

## ***Deleuze and Guattari's Political Symptomatology: From the Psychoanalysis of Literary Symptoms to the Becoming- minor of May '68***

by GUILLAUME COLLETT

### **Abstract**

This article sketches the shift in Deleuze and Guattari's approach to literary symptomatology, from Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* (1969) to *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), addressing the mutating role played by psychoanalysis in these approaches as well as the politics involved. In the conclusion, some tentative comments are made regarding how May '68 and the neoliberal response to it could be better understood in terms of the framework of a post-Marxist "becoming-minor" derived from Deleuze and Guattari's second iteration of their literary symptomatology.

### **1. The Early Deleuze: Symptom and Eternal Return**

As early as 1962, Deleuze (2006) endorses Nietzsche's identification of "the whole of philosophy" with a "symptomatology, and a semeiology" (3): "A phenomenon is not an appearance or even an apparition but a sign, a symptom which finds its meaning in an existing force" (ibid.). A sign is a symptom – and a symptom a sign – because the force relations intensively implicated in the sign determine it as symptom of the combat between forces; yet, insofar as the symptom is also a sign, the *being* of the combat between forces doesn't effectively preexist the sign's interpretative explication or "expression" as *sense* (even if only by the will to power itself, Deleuze 2006: 63-7). Accordingly, this act of interpretation does not excavate the sign's buried *truth* – associated in propositional logic with a "filled", referential contact with the object – but rather, contingently *produces* the sign's sense through the networks of relations it establishes with other signs, always as the expressive redoubling of a "parallel"<sup>1</sup> network of force relations implicated in the sign and in signs' relational networks. Deleuze (2006) shows how in Nietzsche, this is a selective process which confronts each sign with the test of eternal return: what alone pass this test are signs capable of forming a consistent compositional network, a "chaos-cosmos" rising

---

<sup>1</sup> This term is to be understood here in the sense in which Deleuze (2005) reads it through the concept of expression.

above the inchoate depths of the pre-interpretative and chaotic mixtures of force given to the act of interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Being itself always present beneath the “heights” representation, and hence irreducible to the universality and generality of propositional concepts, the interpretative explication of force relations on the “surface” of sense thus produces what Deleuze (2004b) will later term a singular “sense-event”. Any supposed object (corresponding to a logic of reference) is thereby ontologically dissipated as object (and so constituted as ontological) in the interpretative explication of sense as incorporeal spreading-out of an event that hugs bodies but apart from them, as it does so creatively mapping the (evaluative rather than teleological) directionality of their relations of force.<sup>3</sup>

Later, in *Logic of Sense* (1969), the “symptomatology” task of philosophy is now decidedly delegated to literature, or more accurately to a transdisciplinary practice ultimately realized by the work of art. In this book, the work of art – understood more specifically as a fittingly processual and future-orientated “work of art yet to come” (Deleuze 2004b: 285) – is considered to supplant philosophy’s symptomatology role by expressing a “chaos-cosmos” of sense and nonsense (Deleuze 2004b: ix) adequate to (which is to say expressive of) the actions and passions affecting the body. The “univocity of being”, object of philosophy (Deleuze 2004b: 205), is understood precisely here as the expressed immanence of conceptual thought to the body’s actions and passions. Immanence is understood not in terms of thought’s ability to adequately account for experience as it is given to good and common sense as the identity of self-recognition in the object (a merely representationalist approach), but rather in terms of thought’s power of creation which cedes ultimate priority neither to the pure concept nor to experience, but maintains both in a supple relation of co-creation. The sense/nonsense distinction, well known to propositional logic, is considered by Deleuze as only meaningful from the viewpoint of signification, i.e. from *inside* language, whose operation of folding itself inwards (constitutive of interiority) has the effect of covering over sense’s genetic identity with nonsense, which is to say its interpretative-productive function with regard to force and event. Propositional logic admits sense only if it adheres to a logically consistent use of the conventional rules of signification, as conditioned by the logical “test” of good and common sense (see Deleuze 2004b: 87-93). Rejecting this approach, Deleuze’s appetite for “literary nonsense”, and particularly the work of Lewis Carroll, can be understood in large part to reflect its attempt to stick as closely as possible to the non-oppositional play of sense and nonsense flowing over the surface of the body as the conceptual explication of relations of force.

---

<sup>2</sup> This is not to conflate Deleuze and Nietzsche-proper, however, the difference being clearly demarcated in such passages as Deleuze (2004b: 123) and, more indirectly, Deleuze and Guattari (2004b: 6-7). On force and will to power, see Nietzsche (1968: 349, 352-354, 366-8, 370-4), and on selection and eternal return, see Nietzsche (1968: 544-550). The primary difference between the two philosophers, as rendered in the account in the main text above, is that for Deleuze the being of the combat between forces is determined on the “surface” of sense, whereas for Nietzsche the ontological univocity of thought and being seems to be less finely balanced.

<sup>3</sup> Massumi (1992: 10-21) explains well this “guiding-following” process of interpretation in Deleuze.

