Deleuze and Guattari

An intro for Anarchist Communists

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ther have to wait for another time, or else you'll have to brave the source texts themselves – so check the references below for some guides and interpretations. Finally, I'll leave it to Deleuze & Guattari themselves to illustrate the merits of their philosophy for anarchists:

> "A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window."

References

- Colebrook – Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed

- Deleuze and Guattari – Anti-Oedipus

- Deleuze and Guattari – A Thousand Plateaus (especially chapters 9, 12, 13 and 14)

- Holland – Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis

- Nail – Returning to Revolution: Deleuze, Guattari and Zapatismo

- Parr – The Deleuze Dictionary

- Thoburn – Deleuze, Marx and Politics

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari were a pair of French philosophers who came to prominence around the uprisings of May 1968. Their experiences of those events led to their two-volume work 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia', in which they laid out a wealth of tools for analysing the dynamics of capitalism and the state. They drew upon a massive array of sources, blending the philosophical concepts of Marx, Freud and Nietzche, with insights from chaos theory, evolutionary biology, geology and anthropology (amongst many others). Whilst this variety of sources means there are many different ways to engage with Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, anarchists will likely be most interested in their emphasis on creating freedom from all forms of domination, both material and psychological.

Like many of their academic peers of that era, D&G's use of language was deliberately opaque, which has unfortunately meant their ideas have mostly remained locked within academia. I hope this article goes some way to bridging that gap, by presenting just a handful of their bewildering array of concepts in more accessible language. Some who are familiar with D&G may disagree with how I've interpreted these concepts, but that was always their intention with the difficult language: they detested the type of 'State philosophy' that tries to control what is to be considered the truth, and subsequently used to the benefit of dominant powers. Instead they saw the task of philosophers as the creation of a conceptual toolbox that people could draw from, and connect to their own lives and struggles in their own ways. The deciding factor was not truthfulness, but usefulness. In a conversation with Foucault, Deleuze said (paraphrasing Proust): "treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an investment for combat."

Before we begin, one basic concept is worth explaining to help understand D&G. They often talk in terms of 'flows':

flows of money, flows of people, flows of information, flows of thought, flows of speech, flows of history – even 'flows of shit'. For them, nothing is static: all of the universe is in constant flux, albeit at different speeds. From the slow movements of the earth's crust over millions of years, to the rapid changes in an explosion. Likewise they apply this idea of flows to social change, in both the gradual development of social structures through history, to the rapid changes that come about during a revolution.

With that in mind, let's see if we can make Deleuze and Guattari *useful* for anarchist communism.

Freedom and 'smooth space'

In their *Introduction to Anarchist Communism*, the Anarchist Federation (hereafter AFed) says:

> "A state is a machine for controlling people and can never be anything else."

A key function of the state is what D&G call 'striation': taking the commons ('smooth space'), where free movement is possible, and cutting this up into plots with strict borders ('striated space'). When applied to land, this process creates the possibility of rent by creating discreet areas that can be owned and traded. Anarchists will be familiar with examples such as the enclosure of the English commons, the expropriations by colonial powers across Africa, as well as modern state land grabs such as those currently underway in places like China and Ethiopia.

But this 'striation' is not restricted to land. The state is involved in the striation of other common assets: the smooth space of the sea is carved into territories, as is the smooth space of the air. The smooth space of public squares become privatised and regulated, with certain actions (even certain people)

A **positive relative** change on the other hand, does actually create connections to ward off the creation of domination, but doesn't in itself present enough of a challenge to the whole system to create a revolutionary break. Isolationist lifestyle anarchism tends to fall within this type. It may be positive by actually working against internal domination through non-hierarchical relations, and by creating a 'smooth space' that the state can't appropriate for itself. But it is only a *relative* deterritorialisation because ultimately the State-capitalist system as a whole isn't really that bothered by it. It's a minor irritation that the State will either attempt to crush, or like Freetown Christiana in Copenhagen, will allow to continue existing in isolation, causing no further disturbance to the capitalist system.

