



## Gilles Deleuze and the Intensification of Social Theory

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### abstract

Starting from the newly published book by Manuel DeLanda: *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, this exhibit explores the possibilities of reintroducing ontology into the social sciences: the postmodernisation of this particular if highly disparate academic field was to a high degree equivalent to an epistemologisation. Only statements and signs were deemed worthy of analysis and discourse analysis became the name of the game. The oeuvre of Gilles Deleuze posits a reintroduction of a new materialism into the field of study: a materialism which is also an empiricism, bringing into focus an expressive and constructive ontology of *becoming*, rather than that of *being*.

Together with Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault initiated in the 1970s a discussion on the role of the intellectual in post-war Europe and modern society in general.<sup>1</sup> The discussion has by no means lost its relevance, as neo-liberals everywhere are targeting non-commodifiable knowledge, time consuming reflection and critique of power with a hatred and resentment few had imagined. Maybe Foucault also here had a foresight: while he definitely saw the threatening Fascism targeting intellectuals *en bloc*, which is the contemporary fashion, he carefully distinguished between the ‘universal intellectual’ and the ‘specific intellectual’. The former is as a role secured by and subjected to the state, frequently adored in the public, a *sans souci* producer of generalities, and the icon – very deliberate from Foucault’s side – of this was of course Jean-Paul Sartre. There is no need to go into the relation between Sartre and, say, the sorrows of Cambodia: the fact remains that the ‘universal and general truth’ has a sad history, typically related to the nation state and ‘state science’. Hence, Foucault points to another configuration of knowledge and power: the ‘specific intellectual’. Contrary to the universal intellectual, the specific intellectual is not necessarily protected by the state finances, does not seek to produce a totalising imaginary of her persona in the media,<sup>2</sup> and does not propose

1 Cf. Michel Foucault (1977) *Intellectuals and Power*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, which is an interview with Foucault and Deleuze.

2 In Denmark, as probably everywhere in the Americas, state-funded researchers have a media rating, displaying how much they personally are displayed and reproduced – since ‘cited’ wouldn’t really cover the process – in the media. An intense competition between these allegedly critical and

easy reproducible generalities, but works from time to time independent in different networks, shows up at unpredictable places, and commits herself to explore specific problems rather than strapping herself to the deliverance of universal solutions.

Manuel DeLanda is such a 'specific intellectual'. Born in the very territory embodying marginality, Mexico, his intellectual oeuvre of this day covers a wide range of issues and problems, typically connected to scientific concerns. As one of few philosophers he does not subject himself to the divide between social science and science *propre*, neither does he accept the silent (or silenced) war between continental and analytical philosophy. More specifically, he transgresses these dichotomies in truly original reconstructions of central concepts on both sides of this divide, leaving none of them unchanged. This happens via his engagement in experimental film, computer art and programming, chaos theory, war and AI amongst others. Moreover, DeLanda is a very frequent participant in different panels and conferences that bring together highly diverse groups of people, academic as well as non-academic, scientific as well as political interest groups. At the same time he, by way of his writing, probably plays a greater role in academia than do most of its full-time members, and he has in fact accepted to become Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. His earlier books, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (1991) and *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* (1997)<sup>3</sup> became bestsellers despite the fact that they are anything but mainstream. In *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* he explores the importance of technology and different metals in the social setting of 'war' as when, say, Napoleon creates an army out of the materials at hand. The self-organisation of various systems, biological, geological and social is a key ingredient in the analysis. While this component is also prominent in more established system sciences, such as the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann's work on autopoietic systems, DeLanda does not restrict his analysis to one single type of flow: in the case of Luhmann this flow is communication. But the world consists of many flows, in fact, in Deleuze and Guattari's world the world consists of nothing *but* flows: flows of matter, flows of energy, flows of signs, flows of sperm, of blood, of anger. These flows are constantly connected, recorded or consumed by way of different 'machinic agencies', and the dynamic result of these machines are the heterogeneous 'assemblages', of which everything is a part.<sup>4</sup>

These somewhat delirious concepts are much more prominent in *A Thousand Years of Non-Linear History* where DeLanda deploys a wide range of Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, and also develops his original concept of those 'meshworks' that thrive within and outside hierarchies as organising principles of every possible assemblage.

