of time. But in this way it remains misunderstood.

That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange; only it gives no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: ‘these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb — would he not be good?’ there is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: ‘we don’t dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb.’<sup>27</sup>

After this reduction, it is rather unimportant, from Nietzsche’s perspective, whether dialectics reduces the oppositional character of this schema to a moment within a greater unity. An intolerance for excessive difference is already in place. And so the immorality of slave morality appears, not in the particular actions it sanctions or condemns, but in the spirit of revenge and intolerance from which these judgments issue.<sup>28</sup>

In this way, Nietzsche fleshes out a relationality, and thus a form of difference, which exceeds identity and opposition, while showing how certain relational formations give rise to a will that forgets this excess. A being, for Nietzsche, is not a unity of either an atomic or a mediated sort, but rather a nexus of relations of strife and conflict, “born as one is to a subterranean life of struggle.”<sup>29</sup> Yet under certain conditions such a being, raging against its existence, wills to conceive of itself as an identity, consequently compelling this form upon others. This dominated being wills a series of fictions which include identity, opposition, bad conscience, an ascetic ideal, and so forth, precisely because it would rather will these than not will.<sup>30</sup> Another type of being, however, wills to dissolve any semblance within itself of

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, I.13, pp. 44-45.

<sup>28</sup> As Nietzsche maintains, the revaluation of values does not mean a wholesale rejection of the judgments made by the slaves, but rather of the soil from which they grow: “It goes without saying that I do not deny — unless I am a fool — that many actions called immoral ought to be avoided and resisted, or that many called moral ought to be done and encouraged — but I think that one should be encouraged and the other avoided *for other reasons than hitherto*. We have to *learn to think differently* — in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*” (Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Daybreak*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), n. 103, p. 60).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, I.12, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> The meaning of ascetic ideals, Nietzsche says, reflects “the basic fact of the human will, its *horror vacui*: *it needs a goal* — and it will rather will *nothingness* than *not will*” (*Genealogy*, III.1, p. 97).

identity by overcoming itself. But this does not dissolve it into nothingness. And so, in the second and third essays of the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche not only attacks slavish conceptions of guilt and asceticism, but outlines noble alternatives for conscience, justice, law and self-restraint.

Here, the brutish portrayal given in the first essay gives way to that of an “active, aggressive, arrogant man” who “is still a hundred steps closer to justice than the reactive man.”<sup>31</sup> For such a being, which has not learned “to be ashamed of all his instincts,”<sup>32</sup> and whose conception of punishment “evolved quite independently of any presupposition concerning the freedom or non-freedom of the will”<sup>33</sup> and so did not make firm distinctions between intentional and accidental harm, justice emerges as a matter of equivalent revenge taken for unpaid debt, without any further compulsion to identify the offender as a type.<sup>34</sup> It is for this very reason, however, that mercy can emerge as an overcoming of justice by a “consciousness of power that...could allow itself the nobles luxury possible to it — letting those who harm it go *unpunished*.”<sup>35</sup> Related to this is a different function of law. Rather than a tool for revenge, law operates in “the struggle *against* the reactive feelings...Wherever justice is practiced and maintained one sees a stronger power seeking a means of putting an end to the senseless raging of *ressentiment* among the weaker powers that stand under it...”<sup>36</sup> Law as a partial restriction on aggression works in the service of strength — this is the creed of the strong. Conversely, when law seeks to eliminate all struggle and strife, it becomes “a principle *hostile to life*.”<sup>37</sup> Life, for Nietzsche, is necessarily implicated in struggle and conquest, but is not for that reason lacking in constraint. Unlike the constraint counselled by slave morality, however, which is driven by a spirit of revenge, the self control of the strong is a consequence of a healthy life.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Genealogy*, II.11, p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, II.7, p. 67.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, II.4, p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> In this regard, Nietzsche contends that “during the greater part of the past the judges and punishers themselves were *not at all* conscious of dealing with a ‘guilty person’” (*Genealogy*, II.14, p. 82). The result is a justice which avoids the mania which Foucault finds throughout modern disciplinary society to name character types to be observed, analyzed and disciplined.

<sup>35</sup> *Genealogy*, II.10, p. 72.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, II.11, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

The three great slogans of the ascetic ideal are familiar: poverty, humility, chastity. Now take a close look at the lives of all the great, fruitful, inventive spirits: you will always encounter all three to a certain degree...It is quite possible that their dominating spirituality had first to put a check on an unrestrained and irritable pride or a wanton sensuality, or that it perhaps had a hard job to maintain its will to the “desert” against a love of luxury and refinement or an excessive liberality of heart and hand. But it did it, precisely because it was the dominating instincts whose demands prevailed against those of all the other instincts — it continues to do it; if it did not do it, it would not dominate.<sup>38</sup>

In all this the central aspects of an ethic that moves ‘beyond good and evil’ can be glimpsed. The latter is an ethics that, rather than seeking to secure the identity of oneself and another through mutual recognition and respect — a view which contains within it the hidden proviso that the other may only be different insofar as he/she can also be recognized as the same — instead presses beyond such traditional oppositions of self and other. It is an ethics of *pluralization*, which works by the introduction of an excess which dissolves any merely binary relation.