In the preface to *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze (2004b) explains his choice of Carroll as subject of investigation in this book in terms both of his “exemplary logical and linguistic formalism” (ix) adequate to the expression of the body’s affective nonsense, and correlatively, his potential contribution to contemporary psychoanalysis – namely, at the time, the psychoanalysis of the Lacanian school (2004b: ix).<sup>4</sup> What Deleuze particularly likes about their work is the “essential Lacanian rule, that of not being in a hurry to eliminate nonsense from a mixture of series which would want to be prematurely significant” (2004b: 268, n. 7). The Lacanian “letter” – understood as a nonsensical signifier resisting its incorporation into the effects of signification produced by the coupling of a signifier with a signified – shares with the Nietzschean sign precisely this feature of implicating a differential of force fundamental to (if repressed by) signification, which for the Lacanians is due to the letter-sign’s originary inscription on the unconscious erogenous body and its association there with an intensive quantity of libido tied to a zone’s partial drive (cf. Deleuze 2004b: 263-5; Deleuze draws here specifically on Leclaire’s (1998) work). The task of psychoanalysis is to explicate these letters prohibited from entering consciousness – whose associated affect continues to jar with conscious discourse (and indeed retroactively so<sup>5</sup>) producing symptoms. As “talking cure” centred on speech in its singular affective dimension irreducible to signification – the repetition, stress, intonation of the phonemes uttered by the analysand – psychoanalysis’ clinical practice interprets precisely by guiding the analysand’s own self-explication of the sense/nonsense of the letter, whose mutating affective quality stems retroactively from its ongoing and shifting friction with conscious discourse over the course of an analysis. The event of the psychoanalytic cure is contingent on the structural repartition of the relations between conscious discourse (signification) and unconscious sense/nonsense, in a way which minimizes the symptomatic tension between the two orders (see Leclaire 1998: 112-14). This psychoanalytic insight largely hinges on Freud’s discovery that trauma is a *retroactive* function of its later symbolization.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, Deleuze turns to Carroll, beyond psychoanalysis, to interpret the body’s sense/nonsense. Psychoanalysis’ interpretative method is still too anthropocentric and/or subjectivist. In the Lacanian approach, the ineradicable tension between the two Freudian systems (unconscious non/sense and conscious signification), as schematized by fantasy, produces conscious effects of signification nonetheless resonating with the non/sense of the unconscious body, which continues to “insist” within language (as typified by the Freudian *lapsus*), both systems being jointly animated by and together constituting the unfolding of

---

<sup>4</sup> “But since the marriage of language and the unconscious has already been consummated and celebrated in so many ways, it is necessary to examine the precise nature of this union in Carroll’s work” (Deleuze 2004b: ix); “Lacan’s work has [...] completely renewed the general problem of the relations between sexuality and language” (Deleuze 2004b: 263).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Leclaire (1998: 113). There are fairly significant differences internal to Lacan’s school, regarding this topic, though these will not be further discussed in the present article due to space restrictions.

<sup>6</sup> See Freud (2002), and Laplanche and Pontalis (1968).

the subject's singular fantasy formation.<sup>7</sup> This is, for the early Deleuze, to be understood as the unfolding of the unconscious "questions and problems" (singularly structured systems of resonance) determining the psychic life of a subject or singular structure.<sup>8</sup> But, for Deleuze, the *telos* of this problematic unfolding of a singular structure – insofar as, for him, these systems of tension are to be viewed as productive of an ultimately *impersonal*, univocal sense-event or fragment of immanence, which ontologically grounds them in their effect – points far beyond any anthropological finitude, as well as away from any subjectivist residue still inherent to Lacan's understanding of fantasy.<sup>9</sup> For Deleuze, the unfolding of the singular questions and problems of a subject leads, at its point of maximal ontological intensity, to the univocity of the incorporeal event, in which all beings lose their actual or ontic being in order to gain virtual or ontological being as "unlimited becoming" (Deleuze 2004b: 4), and in which all beings are now constitutively synthesized by the test of eternal return (compositional consistency of force relations) (see Deleuze 2004b: 205-6, 253).<sup>10</sup>

As Deleuze writes in the final pages of *Logic of Sense*, it is now no longer philosophy's task to interpret-produce signs as sense, but rather "the problem of a work of art yet to come" which would "alone" give an "answer" to the subject's symptomatic "questions" (2004b: 285). Now explicitly in tension with psychoanalysis, what defines "great art", for Deleuze, is its ability to move beyond a merely psychoanalytic diagnosis of its interpretative-productive practice, the psychoanalytic diagnosis being understood as an ultimately referential approach to signs which traces the symptom embodied in the sign back to the Oedipal drama of the nuclear family. This approach, Deleuze tells us, is applicable only to the "neurotic" novel, understood as "familial romance" (2004b: 273). The psychoanalytic cure works by symbolizing-sublimating the troublingly symptomatic facets of the letter, whereas "great" literature is considered here to extract from symptoms an event which is elaborated primarily for itself within the work, outside any referential Oedipal frame and even outside normative conceptions of health,<sup>11</sup> even if this interpretative-productive labour can in turn provide some more traditionally understood "curative" effects once re-embodied by the author the moment their pen is put down. Deleuze (2004b) refers to this as the phantasm's "pendulum"-like swing back and forth (277). In sum, through its clinical practice aimed at the cure, psychoanalysis could be said to re-anthropomorphize the events (breakthroughs) it interprets-produces, whereas for Deleuze the purpose of the great work of art – as a

---

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Leclaire (1999: 25-31).

<sup>8</sup> I develop this further in *The Psychoanalysis of Sense* (2016), Ch. 4. Deleuze (2004b) speaks of these "questions" in terms of the "origin of birth, of sexuality, of the difference of the sexes, or of death..." (250). See also Deleuze (2004a: 131-3, 160-1, n. 17).

<sup>9</sup> Lacan (n. d.) formalizes fantasy as  $\$ \diamond a$ , meaning the subject is constitutively split by her fantasmatic relation to the infinite horizon of her (lack of) being (radical lack as absence of being, objectified as the *a*), yet is thereby split between finitude and infinity and does not escape from the Kantian horizon of anthropocentrism.

<sup>10</sup> Further analysis of this is provided in Chapter 5 of *The Psychoanalysis of Sense* (2016).