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progressive researchers – all male and in their 'best age' – to enter the top ten of this rating is in itself adding to the status the rating throws off. From time to time, however, for no apparent reason, you are yourself thrown off the mediation, cast into oblivion.

3 Manuel DeLanda (1991) *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*. New York: Swerve; and Manuel DeLanda (1997) *A Thousands Years of Non-Linear History*. New York: Swerve.

4 Cf. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari (1977) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. New York: Viking Press, Part 1.

In his latest book, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*,<sup>5</sup> DeLanda's mission is different from that of his earlier writings: it is a special book, with a special task for a, according to the author, specific audience. First, on a most general level, DeLanda wants to transgress the division between analytical and continental philosophy. In the introduction to the book he proposes the community of analytical philosophers of science to be the primary audience (in the sense, one must assume, of an 'implied reader'). Since his topic is the materialist ontology inherent in the writings of Gilles Deleuze, the task seems frightening: if there ever has been, to the analytical tradition, one intellectual in the hairy French postmodernism who embodied all that was despicable about postmodernism, Gilles Deleuze is the one. In what they consider to be an unbearable jargon loaded with neologisms, Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) represents the worst case in the flood of raving attacks on rationalism, the search for truth and the development of science in post-68 Europe.

This is where DeLanda's take on Deleuze is both productive and provocative. Manuel DeLanda is in one sense not post-modern at all: he is a realist philosopher.<sup>6</sup> But at the same time his *mission* is parallel to most of the post-modern projects: to counter reductionism, to attack determinism, to reject anthropomorphism. He finds, however and apropos the aforementioned paper, the social constructivists, to mention one branch of postmodernism, to be themselves reductionists, disregarding the emergent, self-organising forces of matter itself.

His main argument of the book, and it is an argument that he supports convincingly, is that Gilles Deleuze is no postmodernist in that sense: Deleuze is, ontologically speaking, a *realist*. In fact DeLanda, on the very first page of *Intensive Science*, goes as far as to state that "Deleuze has absolutely nothing in common with ...[the post-modern] tradition." Clearly, this statement only makes sense if the tradition in question is reduced to a form of naive anti-realism, and only if one excludes at least Foucault, Derrida, Serres, Jameson and probably even Lyotard, all of which authorships are relatable to Deleuze's own.

But let's follow DeLanda on the core argument, rather than the ideological one: in the realist ontology of Deleuze, the world is not conditioned on perception or construction. Having made the analytical camp happy and – as indicated – offended the rest of us, DeLanda hurries on to dismiss the analytical idea of a stable, predictable world, where forms and essences – whose properties can be distilled via rigorous linguistic analysis – are guiding the principles of being and truth. Then the author in the rest of the book shows how Deleuze's ontology explodes away the very notions of being, essence and truth. So, while he might have created some enemies in the epistemological branch of postmodernists, DeLanda takes pain in securing that he is making no friends amongst the analytical philosophers either.

Given the destruction of that stable world apparently so dear to our analytical friends, DeLanda replaces this false world picture with a Deleuzian notion of becoming. To

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5 Manuel DeLanda (2002) *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*. London: Continuum, pp. 256.

6 DeLanda once gave a paper at Warwick University, UK, with the title 'Kicking Social-Constructivist Ass'.

Deleuze, individuation, that is, how objects become objects or how matter receives its form, has nothing to do with essences (the tree's relation to a tree *an sich*), but with the immanent forces and intense qualities of matter itself. These dynamic processes are then the subject of DeLanda's reconstruction of Deleuze's ontology, or really, the subject is a fundamental reconstruction of Deleuze's *world*, a world of intensive fields of becomings, rather than of objective beings that are more or less successful copies of eternal forms.