Nietzsche provides an example in his rethinking of the friend/enemy relation. The friend is one who intervenes between ‘I’ and ‘me’ to prevent the fall into the abyss of self-identity, of the nothingness that would be an I=I relation.

I and me are always too deep in conversation: How could one stand that if there were no friend? For the hermit, the friend is always the third person: The third is the cork that prevents the conversation of the two from sinking into the depths.<sup>39</sup>

The friend resides within as a force that drives one to overcome oneself. But for this very reason, the friend is also an enemy: “In a friend one should have one’s best enemy.”<sup>40</sup> The friend is no longer the one who is closest, while the enemy is the most alien, the furthest away. Against the Christian exhortation to love thy neighbours, Nietzsche proclaims: “It is

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, III.8, pp. 108-109.

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1954, 1966), “On the Friend,” pp. 55-56.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

those farther away who must pay for your love of your neighbor; and even if five of you are together, there is always a sixth who must die...My brothers, love of the neighbor I do not recommend to you: I recommend to you love of the farthest.”<sup>41</sup> And against the Church’s desire to destroy its enemies, he calls for the “spiritualization of *enmity*. It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies: in brief, in acting and thinking in the reverse of the way in which one formerly acted and thought.”<sup>42</sup> This spiritualization is not merely personal, but is also the key to the forbearance requisite to any ‘grand politics’.<sup>43</sup> It retains the strife and conflict with the ‘enemy’ — and the ‘friend’ — but no longer in the brute form of opposition.

This portrayal of a Nietzschean ethic must certainly appear surprising to those who doubt he has one, and who portray Nietzsche as a thinker who either deconstructs the foundations of morality in order to sanction an ‘anything goes’ nihilism or — what amounts to the same thing — desires a return to an aristocratic politics in which the will of a dominating few is imposed upon the masses.<sup>44</sup> While Nietzsche himself may not turn his critique of the democratic idiosyncrasy into a positive rethinking of democratic theory and politics, this does not mean his conceptions of law, justice and agonism cannot be put to such use. Most importantly, Nietzsche contributes by presenting an ontological dynamic in which identity and its correlate conceptions appear only as reductive misinterpretations. A political or social theory which puts a primacy on identity is therefore necessarily missing something.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, “On Love of the Neighbor,” pp. 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> *Twilight*, op cit., “Morality as Anti-Nature,” 3, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp. 53-54.

<sup>44</sup> Such a reading is given by Detwiler, Bruce, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). Against Detwiler see McIntyre, Alex, *The Sovereignty of Joy: Nietzsche’s Vision of Grand Politics* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

## Micropowers and Dispersion

It is odd that Foucault is so often attributed with a dynamic in which power works to construct identities against resistance.<sup>45</sup> For an important irony of his genealogical studies, in the realms of criminality and sexuality, is that disciplinary and normalizing powers succeed in producing everything *except* a normalized, disciplined self. It is for this reason that Foucault maintains that the goal of the prison system is not to eliminate delinquency but rather to manage deviance, and the consistent failure of the prison to reform inmates must be understood in this light.<sup>46</sup> Disciplinary society presses towards an efficient use of resources for the management of life,<sup>47</sup> but while a will to identity is wrapped up in this project, the mechanisms of power do not produce identity as a result.

What is to be understood by the disciplining of societies in Europe since the eighteenth century is not, of course, that the individuals who are part of them become more and more obedient, nor that they are set about assembling in barracks, schools, or prisons; rather that an increasingly better invigilated process of adjustment has been sought after — more and more rational and economic — between productive activities, resources of communication, and the play of power relations.<sup>48</sup>

Modern society, compelled by a will to truth to name, locate, observe, measure and know, is driven to identify deviations from a norm which, strangely, does not exist in the first place, and then to police and correct these deviations in order to promote conformity with this fictitious standard. The effect, however, is very much the reverse: there is a multiplication of

---

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Lois McNay (*Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992) and *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994)), who argues that Foucault's work maintains an unresolved ambivalence concerning the subject and power, holding to a concept of power as a positive force which includes resistances, yet never developing this idea and by default articulating a understanding of power as repression of the individual. Concomitant with this, the body is treated as a site of both inscription and resistance, but the lack of an essence makes such resistance impossible. Throughout McNay's analysis, it is taken as given that the dynamics of power relations are embodied in identity constitution and its failure. The depth of her misunderstanding can be seen in her turn to Habermasian communicative rationality as a supplement to Foucault's thought that resolves these difficulties.