<sup>11</sup> See Deleuze (2004b: 169-70, 182-3, 198), and on the "death instinct" Deleuze (2004b: 277-8).

necessarily unfinished project (“yet to come”) – is primarily to produce an ongoing de-corporealization and de-personalization of both symptoms and the singular structure which embodies them.<sup>12</sup>

Turning in more detail to Carroll, in Deleuze’s sophisticated reading, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) in particular lays out the general coordinates of the body’s play of sense and nonsense (see Deleuze 2004b: 271-2). Deleuze notes that the squares of the chessboard (symbolizing Alice’s partial erogenous zones) encountered shortly after she enters the titular looking glass, which figure in the following chapter as the interlocking series of fields she views from a hill and which she will go on to traverse throughout the ensuing chapters, are “phallically” coordinated or totalized by Alice herself through the course of the story as she takes on self-mastery of her body. But Deleuze understands this cliché psychoanalytic interpretation as doubled and superseded by a second trajectory – that of the Red Queen symbolizing the event of univocity itself (and not merely the phallus of coordination), who first shows Alice the fields she must cross and then returns at the end of the story when Alice herself “becomes-Queen” in Chapter IX. What Deleuze makes light of, however, is the constant movement of deterritorialization undergone by Alice as she passes through the fields (the story’s chapters), the fundamentally collective nature of her journey (such as her merging with Tweedledum/Tweedledee in Chapter IV), and the instances of becoming-animal (such as the White Queen’s mutation into a sheep in Chapter V), all of which would appear to inscribe Carroll’s unconscious within a social field. Although I have mentioned the pendulum-like oscillation in *Logic of Sense* between dis-incorporation and re-incorporation, Peter Hallward (2006) nonetheless seems to correctly put his finger on a certain “out of this world” tendency in Deleuze, whose political limitations when attempting to critically analyze and strategically intervene in the concrete struggles of embodied actors within actual history directly flow from this kind of analysis. However, the major challenge to Hallward’s work lies in his only being able to account for the early Deleuze, since I will now show how the mutations undergone by Deleuze’s approach to literary symptomatology convincingly respond to Hallward’s challenge.

## 2. Literary Symptomatology in the later Deleuze and Guattari

### 2.1 Sense and Intensity

In a 1973 paper given to the Lacanian *École Freudienne de Paris*, Guattari (1984a) notes that when re-reading Lacanian psychoanalysis through a modified-semiotic (purportedly Hjelmslevian) framework, one encounters two semiotic categories exceeding the signification-focused Saussurian framework favoured by the Lacanians. While we saw how

---

<sup>12</sup> Here a comparison with the Lacanian notion of cure as “subjective destitution” could prove fruitful, with the caveats already mentioned.

the Lacanian letter is nonsignifying, it was also noted that its affective quality is primarily established retroactively – by the contingent reaction of conscious discourse onto the unconscious – and thus it is still (if oppositionally) determined by signification. What this viewpoint misses is twofold. Both the dimension of pure non/sense considered for itself and outside the frame of signification, as explored by Deleuze, which Guattari (1984a) terms an “assignifying semiotic” (75). And also, and now *beyond* the early Deleuze, the “asemiotic” dimension of “encoded” material fluxes (Guattari 1984a: 74). For the latter, Guattari has in mind DNA, which has no necessary relation to signification, nor sense for that matter, being “encoded” rather than linguistically expressed. But Guattari also has in mind a new model of the unconscious which cannot be reduced to the Lacanian “unconscious structured like a language”, even if the manner in which he (and later with Deleuze) elaborates this encoded “asemiotic” layer involves a mutual pre-supposition or “double articulation” with language.

It is possible to understand the impact which Guattari’s work will have on Deleuze, as well as more specifically on his approach to literary symptomatology, if we turn to the conceptual shift effected between *Logic of Sense* and their co-authored *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975). In the latter, a literary “line of flight” is no longer to be understood as centred on the non/sensical point of escape from signification, the univocity of the sense-event as that which operationally sidesteps the distinction between signifying language and nonsensical bodies. Rather, this is now conceived as only the *obverse* side of literature’s plane of consistency, its incorporeal surface of sense. The aim of literature in its fully Deleuzo-Guattarian symptomatological register is now, rather, to follow this first line of non/sense to the point of indiscernibility between language and bodies now considered more fully at the level of the indistinction between non/sense (the “assignifying semiotic”), on the one hand, and asemiotic blocks of intensity (material fluxes), on the other, which as *reverse* side of literature’s plane of consistency point beyond language altogether and even beyond bodily nonsense as conceived by the early Deleuze (which is still ultimately part of the plane’s obverse side of non/sense). As they write:

The sound or the word that traverses this new deterritorialisation no longer belongs to a language of sense, even though it derives from it [...] a language of sense is traversed by a line of escape – in order to liberate a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 21)

In order to understand the significance of this shift, it is necessary to return to *Logic of Sense*, which distinguishes between Carroll’s literary nonsense and that of Antonin Artaud, on the basis that the former is still operating at the level of non/sense, that is to say ultimately within language, if at what Deleuze considers a “perverse” level sidestepping “neurotic” signification. Whereas Artaud’s experience of language, on the other hand, and the art he produces from it, points entirely outside both the perverse and neurotic fields and formalizations of experience. Alice’s fall through the rabbit hole inaugurating her

“adventures underground” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), attests to a profound psychoanalytic intuition regarding the schizoid nature of early infancy (with its introjection and projection of partial objects and unstable bodily boundaries). Yet, Deleuze claims that Carroll has no direct experience of this domain – the so-called “depths” where mixtures of force subsist independently of their later linguistic structuration (on all these points see Deleuze 2004b: 95-105). Artaud, as a schizophrenic but moreover as a successful or “great” artist, by contrast, is able to tap into this experience of the body and to a radically distinct experience of language directly interpenetrated with materiality, rather than indirectly articulating with it through processes of symbolization and sublimation.<sup>13</sup> Deleuze considers this to rely on the operations of the “body without organs”, a term Artaud first coined in 1947,<sup>14</sup> which Deleuze conceptually adapts into a psychic layer of experience fundamentally anterior to the Freudian distinction between unconscious and conscious/preconscious (Deleuze 2004b: 281-2).