My implied reader may ask how such a peculiar exercise could be relevant for the social sciences and, especially, an organisation theory which considers itself poststructuralist or equivalent. This leads to the sense in which Manuel DeLanda *is* a postmodernist. Whilst being a realist (albeit a special Trojan Horse sort of realist), DeLanda joins forces with the *intentions* of the post-moderns: to construct a relation with the world that rescues its radical openness, divergence and multiplicity. He strongly rejects the correspondence theory of truth, and seeks to retain the prominence of *difference* at the cost of *identity*. This explains his preoccupation with Deleuze, in which thinking truth is outperformed by relevance: what is true is still true, but more often than not also *trivial*. So, part of what Deleuze offers with DeLanda as the maieutic and necessary interface is to *give back* to the social sciences a creative and expressive and open ontology. Postmodernism was to a large extent an epistemological exercise where the magic notion was 'the social' and the consequences were the hidden import of anthropomorphism and a passive disrespect for 'science'. Matter, inert and amorphous, as it was, didn't really matter.

DeLanda argues that both naive realists and social constructivists adhere to what Deleuze calls the 'hylomorphic schema', where the forms of matter receive a source which remains 'outside', whether in the Platonic heaven, in God, or in cognitive schemata or social conventions. But the way out is, as it were, the way in: it is via a new, expressive ontology that the social sciences shall renew their power of enunciation.

Now, the founding difference in Deleuze's ontology is the one between the virtual and the actual. It replaces the classical model of the possible and the real: here, realization is a loss in difference and the world is a faint copy of a rich, utopian world of possibilities. Apart from being the secure outset of resentment (confer for instance the whole theology of the loss of the halo in modernity), it is also a radical reduction of what is real. On the contrary with the Deleuzian world: the virtual, which is an intensive field of becomings consisting of different spatio-temporal processes, is *as real* as the actual: the virtual "is real without being actual, ideal without being abstract."<sup>7</sup> The actual is only the latest result of these intensive processes, and the actual is what occupies us the most, with modern science and especially thermodynamics as the examples DeLanda offers. While being occupied with these actual results, their extensions and their qualities (structures of length, height, age), we lose sight of the intensive processes which gave rise to these qualities 'prior' to the results, namely intensive differences, for instance differences in temperature. DeLanda discusses the example of the creation of crystals,

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7 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari (1994) *What Is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press, p.156.

crystallization, where the crystal itself might have some 'true' characteristics: the number of atoms in the grid, the overall structure of the grid and the power relations which keep it in shape.<sup>8</sup> But the really important or relevant issues, issues that are traditionally subordinated to the extensive qualities, are how the form of the crystal emerged from the flux of, say, the water that froze, and how an influx of energy (that is, intensity) will change the crystals again. If we add soap to water, bubbles might be created, and DeLanda argues that it is the same 'endogenous topological form' which is at work, namely the constraints that the molecules/atoms are endowed with, to move towards a situation in which a minimal portion of energy is required. This topological figure is nevertheless able to actualise a variety of forms.

The critique of science raised by Henri Bergson was initiated by what he saw as the inability of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists to think the truly novel, to keep the future open. If the future is only what is inherent in and determined by the past, the world is always already an iron cage. While at the time of Bergson (and Max Weber), science and bureaucracy were the threatening totalities, today the overall commodification and capitalist axiomatics seem to be the technologies of closure. A core theme of organisation theory: innovation and its management, is a critical case here. How would we, as organisation theorists (or disorganisation anarchists, pick your poison), think and conceptualise something new, which is not a new commodity?

Even if *Intensive Science* does indeed begin (and end) pretty much before this question can be raised in the social sciences, the book fills a blank spot on the map. As readers of Deleuze's work, especially *Difference & Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*<sup>9</sup>, will recognize, Deleuze in fact expects vast areas of mathematics and physics to be known on beforehand, and here DeLanda's book comes in as a real eye-opener. The book is divided into four parts with an appendix attached. The first part, which the author generously offers the reader to skip on account of the extreme technicality of its content, is committed to the reconstruction of those mathematical resources which are necessary tools if one wants to think of the virtual field and the different non-linear causalities which guide it. In a sort of a 'reverse Kantian' fashion this mathematical part is followed by the two middle parts of the book, which explain how the virtual is actualised in *space* and in *time*, respectively.