Only **absolute** change can be revolutionary. This involves a serious rupture in the social system which the state cannot absorb. But like the relative axis, there is a negative and positive type. An example of **negative absolute** change might be the kind of militarised insurrectionary revolution which itself turns tyrannical, failing to stop itself from turning into a new tool of domination. Authoritarian communist revolutions would also fall under the **negative absolute** type: whilst they may well challenge one current dominant power, they nonetheless produce an alternative system of domination through hierarchy and the repression it necessitates.

This is exactly why anarchist communists argue the need for prefiguration: the creation of institutions and organisations that can begin to constitute a new society free of domination *prior* to a revolution. These organisations would enable a **positive absolute** change, by creating connections which continually act against the reformation of the state or any other form of dominant power, before, during and after a period of revolutionary rupture.

There are countless other concepts that could be of use to anarchists that there's no space to go into here. These will ei-

So if these are territories, then territorialisation is just any process which produces these social and material territories. *De*-territorialisation therefore refers to processes which disturb and transform these systems. It gets useful when D&G set out the different types of deterritorialisation, to describe different types of system change. Where our usual contrast of 'reform vs revolution' gives us only one broad axis of change, deterritorialisation uses two different axes: absolute vs relative, and positive vs negative.

Absolute and Relative refer to whether we totally break away from dominant social ideas, or merely create a momentary rift which is then easily re-absorbed by the State. A relative change brings to the surface some existing possibilities in the social system, but an absolute change *creates entirely new possibilities.*

Positive and negative doesn't mean 'good and bad', but rather refer to whether the change acts *against* the formation of a dominant power (positive) or if it's a change which ultimately *supports* domination (negative).

Combining the two axes gives us four broad types. (Though it should be stressed that these are fluid types, and whilst some situations will demonstrate one dominant type, others can involve a mix)

A **negative relative** deterritorisalisation means that the system is upset, a change occurs, but this doesn't go very far to challenge the system, and if anything it actually strengthens dominant power. Elections are an example – a period in which a certain amount of chaos comes into play, but only so much as the state expects and is completely capable of recovering from. The State in fact emerges stronger because of its refreshed 'democratic mandate', and with some weaker links of the system having been cast off. At the same time, no processes were in place to work against the reformation ('re-territorialisation') of State power after the election.

forbidden. There are more abstract examples, such as intellectual property, where the smooth space of ideas and concepts has been striated, and its ownership enforced. And 'net neutrality', the smooth space of the internet, is also under sustained attack by the state, attempting to divide it up to allow preferential treatment to the highest bidders. Striation is one of the ways in which the State clears the way for capitalist exploitation.

The only smooth space the state can tolerate is where it's created as a tool in the service of further striation, such as in maintaining the integrity of state borders. So for example, how modern states use anti-terror legislation to create a smooth space of communications surveillance, where state agents can slip in and out of communication networks without restriction. Or the smooth space of warfare, where normally observed 'state sovereignty' is dissolved, and all terrain becomes subject to violent cleansing.

Striation therefore relates to how movement through space-time is constrained or otherwise, whether of human bodies, capital, information, products, armies; all 'flows'. Anarchism could be said to seek a world of smooth space, that is, not just a world without borders, but without coercion in our movements, thoughts and expressions. D&G apply smooth space to work in a way similar to an anarchist perspective, counterposing the striated, coercive 'work' with the smooth, creative 'free action':

'*Where there is no State and no surplus labour there is no Work-model either. Instead, there is the continuous variation of free action, passing from speech to action, from a given action to another, from action to song, from song to speech, from speech to enterprise, all in a strange chromaticism with rare peak moments or moments of effort that the outside observer can only "translate" in terms of work*'

We must be careful however, as smooth spaces are not in and of themselves liberatory. As mentioned, they can be used

directly in the service of the state, such as in warfare. They can also exist in the cracks of striated spaces, creating an individual and temporary sense of liberation that doesn't disturb the social order. The urban explorer constructs a smooth space in their movement through a city, traversing the locked, boarded up and hard to reach places. But this doesn't remove the striations themselves, it merely allows an individual the thrill of working around them.