It is well documented that Guattari’s desire to collaborate with Deleuze was in large part prompted by Deleuze’s early elaboration, in *Logic of Sense*, of this novel conception of the Artaudian body without organs, considered as radically non-Lacanian in its understanding of the language-body nexus. But one needs to also appreciate the manner in which, through their collaboration, this notion itself will be fundamentally re-orientated. While both Deleuze and Guattari consider the bodily unconscious as initially and primordially schizophrenic (Deleuze via his reading of Klein’s “paranoid-schizoid position”, Guattari through his work in institutional analysis treating psychotics), Deleuze views infant development in terms of the endogenous bodily genesis of an element of totalization standing above the schizophrenic experience of the body, and able to direct the body towards a process that will later be framed in terms of a linguistic symbolization and sublimation of affect (see Deleuze 2004b: 214-22). Deleuze and Guattari together will radicalize this, however, by viewing the Kleinian “good object” of identification with an “other” (as adapted by Deleuze), guiding the infant’s entry into the ensuing “manic-depressive position” of psycho-sexual development, as fundamentally a socio-political function whose historical emergence can be reconstructed through a genealogical method, which they will develop together in Chapter 3 of *Anti-Oedipus* (1972).<sup>15</sup> As such, for Guattari and for Deleuze from *Anti-Oedipus* onwards, the unconscious will be viewed as essentially schizophrenic without any intrinsic neurotic/perverse component of self-transcendence towards otherness as the basis of the acquisition of signifying language. As such, clinically, this means that “normal” and/or neurotic individuals and perverts are as “schizophrenic” as psychotics, to the extent that the unconscious is fundamentally schizophrenic (“schizophrenia” is a socio-cultural pathology).

---

<sup>13</sup> I discuss this point further in *The Psychoanalysis of Sense* (2016), Ch. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Accessible here: <http://www.surrealism-plays.com/Artaud.html> (last accessed 21.11.2018).

<sup>15</sup> This “good object” they will later reformulate as the “despot’s” “voice from on high” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004a: 228), which “overcodes” or signifierizes and thereby represses polyvocal semiotic chains.

This manifests itself clearly in the chapter on the body without organs from *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), “November 28, 1947: How do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?”, which begins with, and remains deeply informed by, a reading of a case of clinical masochism i.e. *perversion*, rather than psychosis (schizophrenia or paranoia). The fundamental break in *Logic of Sense* between Carroll’s “perversion” and Artaud’s schizophrenia is hence bypassed once we reach *A Thousand Plateaus*, and arguably this is thanks to Guattari’s radicalization of the unconscious as schizophrenic. All clinical symptoms are thus now to be understood in relation to this schizophrenic base, comprised of a connection of intensive quantities (material fluxes), broadly similar to the Lacanian reading of the unconscious body as “set” of intensive letters, yet with no longer any need for a phallic or Oedipal coordination and totalization of these relations.

Moreover, Guattari introduces a second important dimension by de-Oedipalising the dynamics involved. Deleuze understands the transition from a schizoid state of the body experienced in early infancy to a coordinated erogenous surface (the order of the “letter”), which functions as the basis of the formation of signifying propositions (and of any propositional articulation, however distant, between bodies and language), in terms of Oedipal or phallic castration (Deleuze 2004b: 236, 261). Castration establishes a structural psychic break between the “surface” of non/sense and the “depths” of the schizoid body. By understanding the transition from the schizophrenic unconscious to an organized body displaced from its schizophrenic base instead as the effect of a *socio-economic* regime or political economy of signs, which moreover can at all times be reversed, Guattari’s influence allows Deleuze’s body without organs to now be re-positioned *inside* the functioning unconscious of the normal/neurotic and perverse subject (if at a distance due to social repression) – which is to say that the body without organs as non-phallically organized or connected block of intensities is present and, to varying degrees, operative in all subjects. Guattari thereby helps Deleuze recalibrate his conceptualization of castration’s structural location so that the unconscious’ constitutive break is no longer primarily found between the body without organs and the surface of non/sense, but between these two levels taken together on the one hand (as the “plane of consistency”), and the order of signification on the other (socio-economic regimes of signs – see Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 123-30).

Bypassing the distinction between clinical schizophrenia and perversion (and normality or neurosis), Deleuze’s psychoanalytic and literary categories from *Logic of Sense* are thus no longer meaningful, as we see in *Kafka* and then in *A Thousand Plateaus*. If *Logic of Sense* posits “sense” as a dimension of experience out of touch with the schizoid and corporeal depths of the body, as found in the schizophrenic experience, the radicalization of the unconscious as fundamentally schizophrenic gives rise to the surprising figure of the *perverse body without organs* as the reverse side of the surface of sense. The topological figure of the rabbit hole (implying verticality and the distinction between surface and depth) is replaced by the numerical and intensive figure of *intensity = 0*. To access the body without organs, the chapter from *A Thousand Plateaus* of the same name instructs the reader to

partition the body without organs away from the “machinic” (i.e. asemiotic) connections or libidinal interactions which would prompt a building of intensive blocks in the unconscious (through relations of composition and decomposition of force). Cutting oneself off from any body liable to prompt a composition of relations of force, or connection of intensities, involves an intensive reduction returning the body to its maximally dis-organ-ised (and zero-degree) pole. It is from this basis that it is then possible to re-establish a new set of relations with other dis-organ-ised bodies, this time inscribed directly on a body without organs of social or collective (and machinic rather than structured) desire.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Sense and Intensity in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*

*Kafka's* conceptual revolution in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to literary symptomatology is at least threefold – involving a direct or machinic connection to *intensity*, an *intensive* use of language, and the activation of a transversal and political “*becoming-minor*” (associated with the later notion of “line of flight”).