<sup>46</sup> See Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), esp. Part IV.

<sup>47</sup> What Foucault refers to as 'biopower' in *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978, 1990), Part V.

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, Michel, "Afterword: The Subject and Power" in Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Harvester and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 208-226, p. 219.

differences, producing dispersion and disjunction, rather than gathering differences under an umbrella of normality. Yet it is through the persistent failure of the powers that individuate, classify and correct, to manifest an efficient social system, that these same mechanisms of discipline are encouraged to extend themselves into more areas of modern life. The entire system of disciplinary power is thereby trapped in its own logic, unable to do anything more than increase its policing. It is thus not surprising that prisons look like factories, which look like hospitals, which look like schools. Nor is it surprising that when one examines the personal histories of the various ‘deviants’ which modernity seeks to police, they all have already passed through a myriad of institutions purportedly designed to normalize them.

If Foucault’s overall project is to be understood as a challenge to this pervasive will to identity or truth, then as with Nietzsche it is important to distinguish this will to truth as a perspective on the world, from the dynamic of power that constitutes but also surpasses it. Foucault contends that the will to truth seeks to tame the excessive power of discourse,<sup>49</sup> and in modern circumstances has gradually eclipsed and absorbed other social mechanisms of control, such as prohibition or the dismissal of certain discourses as irrational.<sup>50</sup> Discourse thereby appears more and more liberated, but this must be understood against a background demand that discourses demonstrate their truthfulness. Our apparently liberated post-Victorian sexuality, for example, rests upon a prior explosion of discourse linking sex and desire to the truth of the individual.<sup>51</sup> Here, the very ideas that power and liberation are opposed, and that discourse can be power-free or a means to free oneself from power, hide a more subtle form of power and discourse which conditions this liberation by constituting the field of sexuality as a truth that has been repressed. The will to truth operates still more subtlety through its reduction of events to chronological history. Such a history, Foucault says, need not judge the present in terms of progress or decline, and can accept the contingency of events, but nonetheless establishes them in an order which makes them comprehensible, which locates and thereby identifies them.

---

<sup>49</sup> “[I]n every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault, Michel, “The Order of Discourse” in Shapiro, Michael, ed., *Language and Politics* (New York: NYU Press, 1984), pp. 108-138, p. 109).

<sup>50</sup> See “The Order of Discourse,” op cit., pp. 113-114.

<sup>51</sup> *History of Sexuality, Vol I., Parts I-II.*

History as practiced today does not turn away from events...But the important thing is that history does not consider an event without defining the series of which it is part, without specifying the mode of analysis from which that series derives, without seeking to find out the regularity of phenomena and the limits of probability of their emergence, without inquiring into the variations, blends and angles of the graph, without wanting to determine the conditions on which they depend. Of course, history has for a long time no longer sought to understand events by the action of causes and effects in the formless unity of a great becoming, vaguely homogeneous or ruthlessly hierarchized; but this change was not made in order to discover prior structures, alien and hostile to the event. It was made in order to establish diverse series, intertwined and often divergent but not autonomous, which enable us to circumscribe the “place” of the event, the margins of its chance variability, and the conditions of its appearance.<sup>52</sup>

It is for this reason that Foucault notes that while he has always operated within the sphere of historical events he had done something other than history.<sup>53</sup> That is to say, his work has been a genealogical investigation into agonistic power relations that exceed any movement of identity and opposition. While this genealogy may make historical claims regarding changing configurations of power, it operates on the idea that the connection between power relations and meaning cannot be grasped if reduced simply to the order of their historical appearance.

Foucault presents his micropowers as “a moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable” and which constitutes the repetitive mechanisms of repressive power as “the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement.”<sup>54</sup> Power relations are immanent in all things — power is everywhere though, importantly, it is *not* everything — but inscribed within them is a plurality of sites of resistance as part of its relational nature. Power is

---

<sup>52</sup> “The Order of Discourse,” p. 128. See also Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 1972), Introduction.

<sup>53</sup> “The studies that follow, like the others I have done previously, are studies of ‘history’ by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to; but they are not the work of a ‘historian.’ Which does not mean that they summarize or synthesize work done by others. Considered from the standpoint of their ‘pragmatics,’ they are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently” (Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 9).