These parts are much more inviting, as they also illustrate the production processes with examples like the abovementioned crystallisation. The schema of morphogenesis (transcendent forms imposed from the outside) and identity (with a presumed original) are replaced with a framework of intensive differences, which are in a constant process of actualisation, that is, acquiring extensions and qualities. There 'is', then, no space 'before' these singular states have been passed, by, say, the embryo of the chicken on its way to *become* a chicken: or more precisely, this space is non-metric and non-causal, it is a *smooth* space, as opposed to the metric and causal scheme dominant in the

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8 Confer also here the brilliant introductory piece: Manuel DeLanda (1998) Deleuze and the Genesis of Form, [http://www.artnode.se/artorbit/issue1/f\\_deleuze/f\\_deleuze\\_DeLanda.html](http://www.artnode.se/artorbit/issue1/f_deleuze/f_deleuze_DeLanda.html).

9 Gilles Deleuze (1994) *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia University Press, and Gilles Deleuze (1990) *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press.

actualised space, the striated space.<sup>10</sup> In the intensive field, the different migrations and foldings are extremely flexible, and the embryo can become every chicken, an openness and flexibility less pertinent in the actualised, metric space. The process of developing the embryo is a true multiplicity (or it is ‘pluripotent’ as DeLanda puts it), before it is actualised as *that* particular chicken. As Deleuze writes: “Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given.”<sup>11</sup>

While an individual might have a fixed number of definite, extensive and qualitative properties (seen from the perspective of the metric space), it also possesses an indefinite number of yet unactualised capacities to affect and to be affected as well as unactualised tendencies (singularities with a non- or quasi-causal relation to the particular actualisation of the assemblage in question).<sup>12</sup> The problem with science is its tendency to *conceal* what animates the intensive processes in the virtual – singularities and affects – under the extensive. What is needed (and DeLanda discusses in which instances it is in fact going on) is a science which does not cancel out the differences via homogenisation, and is able to “exhibit the open set of possibilities calling for an explanation in terms of the virtual.”<sup>13</sup>

If this second part – of the four parts comprising the book – is committed to wrestle the world out of the dictatorship of the pre-given form and its imposed identity, by connecting its individuation to the space it develops, the next step is to wrestle it out of the timelessness of eternal forms, documenting the historicity of every multiplicity. The basic problem here is to conceive of a time which can transgress the extensive and metric, and work out a vocabulary of an ‘intensive time’ (Readers of *Logic of Sense* will be familiar with the notions that covers this conflict: *Chronos* and *Aion*. The time of the event and the singular is *Aion*. Deleuze is, evidently, also here inspired by Bergson’s *durée*). The time we normally (and to some extent phenomenologically) experience is a result of a metrization and quantization of time, ‘metric time’, and just as with space, these processes hide the intense, non-quantifiable flow of time needed to develop new forms. As well as the virtual needs its own space, it needs its own time:

Unlike a transcendent heaven inhabited by *pure beings without becoming* (unchanging essences or laws with a permanent identity) the virtual needs to be populated exclusively with *pure becomings without being*.<sup>14</sup>

Consider, which DeLanda does after this quote, the unactualised event of 0°C that marks a point where water neither freezes nor melts. This event can be seen from the point of view of the *virtual* to be a pure becoming, which is an event that involves both directions at once: “a melting-freezing event which never actually occurs.” It is, as

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10 Cf. plateau 14 on the smooth and the striated in Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

11 *Difference and Repetition*, p.222.

12 *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, p.62.

13 *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, p.65.

14 *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, p.107.

Deleuze puts it “always forthcoming and already past.”<sup>15</sup> This time is the time of the event: “a dead time; it is there where nothing takes place, an infinite awaiting that is already infinitely past, awaiting and reserve.”<sup>16</sup> It is Shakespeare’s *time out of joint*, which is where “time itself unfolds...instead of things unfolding within it.”<sup>17</sup>

This discussion leads DeLanda to a final encounter with, if you allow, State science and its generalities in the fourth and last part of the book: Virtuality and the laws of physics. DeLanda situates his discussion within the standing debate on science and technology, and points out the main advantage of the Deleuzian approach to science: it is problematic rather than axiomatic. As DeLanda puts it: “[...] problems are not reducible to their solutions but rather are defined by their distribution: a given distribution of the singular and the ordinary, the important and the unimportant.”<sup>18</sup>