Firstly, the line of flight of language no longer has the univocity of non/sense as its ultimate aim, this being only its starting point. Its primary function is now to lead to a point of conversion from the *obverse* side of the plane of consistency (semiotic non/sense) to its *reverse* side (asemiotic blocks of intensity), accessible via a zero-degree point of intensity. Kafka short-circuits the break between Carroll and Artaud. Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into a bug in *The Metamorphosis* (1915), Kafka giving no explanation for this mutation, is beyond the absurd or surreal, considering the latter's valuing of the nonsensical. The metamorphosis makes no “sense”, indeed, but this is only its starting point. The real aim of the literary metamorphosis, in Deleuze and Guattari's reading, is rather to unlock asemiotic zones of experience outside literature itself if only accessible by passing through it. As intimated earlier, this relation of the two sides of the plane of consistency (understood as two inseparable facets of a single process), implies, as Deleuze (1998) writes in his preface to *Essays Critical and Clinical*, that if literature unlocks affects and percepts that are *not of language*, these affects and percepts are nonetheless not possible outside language, being the outside *of* language (its very lining), rather than *outside* language as such (lv).<sup>17</sup> The blocks of intensity, as relations of composition and decomposition between interacting

---

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Deleuze and Guattari (2004b: 167-8) describe a process of desire entailing a “sub”, a dominatrix, and the machinery needed to establish a collective field of immanence of desire. This involves first sewing shut the “sub”'s erogenous zones, thus reducing his partial drives' intensities to zero, dis-organizing and de-Oedipalizing his body. This thereby allows a collective body without organs to emerge immanent to that field of desire, whose intensive connections can then be progressively built up by being articulated machinically or asemiotically. Likewise, in Kafka (2009), we could say that Gregor Samsa's bedroom-ridden bug is the precondition (at a degree zero of intensity) of its later ability to form novel machinic connections.

<sup>17</sup> See also Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 22): their famous formulation from *Kafka* should be strictly understood as a movement *from* metaphor *to* metamorphosis, yet nonetheless still *through* (if in a way beyond) language.

bodies, are subtended by relations of sense (and vice versa): non/sense articulates the body without organs. Language organ-ises and dis-organ-ises the body, creating new connections and breaking old ones; the literary becoming-animal of the *Metamorphosis* is expressed in sense by language but having been expressed converts itself into an asemiotic block of intensity running alongside any extractable “meaning”, but through a parallelism which is in no way one of causal correspondence or one that involves a shared medium.

This brings us to the second major innovation of their Kafka-influenced second approach to literary symptomatology: its *musicality*, or more generally its asemiotic, *intensive* approach to language. The point of conversion discussed above is best summed up, in terms of its relation to language’s functioning, by their adaptation of the linguistic notion of “tensor”:

This language torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralisation of sense, no longer finds its value in anything other than an accenting of the word, an inflection. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 21)<sup>18</sup>

As they write in *Kafka*, “intensives” or “tensors” refer to the elements of a language which articulate its internal asemiotic tensions (which, they add, are commonly found in a “minor” literature, see below) (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 22). Deleuze and Guattari (2004b) understand the tensor more generally in later works as a “nonformal function” (563) or “trait of expression” (ibid.), which is to say an informal element of expression outside the linguistic expression of sense. This is because as “trait” (elsewhere termed a “matter of expression”), it is prior or ancillary to the fundamental linguistic distinction (again as they conceive it) between linguistically formed expression and non-linguistically formed semiotic content – in short, language and bodies, respectively (when seen from the viewpoint of the plane’s obverse side). Instead, the inflection of the word now emerges within sense, from sense, that is to say it is spoken, but its value escapes any semiotic determination, being purely intensive or “musical” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 5-6).

*A Thousand Plateaus* will develop the notion of tensor further to argue for the machinic functioning of tone in speech – understood quasi-musically and in a theoretically significant, if underexamined, connection to their concept of the “refrain” – which breaks radically with the Lacanian viewpoint on “speech”. The latter, in opposing speech’s diachronic and bodily contingency (its proximity to the “letter”) to the synchronic universality or generality of language, again merely serves to define it negatively as an absence of signification. The notion of tensor, by contrast, conceives of tone positively as a machinic function pointing outside language altogether and arriving at an informal, destratified dimension of language outside of language’s formed strata of content and expression. Indeed, if we take the connection to the concept of refrain a little further, the tensor’s quasi-musical “form” (or

---

<sup>18</sup> On this movement from *Logic of Sense* to *Kafka*, see also Alliez (2004: 106).

pseudo-form), being fully immanent to the “becomings-animal” (another term for intensive blocks) it expresses as its corresponding “content” (as pseudo-content) on a plane of consistency,<sup>19</sup> is the machinic operator of the kinds of intensive block an author such as Kafka seeks to express (in the Deleuzo-Guattarian reading). As Deleuze and Guattari point out in *What is Philosophy?* (1991), Gregor squeaks when he speaks and his voice (upon becoming-bug) forms an asymmetrical block with his sister’s violin (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 184; see also Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 5-6).<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, their new symptomatology has a collective political dimension lacking in its first “Carrollian” iteration, which defines the “minor” status of a literature such as Kafka’s. As they write, a minor literature connects “immediately to politics” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 17). Writing at the level of the intensity of the body without organs (and via an intensive, asemiotic use of language), necessitates literature’s articulation at a collective level of enunciation – this is what enables desire (as necessarily expressed collectively via a non-individual body without organs) to be produced through the connective multiplication of intensive blocks on a collective body without organs. In short, Kafka’s intensive usage of language is inseparable from his adoption of a position of minority with respect to his chosen literary language – German. In Deleuze and Guattari’s reading, Kafka writes in German because it allows him to be positioned as minor with respect to it, and thus to write at a collective level of enunciation that connects him with a collective revolutionary becoming-minor shared by his fellow German-minoritarians – those who are also linguistically, culturally, and socio-politically, marginalized with respect to the German language. This illustrates well Guattari’s (1984b: 111) earlier claim (dating from 1969) that, in practice, machine and structure are inseparable components of collective enunciation, the machine being precisely that which works away within formed and well established (or “majoritarian”) linguistic and semiotic strata to re-intensify them through an informal dimension they typically repress.