<sup>54</sup> *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, p. 93.

therefore never in simple opposition to freedom,<sup>55</sup> and resistance, in turn, is never reducible to a sort of thermodynamic, ‘equal and opposing’ force to power. While there are instances of such opposition — such as the way the treatment of prisoners produces resentment towards the system and leads not to reform but rather recidivism<sup>56</sup> — there are also more subtle resistances which follow from incompatibilities within and among disciplinary institutions and practices. Thus, for example, the exercise of power to observe and investigate sexual deviance has the effect, by virtue of the voyeurism and erotic ‘hide and seek’ games it encouraged, of proliferating rather than controlling sexual desire.<sup>57</sup> Further, while various institutions such as the family and psychiatric bodies cooperate to monitor sexuality in the home, they also come into conflict when psychiatrists seek to institutionalize family members.<sup>58</sup> And there are further discontinuities and cross-purposes that follow from the lack of correspondence between objects and discourses of knowledge and the sites of their production, whereby the hospital as an institution to deal with insanity has its origins not in medicine but law enforcement, while the discourse on madness is located not in the hospital but in the courts; and the delinquent, as an object of penal law, is produced within the walls of prisons, while prisoners themselves are created by the judiciary.<sup>59</sup>

It is through a composition of micro-forces that is in no way an mere aggregation or totalization<sup>60</sup> that “far reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced.”<sup>61</sup> This dynamic is poorly understood, Foucault maintains, by juridico-discursive

---

<sup>55</sup> “This means that in relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance — of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation — there would be no relations of power. This being the general form, I refuse to answer the question that I am often asked: ‘But if power is everywhere, then there is no liberty’” (Foucault, Michel, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom” in Bernauer, James and Rasmussen, David, eds., *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1988), pp. 1-20, p. 12).

<sup>56</sup> See *Discipline and Punish*, op cit., 264-268.

<sup>57</sup> *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp. 111-112.

<sup>59</sup> On this last point see Deleuze, Gilles, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), esp. Part II.

<sup>60</sup> “There is no discontinuity between them, as if one were dealing with two different levels (one microscopic and the other macroscopic); but neither is there homogeneity (as if one were only the enlarged projection or miniaturization of the other); rather, one must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work” (*The History of Sexuality, Vol I*, pp. 99-100).

<sup>61</sup> *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, p. 102.

models which treat power solely in terms of restriction, including psychoanalytic models in which the Law constitutes the very desire it prohibits. These models, he insists, treat power as an “anti-energy” that is “poor in resources, sparing of its methods, monotonous in the tactics it utilizes, incapable of invention, and seemingly doomed to repeat itself.”<sup>62</sup> They are inadequate not only because resistance is internal to power, but because they theorize only a narrow set of oppositional relations restricted to limitation and transgression, thereby misunderstanding the complexities of power that follow from it being in excess of the logic of identity. Hence they conceive of the fracturing of modern society in terms of the failure of power to engender a closed system, rather than as a condition that follows from the nature of power surpassing the dictates of identity and opposition. The result is the irrelevance of these models for a society “that has been more imaginative, probably, than any other in creating devious and supple mechanisms of power”<sup>63</sup> and which “has gradually been penetrated by quite new mechanisms of power that are probably irreducible to the representation of law.”<sup>64</sup>

Foucault’s later turn towards the care for the self must be understood in light of this analysis. It is in no way a theorization of resistance, if the latter means a liberation from power relations — though it can involve liberation from certain formations of power.<sup>65</sup> The care for the self, or the relation of the self to itself, is rather a terrain presupposed by the very power relations which produce disciplinary or coercive practices and institutions. Social meanings and ‘games of truth’, constituted by relations of strife, include social types that are classified and disciplined, and moral rules which establish prohibitions. But the latter also presuppose a subject who relates to these rules, and consequently a set of self-to-self practices through which the subject is ethically positioned to them. And the shifts in these practices — along the axes of the ethical substance being modified, the mode or command which motivates subjection to the moral law, the practices that may be employed in adjustment, and the telos of these ethical formations<sup>66</sup> — have political and ethical import not

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>65</sup> See “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” *op cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Without recounting the details here, see *The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, *op cit.*; Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1986); and Foucault, Michel, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress” in Rabinow, Paul, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 340-372.

because they articulate a more ideal past,<sup>67</sup> but because they problematize contemporary meanings that otherwise remain unquestioned. Most specifically, they call into question the close link established in modernity between desire, sex and the truth of the individual, which is made at the expense of pleasure,<sup>68</sup> and the consequent anxiety to locate and normalize delinquency.