Smooth spaces can have a powerful effect however, particularly when as part of collective action. We might distinguish the smooth space of a militant protest, that spontanously reclaims space from the hands of the state and spreads out unpredictably, versus the striated space of the police-sanctioned A-B march. The smooth space of a non-hierarchical neighbourhood assembly, versus the striated space of union bureaucracy. Or on a broader scale, the smooth space of a new society created through direct democracy, versus the striation of the five year plan.

The State and 'rigid segmentarity'

AFed says: "Schools, whilst providing an important service, also indoctrinate children and prepare them for a life as workers rather than as human beings. Prisons, immigration authorities, dole offices and on and on and on, all intrude into our lives and control our actions. Some of these things, like schools, hospitals and welfare benefits, we sometimes depend on for our lives. It is often this very dependence that these organisations use to control us."

Social space is divided along different types of line: in dualisms (child/adult, man/woman, this class/that class), expanding circles (the individual, the couple, the family, the town, the city) and linear lines (I pass from home, to school, to army, to work). Each of these ways of division is operative in all forms

oppression occurs within communities. So how do we express what kind of community we want? Using the three syntheses above, we might say we are for community based on a complex interweaving of parts, such as real local links of emotional and material solidarity between people (legitimate **connection**). This is in contrast to the way the word community is often used, which can mean little more than lots of individuals living close by who don't interact – community merely presumed by the name. We are for inclusive community, where all are welcomed in their myriad differences (legitimate **disjunction**), rather than a community which excludes on normative grounds of gender, race, disability, etc. And we are for stable but flexible community (legitimate **conjunction**), where people have a sense of collective identity but which never excludes on the basis of 'us vs them'. A community which maintains unique character and tradition but where people have an openness to gradual, consensual change, always shaping itself to find better ways of living together.

Revolution and deterritorialisation

AFed says: "Both the destruction of what exists now and the construction of something new are part of the revolution."

Finally, something that may be useful for anarchists in thinking about revolution is D&G's concept of 'de-territorialisation'. It's a bit of a cumbersome word, so it's worth breaking down a bit. It refers to 'territory', but this isn't necessarily a physical territory: it can also apply to conceptual or social territories. This might seem odd at first, but we actually use this in everyday language already. When the Tories came into power with a majority, people may have said something like: 'We've entered new territory', implying a new dominant ideology, a new combination of laws, ideas, statements, practices etc.

We **conjoin** *legitimately* in being open to the shifting of our horizons, to the finding of a new position. We conjoin *illegitimately* in always referring back to a rigid and unchanging ground, which generates segregation. Nationalism is a perfect example of such an unchanging ideological ground. After arriving at the idea of 'immigrant', this is placed into the rigid, pre-determined ground of 'Britain'. It sets up a segregative 'us vs. them' distinction which is carried through all judgments. It doesn't matter how open and respectful think they are, so long as they rely on this rigid ground of the nation, their compassion will ultimately be overruled by the desire to protect the state.

But again, we must be careful that anarchist ideas do not also suffer this. We have to always be ready to hone our expectations and analytical tools to adapt to a changing world, and remain open to creating contingent links on this ground. We can't simply fall back on dogmatic assertions based on the grounding of classical anarchist thought, and segregate ourselves from other working class struggle. In other words, we have to maintain our principles without isolating ourselves. A successful example has been the London AFed group finding ways to act within the housing movement. On the whole it's operated on non-hierarchical principles familiar to anarchists, but has sometimes required working alongside people with divergent political views. By maintaining our autonomy as anarchists but forming contingent, temporary bonds with others, we've been able to assist in actions like eviction resistance, we've added an extra voice in arguments for keeping action at a grassroots level, and allowed us to create links with and have influence in parts of the movement we otherwise wouldn't have.

To bring these three syntheses together, we can look at the idea of 'community'. It can be a difficult term for anarchists: community in the one sense is where we act against the State, yet we can't be uncritical of it, as much inter-working class

of society. But where pre-state societies tended towards segments which are supple, and interlink in multiple ways around numerous centres, State societies make these rigid, and organise them hierarchically around a single centre. What was a dynamic web of different centres of attraction becomes a single hierarchical 'resonance chamber' through which power can flow.