As Aidan Tynan (2012) puts it:

The literary clinic grasps the author’s position not as a particular and personal case of a wider social and collective generality, but precisely as a *problematic* intersection of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari will define music in general in *A Thousand Plateaus* as the destratified “form” of expression corresponding to the “becomings-animal” of humans, as its corresponding, destratified “form” of content (see Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 330-1). This follows from their machinic investigation of biosemiotics within the zoological sub-discipline of ethology (the evolutionary study of animal behaviour), in *A Thousand Plateaus’* chapter “1837: Of the Refrain”.

<sup>20</sup> One should also note the profound connection in Deleuze and Guattari’s work between clinical perversion and becoming-animal, both of which function to de-Oedipalise sexuality so as to reach a machinic level of desire beyond language (and thus beyond Oedipus, which after Lacan must be understood as structural). Though, as they point out in *Kafka* (1986: 15), this again constitutes something like a pendulum swing (but along different axes than one finds in *Logic of Sense*), such that becoming-animal always risks falling back into Oedipal failure, roughly understandable in terms of the Freudian category of “denegation” (the symptomatic misrecognition of the object of desire, “that’s not what I wanted...”).

personal and the collective in which the author can be viewed as a singularity capturing both personal and collective forces at once. If Masoch or Kafka suffered their own conditions at some private or personal level, it was the procedures of their literary activity that allowed a transmutation – what we have been calling a *transference* – of this private domain into impersonal, world-historical and socio-political dimensions. (153, emphasis in the original)

Tynan's emphasis on transference here, moreover, is particularly instructive with regard to appreciating the transformation in psychoanalytic thinking between the "first" and "second" literary clinic outlined in this article. If Kafka's method of writing sought to transmute Oedipal guilt (*ibid.*) into something else, this cannot be understood along the lines of Deleuze's Carrollian model of transference as eventual de-personalization – a becoming-imperceptible or becoming-incorporeal achieved through the expression of a literary sense-event (the play of sense and nonsense circling around their ultimate univocity).<sup>21</sup> The latter implies a more or less individualized conception of fantasy, even if this fantasy structure opens onto a univocal event which subsumes all that exists into its process of ontological disincorporation. Rather, what Tynan is getting at in the above with regard to Kafka is aligned with Guattari's signal contribution to the psychoanalytic clinic – his theoretical and practical transformation of transference into transversality, or of individual fantasy into group fantasy understood as a collective production of desire writing itself directly onto the socio-economic real (see Watson 2009: 23-31).

The idea behind transversality as a new model of transference is essentially that symptoms are not primarily treated through realignment (via symbolic or linguistic means), with respect to their unconscious and libidinal content and its effects on consciousness. Rather, the unconscious is directly and collectively reconstituted or constructed (and by both linguistic and non-linguistic means); the unconscious content of what appear to consciousness as symptoms is itself constructed, rather than this content's relation to consciousness being mediated in ways aimed at relieving its intensity. Hence, a minor literature functions clinically precisely by constructing a collective unconscious (moreover beyond the rigid Freudian dualism between conscious and unconscious) adequate to the unblocking of (equally libidinal and socio-economic) flows of desire, blockages manifesting themselves in consciousness as symptoms.<sup>22</sup>

As such, transversality has directly political implications and not only psychoanalytic ones. Within their second and now fully political literary symptomatology, sense (as both meaning and direction, following the French *sens*) – which we know is more completely the

---

<sup>21</sup> On *Logic of Sense's* "sense-event" as novel theory of transference, see David-Menard (2005: 182).

<sup>22</sup> Tynan (2012) notes how, in Deleuze and Guattari's reading, Kafka's method of de-personalization involves "liberating personological contents [or symptoms] from their forms of expression, these contents being then taken up by new forms which transform the contents into something else" (114). See also Tynan's (2012) comment regarding Kafka as anonymous "K function" siphoning collective materials flows of desire directly into the social field (121).

gap or fold *between* sense and intensity (the obverse and reverse sides of the plane of consistency) – can be understood as always both meaning and the associated asemiotic or machinic de-/re-territorializing directionality of this meaning. That is to say, the *intensive blocks* which are always being constructed in a “minor” literature as a machinic vector of de-/re-territorialization, and which structurally mutate the “majoritarian” social field in which this minor literature operates. To succeed in writing intensively (which is to say, collectively or at a “minor” level) is by necessity to explode an existing, majoritarian, social field, for two reasons. Firstly, to write intensively requires the adoption of a position of collective enunciation, thereby allowing the latter to express itself machinically through this writing by constructing intensive blocks. And secondly, because to write intensively means always that new spaces of meaning are being explored at the same time that, as their reverse side, new domains of collective experience (“becoming-minor”) are being constructed as equally material infrastructure and quasi-causal “effect” of that sense.