Problematizing the will to truth in this way presents the opportunity for alternative ways of thinking and acting, by articulating the contingency of contemporary truths and identities. It thereby supports a certain experimentalism with living, one which, by calling into question the need to see oneself as an identity, promotes a political and ethical affirmation of difference.<sup>69</sup> This amounts not to escaping games of truth but rather seeking to play them differently.<sup>70</sup> Playing them differently means approaching them with a sense of curiosity and care for that which remains opaque and different, and a willingness to press thinking beyond its traditional limits.<sup>71</sup> This is Foucault's means to endeavour beyond good and evil, or to struggle against the fascism not only around us but also inside us.<sup>72</sup> The danger presents itself, he says, whenever the possibility of serious discussion or cooperation is foreclosed in a political practice caught up in a 'model of war', in which success and failure becomes a zero-sum game.

---

<sup>67</sup> "I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by another people" ("On the Genealogy of Ethics," op cit., p. 343).

<sup>68</sup> "And I could say that the modern 'formula' is desire, which is theoretically underlined and practically accepted, since you have to liberate your own desire. Acts are not very important, and pleasure — nobody knows what it is" ("On the Genealogy of Ethics," p. 359).

<sup>69</sup> Thus Foucault distances himself from the 'Californian cult of the self', and from Sartrean theme of authenticity in self-creation. See "On the Genealogy of Ethics," pp. 349-351, 362.

<sup>70</sup> See "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," p.15.

<sup>71</sup> "I like the word [curiosity]. It evokes 'care'; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way...; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental" (Foucault, Michel, "The Masked Philosopher," in *Politics Philosophy Culture*, trans. by Alan Sheridan and others, edited and with an introduction by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 323-330, p. 328).

<sup>72</sup> See Foucault's Preface to Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. xi-xiv.

Furthermore: might not this “struggle” that one tries to wage against the “enemy” only be a way of making a petty dispute without much importance seem more serious than it really is? I mean, don’t certain intellectuals hope to lend themselves greater political weight with their “ideological struggle” than they really have?...And then I’ll tell you: I find this “model of war” not only a bit ridiculous but also rather dangerous. Because by virtue of saying or thinking “I’m fighting against the enemy,” if one day you found yourself in a position of strength, and in a situation of real war, in front of this blasted “enemy,” wouldn’t you actually treat him as one? Taking that route leads directly to oppression, no matter who takes it: that’s the real danger.<sup>73</sup>

It is for this reason that Foucault refuses to engage in ideological forms of politics that, by virtue of being totalizing, “are always, in fact, very limited.”<sup>74</sup> Instead, he seeks to raise problems within the political field not determined by established political outlooks which remain committed to party politics or identity-based politics generally. This is a task of thought, governed by a certain ethical sense, which flows into politics: “Thinking and acting are connected in an ethical sense, but one which has results that have to be called political.”<sup>75</sup>

Let’s take an example that touches us all, that of Poland. If we raise the question of Poland in strictly political terms, it’s clear that we quickly reach the point of saying there’s nothing we can do. We can’t dispatch a team of paratroopers, and we can’t send armored cars to liberate Warsaw. I think that, politically, we have to recognize this, but I think we also agree that, for ethical reasons, we have to raise the problem of Poland in the form of a nonacceptance of what is happening there, and a nonacceptance of the passivity of our own governments. I think this attitude is an ethical one, but it is also political; it does not consist in saying merely, “I protest,” but in making of that attitude a political phenomenon that is as substantial as possible, and one which those who govern, here or there, will sooner or later be obliged to take into account.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), pp. 180-181.

<sup>74</sup> Foucault, Michel, “Politics and Ethics: An Interview” in Rabinow, Paul, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 373-380, p. 375.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377. These words are those of a questioner, but Foucault states his agreement with them.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

And, of course, it is also necessary to raise the problems ignored by the normal mechanisms and institutions of politics, such as those in the asylum, prison and clinic. These are specific fields, but they nonetheless open up the most general problems of modern Western society: power relations and the disciplinary strategies that organize them.<sup>77</sup>

In these ways, Foucault takes Nietzsche's critique of identity and his dynamic of agnostic relations, and carries them onto terrains in need of politicization. And because these areas are occluded by the democratic demand for identity, they require alternative modes of theorization and engagement. Both theory and practice must become more subtle and layered than traditional conceptualizations allow. The first can no longer be distinguished from the second as an abstract doctrine providing a priori rules and justifications. Political theory in particular cannot remain the explication of procedures within which disputes are to be conducted and policed, the elaboration of the conditions for a more inclusive social milieu which would resolve them, or otherwise the development of a utopian model to inspire political action. All of these options in some way paper over that which is in excess of identity and opposition by giving primacy to the reconciliation — in the form of either simple inclusion or simple exclusion — of divergent elements. Submerged within any binarism, as Nietzsche and Foucault both know, is a multiplicity to be exposed. Politics is precisely the strategic attempt to do this.