Through this hierarchical chamber, state organs are made to resonate together with the same neoliberal ideology: schools and universities acting as factories to produce workers; prisons used as sources of labour, housing those who fail to adapt to the harshness of neoliberal society; benefits being given only on condition of unpaid work; politicians shaping policy to best help big business, all public services being stripped, marketised and privatised; the continuity of the interests of the financial, industrial and military sectors. Ideology is able to resonate through all these social segments as one.

The more the state interferes with our lives, the more we as individuals are also made to resonate with these state organs. We are hailed by the state as individualised legal and political subjects, supposedly equal under the law, ignoring the inequality of our social circumstances. We are treated as customers, eroding the expectation of unconditional civic rights and replacing them with payment-conditional consumer rights. We are compelled to dress and act with increasing homogeneity, with deviation from the ideals of 'smartness' and 'speaking properly' being a danger to our ability to find work, even now extending to our conduct on social media. Families reproduce and normalise hierarchy and the 'work ethic' in their children. Even relationships are judged in terms of 'marriage markets' and 'investments'. This level of insidious social control would be impossible without a system of rigid segments, arranged to act as a single resonance chamber through which an ideology could flow.

Domination within the working class: the unconscious 'syntheses'

AFed says: "[T]he ruling class works hard to divide us against each other. It does this in two ways, partly through trying to control ideas and the way we think about ourselves, and partly through creating small differences in power and wealth that set working class people against each other"

D&G also aimed to analyse more precisely how capitalism and the state affect the way we think about ourselves and others at a subconscious level. For them, 'ideology' was too vague and deterministic a concept, and needed more specific elaboration of how State processes like striation and rigid segmentation affected thought. They refer instead to three 'syntheses' of the mind. This is how our minds connect together the chaos of sensations around us, then divide them into discrete objects, then put together all these seperate objects and understand them in context, against a ground. These then are the syntheses of *connection*, *disjunction* and *conjunction*.

Where it becomes politically useful is that D&G add an ethical dimension: each of these syntheses has a *legitimate* and an *illegitimate* form. In short, the legitimate syntheses of the mind are partial, inclusive and fluid. The illegitimate are global, exclusive and rigid. This means that:

We **connect** *legitimately* in our awareness of how people, minds, events, social systems and so on are complex and contradictory, and made up of an array of unique parts. We connect *illegitimately* in our simplification of human and social complexity, in treating everything and everyone as an already determined whole object.

This process is constantly active in the media, such as in the representation of Muslims or asylum seekers, who are presumed to be explained by that label, rather than being complex people for whom that is only one constituent part. It also happens to anarchists, where instead of being approached as complex human beings for whom 'anarchist' is only one element, we are instead taken as simple whole objects that are entirely summed up by that word, and all the misinformation attached to it.

But we can also be guilty of this ourselves. For example, seeing people such as Daily Mail readers or UKIP voters as totally explainable by the label, rather than a complex blending of parts in their own right. This doesn't mean taking a woolly liberal perspective of 'everyone's opinion is equal' – it's about trying to understand why these oppressive positions come about. By looking at people as a complex array of parts rather than simple objects explainable by a label, we leave open space to try to understand the social processes that have produced them. That way, we stand a better chance of learning how to counteract the social and psychological forces that create racism, nationalism and fascism.

We **disjoin** *legitimately* in recognising difference and treating it inclusively. We disjoin *illegitimately* in tying difference into strict binaries, and excluding that which doesn't fit. For example, the distinction between 'man and women' is often used to exclude and oppress queer, trans and intersex people. The illegitimate axioms go: 'You are either a man or a woman, and you remain that way for life ... A man is attracted to women and a woman to men ... Men dress and act like this, and women like that ...' In contrast, a legitimate disjunction accepts that woman and man are two perfectly legitimate categories, but do not form a restrictive pair. There is space for a proliferation of further identifiers to understand a person's sex/gender: trans woman, queer man, non-binary person, intersex person – who may be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, monogamous, polyamorous – who may dress and act normatively or otherwise. So where the illegitimate disjunction forms an exclusive pair 'either A or B', the legitimate use forms an inclusive series 'A and B and C and D and ...'