A line of flight is thus the instantaneous point of conversion and reversibility-without-fusion of sense and intensity, as the rotating dynamo that powers the construction of territories as counter- or minor-territories. These minor-territories can even be seen as the dynamic basis of territoriality as such, given that territorial “structures” are always machinically subtended (on their reverse side) by the ongoing construction of a deterritorialized plane of consistency alone capable of holding together, and accounting for the transition between, distinct territories<sup>23</sup> (this is the more general problem of “structural mutations” as we move epistemologically between social fields in history – see Deleuze 2004c: 191). Moreover, this process always hinges on a collectively semioticized drive and hence the drive of a collective becoming-minor.<sup>24</sup> In short, any intensive usage of language is by necessity that of a minority – or more precisely that of a machinic becoming-minor always strictly relative to a structured majoritarian field – not least because to write intensively constructs new territories of meaning and experience, as much as it turns back onto and calls for marginalized agents of collective enunciation. The latter are sidelined by majoritarian territories of sense – existing outside the bounds of the majoritarian model of fixed, pre-established territories individuated by signifying sense<sup>25</sup> – and waiting to be re-activated.

---

<sup>23</sup> Regarding Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of collective enunciation in its dynamic and multivalent relations to territory, semiotic-affective consistency, and drive, see their chapter “1837: Of the Refrain” from *A Thousand Plateaus*.

<sup>24</sup> This Deleuzo-Guattarian claim will be implicitly critiqued in the conclusion by showing how, following Foucault, the shift from May ‘68’s “minor territory” to those of contemporary neoliberalism would appear, in fact, to hinge on an individually semioticized drive. Nonetheless, my point below is that this structural mutation (essentially from collectivism to individualism), epistemologically identified in Foucault’s (2010) work, is itself more convincingly explicable through secondary recourse to a more fundamental repression-transformation of collective desire, understandable via Deleuze and Guattari as a “war-machine” subtending the structural mutation from one epistemological field to another (namely Foucault’s-Deleuze’s distinction between “disciplinary” and “control” societies (see Deleuze 1995b)).

<sup>25</sup> With regard to the majoritarian, “arborescent” model of language, see the chapter “November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics”, from *A Thousand Plateaus*.

This is in part what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they say that literature, and art more generally, calls for a “new people” and a “new earth” (see Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 375, and Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108).

### 3. Open Conclusion: May '68's Minor Territory

While the events of May '68 doubtless had an impact on the development of Deleuze and Guattari's literary symptomatology, what I would like to focus on here instead, by way of conclusion, are some tentative suggestions regarding how we might consider May '68 itself and the neoliberal reaction to it in terms of the framework of “becoming-minor” discussed above. More generally, I would like to connect these themes here more directly to Deleuze and Guattari's reinvestment of Marxism. Deleuze will later claim that the framework of becoming-minor was developed by himself and Guattari partly as a way to engage and update the Marxian understanding of class, just as the notion of line of flight was designed in part to update the Marxian conception of contradiction as that which determines a social field in the last instance (Deleuze 1995a: 172).<sup>26</sup> May '68's challenge to traditional Marxist-Leninist categories arguably lies in the dispersed nature of its struggles and in its de-centred and non-totalizable power relations.<sup>27</sup> Although some have attempted to give the general strike that developed after the initial student uprisings a centering and determining role,<sup>28</sup> it is notable that the uprisings did not end once the workers' concrete economic demands had been largely met. The framework of becoming-minor arguably helps explain these events in terms of a symptomatic emergence of collective desire in the social field writing itself directly onto socio-economic relations, and outside of either a dialectical mediation between capital and labour, or indeed outside meaning as such.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, this is precisely the dimension that has been rewritten in the official neoliberal account as an explosion of selfish individualism,<sup>30</sup> since for Deleuze and Guattari, updating

---

<sup>26</sup> Although I do not have space here to develop this point, even though Deleuze and Guattari will generalize these two social functions or mechanisms, and apply them outside of capitalist societies in *A Thousand Plateaus*, both of these are doubtless informed by structural shifts in capitalism's dominant mode of accumulation during this period (the post-War and particularly post-'68 decline of the West's industrial productive capacity), necessitating a more flexible and nuanced understanding of the relation between workers and capital that cannot be reduced to the pre-War “disciplinary” model of enclosure.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Badiou (2015: 34-5).

<sup>28</sup> See Althusser's March 1969 letter to Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, which provides his preliminary analysis of May '68 (accessible here: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3851-louis-althusser-s-letter-on-the-may-events> last accessed 10.09.2018).

<sup>29</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari's bypassing of the Marxist base/superstructure distinction via their theory of linguistic planes of consistency (an argument largely derived from Guattari's work), see Deleuze and Guattari (2004b: 99-100).

<sup>30</sup> See Christian Laval's article in the current issue.