### **A Many-Layered Politics**

We live in a social and political world of many levels which cannot be fully separated from one another, but which must also not be conflated. These levels open up possibilities and necessities for understanding power, knowledge and change, and thus for politics. Like the thinking of Nietzsche and Foucault already examined, Deleuze and Guattari's work aims to trace these multiple layers in their heterogeneity and mutual imbrication.

There is, first, a molar level, or a level of segmentarity: domains and classifications such as school, profession, holiday, prison, working class, childhood, adolescence,

---

<sup>77</sup> "Another old accusation: that I take up particular problems in order to distract attention from others that are general and essential. I repeat: what I take up *is* general, perhaps more than anything else. We live in a social universe in which the formation, circulation, and utilization of knowledge present a fundamental question. If the accumulation of capital has been an essential feature of our society, the accumulation of knowledge has not been any less so. Now, the exercise, production, and accumulation of this knowledge cannot be dissociated from the mechanisms of power; complex relations exist which must be analyzed" (*Remarks on Marx*, op cit., pp.164-165). See also "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, op cit., pp. 205-217.

homosexuality, and so forth. This is a realm of sharp divisions, where one's place or identity is located. There is no doubt that one assumes several roles within and across these segments, but only one at a time or only within specific relations. Thus one passes from childhood to adulthood, or from school to work; one may be a father and a son and a husband simultaneously, but to different people; one is a worker from 9 to 5, and a pensioner after 65. In this way, the segments amount to organized binaries, even where there are more than two choices one can make.<sup>78</sup> But regardless of the choices or assignments made, the segments, while quite different, seem ominously the same — undoubtedly because they all function on a disciplinary model.

There is also another level of micro- or molecular fluxes, where the identities and differences of the molar level are composed and dissolved. This is a level of constitutive power relations which always struggle against resistances, the same power creating both 'normal' identities and forms of madness, delinquency and perversion which oppose them. The latter are found in the marginals which society seeks to constrain, but there is some of them in all of us.<sup>79</sup> They exist as a pervasive and potentially revolutionary element within the segments of society, threatening to overturn the latter.

And there is a third level, also relational, where the relations are not oppositional but of some other form. They are affirmative in the same way as Nietzsche's noble overcoming, and so are also creative. There is a politics we direct against molar segments, by which we seek to modify or reform them, perhaps even radically; and there is also a political struggle

---

<sup>78</sup> "Segments depend on binary machines which can be very varied if need be...And they are not roughly dualistic, they are rather dichotomic: they can operate diachronically (if you are neither *a* nor *b*, then you are *c*: dualism has shifted, and no longer relates to simultaneous elements to choose from, but successive choices; if you are neither black nor white, you are a half-breed; if you are neither man nor woman, you are a transvestite: each time the machine with binary elements will produce binary choices between elements which are not present at the first cutting-up)" (Deleuze, Gilles and Parnet, Claire, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 128).

<sup>79</sup> Deleuze and Guattari hold that this molecular level corresponds to Foucaultian micro-powers, and yet they seem to systematically misread Foucault on this point, treating power and resistance in Foucault as oppositional forces, though as should be clear from this paper's earlier analysis of Foucault that this is a mistaken portrayal: resistance for him results not simply from opposition but from discontinuities inherent in power relations themselves. Deleuze and Guattari use their reading to posit a dynamic of desire which they say undercuts Foucault's analysis of power: "Our only points of disagreement with Foucault are the following: (1) to us the assemblages seem fundamentally to be assemblages not of power but of desire (desire is always assembled), and power seems to be a stratified dimension of the assemblage; (2) the diagram and abstract machine have lines of flight that are primary, which are not phenomena of resistance or counterattack in an assemblage, but cutting edges of creation and deterritorialization" (Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 531, n. 39). Deleuze provides a more sustained and subtle account of his differences with Foucault in "Desire and Pleasure" (Davidson, Arnold I., ed., *Foucault and his Interlocutors* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 183-192), but his analysis there is still based on the contention that for Foucault power and resistance are in opposition. The reading does not appear, however, in Deleuze's *Foucault* (op cit.).

waged at the level of meaning, in the name of the marginal and the excluded. But with this third level there is still yet another politics, not of reform or (even revolutionary) opposition, but of doing something different: a politics that is a-systematic rather than anti-systematic.<sup>80</sup>

There is, then, a relational terrain which does not conform to identity and opposition. Deleuze and Guattari give it many names, stressing its multiple characteristics. These names include:

- \* A *war machine*, which expresses the agonism of this relationality, while differentiating it from the ‘institution of war’ which appropriates this agonistic element into an oppositional system: “*The State has no war machine of its own; it can only appropriate one in the form of a military institution, one that will continually cause it problems.*”<sup>81</sup>
- \* A *rhizome*, which expresses how this network of relations does not conform to any arboreal model of pluralism in which differing branches and roots are unified by a common trunk or base. The rhizome is a plurality with no central point, and therefore no defined limit.<sup>82</sup>
- \* A *multiplicity* which differs from the One and the Many, from any plurality that refers back to unity.
- \* A *smooth space* or *plane of consistency*, which is not an indifferent space in which all parts are the same, but rather one in which differences are not hierarchized or striated by a central point or identity that stands above and organizes them. It is a space that is consistent by virtue of having no transcendent dimension, and is therefore smooth but also differentiated.<sup>83</sup>
- \* *Desire*, but understood as an a-teleological movement not related to any particular object: “desire implies no lack; neither is it a natural given. It is an *agencement* of heterogeneous elements that function.”<sup>84</sup> Desire is therefore not to be confused with pleasure or feeling which might judge it.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> This distinction is borrowed from Kazarian, Edward P., “Deleuze, Perversion and Politics,” *International Studies in Philosophy*, XXX:1 (1998), pp. 91-106.

<sup>81</sup> “1227: Treatise on Nomadology — The War Machine” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, op cit., pp. 351-423, p. 355.

<sup>82</sup> See “Introduction: Rhizome” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 3-25.

<sup>83</sup> “A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentred, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without ‘counting’ it and can ‘be explored only by legwork.’ They do not meet the visual condition of being observable from a point in space external to them; an example of this is the system of sounds, or even of colors, as opposed to Euclidean space” (“Treatise on Nomadology”, op cit., p. 371).

<sup>84</sup> “Desire and Pleasure,” op cit., p. 189.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, pp. 189-90. Nietzsche perhaps best expresses the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of desire and its affirmative character when he writes: “Physiologists should think before putting down the instinct of self-

- \* *Nomadism*, as contrasted with migration, the latter perhaps not knowing its final destination but nonetheless seeking one, while the nomad has no such concern with locale.<sup>86</sup>
- \* A *line of flight* or *deterritorialization* which performs a kind of “flattening” by decomposing structures of identity which organize differences from on-high. This occurs not by a line of flight opposing a striated organization, but simply by exceeding it.

This final level may in some sense be outside the others, but all three are also immanent to each other, forming a single assemblage. The micro-levels of desire and molecular fluxes constitute the macroscopic segments which fix and incorporate, (re)territorializing desiring lines of flight; and such lines of flight continue within molar organizations as that which deterritorializes them.

The molar segments of society all work to code differences in order to organize them. They establish themselves as domains with identities and deviances appropriate to them. The domains do have their independence, but also communicate with one another. Prisons and courts, for example, operate by different rules and practices, but resonate together, the latter producing convicts through a judgment of guilt passed upon actions, the former receiving convicts and producing delinquents through disciplinary tactics, so that each passes its subjected products to the other. Every domain refers outside itself in a similar way, and the State is nothing other than the mechanism by which these diverse domains communicate. It overcodes the domains, not by reducing them to an homogenous blob, but by enabling and regulating transferences. The state is thus an important site of political struggle, but it is also insufficient: the problem of crime cannot be adequately dealt with only at the level of the state, since it is a relay rather than an all-or-nothing power holder.

If the level of desire is in some sense primary, it is because its strife gives rise to the very segments which seem to arrest it. As Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis of master and slave moralities makes clear, certain formations of agonistic relations posit a transcendence which organizes all relations and becomings; but this organization, working by identity and opposition, necessarily distorts, reduces and only partially captures that which it seeks to grasp. The state and its molar organizations are in this way always pitted against a certain

---

preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength — life itself is *will to power*; self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *results*” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, op cit., n. 13, p. 13. See also *Will to Power*, n. 650, p. 344).

<sup>86</sup> “The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence of factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory” (“Treatise on Nomadology,” p. 380).

chaotic excess, a war machine that lies outside it in the sense that the latter can never be fully incorporated. But it is a mistake to see this outside from the point of view of the state itself — that is, to see chaos as mere anarchy, like a Hobbesian state of nature. Chaos is not the polar opposite of order insofar as it presupposes a certain set of rules or laws — a *nomos* — but these follow from its being in excess of identity and opposition. Hence there can be a ‘nomad science’, and a form of thinking extricated from the State model. And like the becoming that both Nietzsche and Foucault argue is domesticated by the logic of identity, this nomadism is untimely and therefore not captured by history.

There are many aspects of nomad or minor science,<sup>87</sup> but they are all linked through a certain notion of space, one which surpasses the spatial thought of an identity, with its accompanying notion of boundaries, and its rejection of the possibility that two different things might occupy the same space, or that one thing might be in several places. This other space might be understood as another dimension which is not perceived but which structures perceptible reality, the way in which modern physics, following Minkowski, understands perceptible reality as merely a three-dimensional slice of a four-dimensional space-time manifold.<sup>88</sup> Against any Euclidean conception, then, is “another, topological, space which establishes contact between the Outside and the Inside, the most distant, the most deep.”<sup>89</sup> This new space subverts the possibility of treating differences in terms of opposition. The latter is “roughly cut from a delicate milieu or overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities...”