Marx but remaining in his lineage,<sup>31</sup> collective desire must be constitutively repressed and remain unacknowledged as a driving force of socio-economic relations to maintain the functioning of capitalist relations of production. While the theme itself of “repression” will come under attack in the wake of May ’68 in the writings of Foucault (1998) and others, what Foucault for one appears to focus primarily on, again, is the dimension of the biopolitical production of individual desire or sexuality – and indeed without directly engaging the psychoanalytic notion of repressed *unconscious* desire or sexuality (Zupančič 2016), understandable after Deleuze and Guattari as fundamentally collective – which will later inform his conception of neoliberalism as fostering “Entrepreneurs of the Self” (Foucault 2010). In other words, if Foucault is arguably right to emphasize this dimension of biopolitical production inherent to neoliberalism, which cannot be accounted for solely in terms of repression, what he would appear to miss is the suggestion that the production of individual desire appears as the obverse side of the capitalist (including neoliberal) state’s constitutive repression of unconscious *collective* desire.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of the “war machine” helps us better understand this point. While putatively “exterior” to the state apparatus (Deleuze and Guattari 2004b: 387), Deleuze (2004d) notes elsewhere that “capitalist society never stops internalizing a revolutionary war-machine” (261), which we can also understand as a revolutionary becoming-minor. To internalize is not simply to repress, but it is to transform (or “express”), arguably contra Foucault’s (2010: 91-2) claim that the Marxist (or here post-Marxist) conception of the state fails to account for biopolitical production. Can it thus be maintained that the individual desire of the neoliberal “Entrepreneur of the Self” functions strategically with regard to May ’68 as a perverse transformation of the latter’s “becoming-minoritarian”, or revolutionary collective unconscious desire (what Deleuze and Guattari (2004a) elsewhere term “desiring-production”)?<sup>32</sup> which emerged in May ’68 (and globally in 1968 more generally) as a challenge to its repression by the capitalist state, with widespread and long-lasting consequences for the future of capitalist relations of production? To what extent could we consider this as a kind of “governmentalization” of the war machine or of becoming-minor? How useful is it to consider May ’68 as “minor territory”, articulating a position that continues to be totally antithetical to contemporary capitalist relations, yet which was also in a way productive of them if by means of a perverse reversal? Could we consider the neoliberal “Entrepreneur of the Self” therefore as a “symptom” of May ’68 in the precise sense given to this term by Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of a minor literature (in which the symptom is itself continually worked on in a social field rather than being unidirectionally symptomatic of it)? And do these latter notions thereby imply that the

---

<sup>31</sup> See Guattari’s self-avowed dependence on the Marxian conceptions of labour and class struggle for his theory of collective desire (2006: 188-95).

<sup>32</sup> To formulate this question, I have drawn on Alliez and Lazzarato’s (2016) theory of the governmental war machine, though they do not focus on the neoliberal transformation of collective into individual desire.

biopolitical production of individual desire is always at risk of falling back into, or leaking away towards, a machinic component of collective desire?<sup>33</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alliez, É. (2004). "The BwO Condition or, The Politics of Sensation". In J. de Bloois, S. Houppermans, and F.-W. Korsten (eds), *Discernements: Deleuzian aesthetics / esthétiques deleuziennes*, 93–112. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi.
- Alliez, É. and Lazzarato, M. (2016). *Guerres et Capital*. Éditions Amsterdam: Paris.
- Badiou, A. ([2010] 2015). *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. D. Macey and S. Corcoran. London: Verso.
- Carroll, L. ([1865] 1998a). "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland". In L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, 1-110. London: Penguin Books.
- Carroll, L. ([1871] 1998b). "Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There". In L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, 111-241. London: Penguin Books.
- Collett, G. (2016). *The Psychoanalysis of Sense: Deleuze and the Lacanian School*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- David-Ménard, M. (2005). *Deleuze et la psychanalyse: l'altercation*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Deleuze, G. ([1990] 1995a). "Control and Becoming". In G. Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin, 169-176. London: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. ([1990] 1995b). "Postscript on Control Societies". In G. Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin, 177-82. London: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1998). *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith. London: Verso.
- Deleuze, G. ([1968] 2004a). *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. ([1969] 2004b). *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester and C. Stivale. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. (2004c). "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?". In *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, ed. D. Lapoujade, trans. M. Taormina, 170-192. London: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. (2004d). "Nomadic Thought". In G. Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, trans. M. Taormina, 252-261. London: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. ([1968] 2005). *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. M. Joughin. New York: Zone Books.

---

<sup>33</sup> This last question clearly evokes Hardt and Negri's (2001) work, though potentially emphasizes further the dimension of becoming (or more specifically becoming-minor) which they seem to downplay (28).

- Deleuze, G. ([1962] 2006). *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. ([1975] 1986). *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. D. Polan. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. ([1991] 1994). *What is Philosophy?*, trans. G. Birchill and H. Tomlinson. London: Verso.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. ([1972] 2004a). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol. I*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem and H. R. Lane. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. ([1980] 2004b). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol. II*, trans. B. Massumi. London: Continuum.
- Foucault, M. ([1976] 1998). *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, trans. R. Hurley. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (2010). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. G. Burchell, ed. A. I. Davidson. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Freud, S. ([1918] 2002). "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis [The 'Wolfman']". In S. Freud, *The Wolfman and Other Cases*, 203-320. London: Penguin Books.
- Guattari, F. (1984a). "The Role of the Signifier in the Institution". In F. Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, trans. R. Sheed, 73-81. London: Penguin.
- Guattari, F. (1984b). "Machine and Structure", in F. Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, trans. R. Sheed, 111-119. London: Penguin.
- Guattari, F. (2006). *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*, trans. K. Gotman. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Hallward, P. (2006). *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. London: Verso.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2001). *Empire*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.
- Kafka, F. ([1915] 2009). *The Metamorphosis*. London: Martino Fine Books.
- Lacan, J. (n. d.). *The Seminar Book XIV: The Logic of Phantasy (1966-7)*, trans. C. Gallagher. No publishing details.
- Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.-B. (1968). "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality". *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 49 (1): 1-18.
- Leclaire, S. ([1968] 1998). *Psychoanalyzing: On the Order of the Unconscious and the Practice of the Letter*, trans. P. Kamuf. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Leclaire, S. (1999). *Oedipe à Vincennes. Séminaire '69*. Paris: Fayard.
- Massumi, B. (1992). *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1968). *The Will to Power: In Science, Nature, Society and Art*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. W. Kaufmann. London: Penguin Books.
- Tynan, A. (2012). *Deleuze's Literary Clinic. Criticism and the Politics of Symptoms*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Watson, J. (2009). *Guattari's Diagrammatic Thought. Writing Between Lacan and Deleuze*. London: Continuum.

Zupančič, A. (2016). “Biopolitics, Sexuality and the Unconscious”. *Paragraph*, 39 (1): 49-64.