As for opposition...it is as though things were spread out upon a flat surface, polarised in a single plane, and the synthesis itself took place only in a false depth — that is, in a fictitious third dimension added to the others which does no more than double the plane. In any case, what is missing is the original, intensive depth which is the matrix of the entire space and the first affirmation of difference: here, that which only afterwards appears as linear limitation and flat opposition lives and simmers in the form of free differences. Everywhere, couples

---

<sup>87</sup> Some of these are detailed in “Treatise on Nomadology,” pp. 361 onwards, but it can be said the Deleuze’s entire corpus is itself a sustained exposition of this form of thought.

<sup>88</sup> See Krauss, Lawrence M., *The Physics of Star Trek*, forwarded by Stephen Hawking (London: Flamingo, 1997), pp. 27-29.

<sup>89</sup> *Foucault*, p. 110.

and polarities presuppose bundles and networks, organized oppositions presuppose radiations in all directions.<sup>90</sup>

Another realm of movement and becoming is also made available — one of elusive and ‘intensive’ becomings which appear to move nowhere from the perspective of identity, and yet pass with ‘infinite speed’ by virtue of being ‘beyond’ the limits of spatio-temporal continuity. The swerve of Epicurean atoms — the *clinamen* — which occurs in a time and space smaller than the minimum thinkable continuity, embodies precisely this movement.<sup>91</sup> It is the nomadic movement of a line of flight which is experienced as “a curious, stationary journey.”<sup>92</sup>

From this multi-layered complex of movements and sedimentations comes the need for a multiform politics, and an appreciation of the way in which all things, at whatever level, are political. The personal is political, though in a peculiar sense. It is not simply because the barrier between private and public is drawn in the public or political realm; nor because both public and private refer to large scale powers, such as capitalism, patriarchy and racism, which organize both. More than these, it is because of the way in which anything, in the molecular fluxes that constitute it or in which it participates, and in the creative deterritorializations it can enact, ultimately affects the reification or overcoming of formations of power, identity and opposition. And it is because a thing is always more than simply a thing, tied to an excess which eludes any full capture by the logic of identity.

It is for this reason that politics must involve more than reform of existing institutions or revolutionary opposition to them. A creative experimentalism is also requisite for a politics that aspires beyond good and evil. This creation is not to be judged by its success or failure to ‘achieve change’, for its power comes in the purposelessness it can juxtapose to a world driven to organize and totalize itself in terms of identity and purpose. The ‘purpose’ of displaying purposelessness is of course paradoxical, and in this way it is closely associated with the task Adorno gives to both art and thinking to hold together self-contradictory

---

<sup>90</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: The Athlone Press, 1994), pp. 50-51.

<sup>91</sup> “The *clinamen*, as the minimum angle, has meaning only between a straight line and a curve, the curve and its tangent, and constitutes the original curvature and the movement of the atom. The *clinamen* is the smallest angle by which the atom deviates from a straight path. It is a passage to the limit, an exhaustion, a paradoxical ‘exhaustive’ model” (“Treatise on Nomadology,” p. 361). See also Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), “Lucretius and the Simulacrum,” pp. 266-279.

<sup>92</sup> *Dialogues*, op cit., p. 127.

moments,<sup>93</sup> and which Lyotard assigns to art and writing to speak to the excess of the event by betraying their own attempts to represent it.<sup>94</sup> But it is in the impossibility of such a role that this politics can attain its own moment of revolution, bringing forward the ‘new’ as that excess which is forgotten in the establishment of identities around which politics normally proceeds, “the impossible newness of the more ancient, always new because always forgotten.”<sup>95</sup>

It is in the introduction and politicization of this impossible excess that Nietzsche’s thought can be employed in a positive contribution to democratic thought. There are certainly dangers here, for in a movement of overcoming there is always the possibility that “the line of flight is converted into a line of abolition, of destruction of others and of itself.”<sup>96</sup> But parallel dangers are associated with all other forms of politics as it is normally conceived — which is presumably a central reason we have political theory. The point, therefore, is not to create a democratic politics without dangers — an idea which may well be a contradiction in terms itself — but to put the problematization of identity to use for democratic theory and practice. In this regard, Nietzsche’s seemingly anti-democratic ideas have the virtue of mitigating the dangers inherent in those forms of democratic politics which would depreciate his thought.

---

<sup>93</sup> See Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 1974).

<sup>94</sup> See Lyotard, Jean-François, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 142.