Rather than solving problems by way of clear and distinct solutions, problems must be seen as ‘obscure yet distinct’, and only attaining clarity during the phases where intuition partakes in specifying concrete yet unanticipated solutions. Problems are a matter of a nomadic distribution of singularities as opposed to matters of essence or inherent truth: in *Anti-Oedipus* – a work which, it must be said, DeLanda almost completely leaves out of his discussion except for the ‘appendix’ to which I will return – Deleuze and Guattari excavate the depressing history of solutions presupposing their problems. The worst case being psychoanalysis: whatever the problem was, the solution is the triangle, the ‘dirty little secret’, Mommy-Daddy-Me. Whichever is produced by the factory of the unconscious, it is problematized as a ‘theatre’, and its alleged ‘meaning’ is extracted. But since the whole script was prescribed by Oedipus, the analysis is eating its own tail: Oedipus is always territorialising, Oedipalising. And that is the *problem*, not the solution.

This is why, in Deleuze’s thinking, the ‘problematic’ is always regarded to be prior to the ‘solution’, which is a category of the already closed case, since a

solution always has the truth it deserves according to the problem to which is a response, and the problem always has the solution it deserves in proportion to *its own* truth or falsity – in other words, in proportion to its sense.<sup>19</sup>

The solution is confined to the empirical, historical determinations of its actualisation, and in a certain sense the solution is not interesting, it is not ‘inter-esse’, between being, but is already esse(nce). At the same time as the solution is the actual event, the problem to which it ‘is a solution’, must be retained as *virtual*, in a perpetual state of becoming, that is, becoming actualised. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the abilities of, respectively, philosophy, art and science, to ‘counter-actualise’ the actual in

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15 *The Logic of Sense*, p.80.

16 *What Is Philosophy?*, p.158.

17 *Difference and Repetition*, p.88. Some of these quotes appear in the extensive and extremely informative notes to the main text of *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*.

18 *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, p.176.

19 *Difference and Repetition*, p.159.

order to let their intensive properties emerge: whereas science is committed to the actual state of affairs (and one must add that in this formulation science almost by definition becomes 'State science'), art is able to recompose an intensive field because of its ability to mesh together heterogeneous multiplicities. Philosophy, finally, is able to plunge everything all the way back into the virtual.

At this point, Manuel DeLanda makes an important contribution: he shows in detail why Deleuze's view on science is not adequate and really outdated. He – Deleuze – is stuck in a view on science which was created by Anglo-American philosophers of science in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he does not really incorporate the development within advanced thermodynamics and system sciences throughout the entire century. That is why Deleuze's 'science' runs the risk of being captured by 'State science', that is, a form of science blind to the virtual and intensive fields of becomings of a 'nomad science', and preoccupied with the actual extensities and qualities.<sup>20</sup> One of DeLanda's contributions is to reimpart a nomadic or 'smooth space', within the laws and 'striations' of established science: he shows that nomadic or *intensive science* is immanent to *science propre* seen from the point of view of analytical philosophy.

This important distinction between nomadic and State science functions in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari's as a continuous organizing principle in the form of the contested relation between 'striated space', that is metric, domesticated and law abiding space (State science, the city) and 'smooth space', which is non-metric, nomadic and meshed with immanent strategies (nomad science, the desert). It also reappears, I suggest, as the difference between Foucault's 'universal intellectual' and 'specific intellectual' with which I began this exhibit. In Deleuze's discussion of the history of ideas – which is a discussion that runs like a virtual thread throughout his oeuvre – he dismisses the traditional heroes from Plato to Hegel, and brings to the forefront illegitimate philosophers like Spinoza, Leibniz and Bergson. Hegel is the prime State philosopher: whereas the State military and administrative machinery striates the smooth areas with roads, cities and channels of goods and capital, the State philosopher carries on this striation in the mental spaces of the people.

In DeLanda's discussion, however, there is also a certain striation going on, which he more or less admits. When quoting, for instance, *A Thousand Plateaus* or *What is Philosophy?*, we are, strictly speaking, dealing with texts by *both* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. But DeLanda tries, to use his own words, to 'wrench' Deleuze out of the collaboration with Guattari. Let me quote *in extenso* from the famous opening of *A Thousand Plateaus*:

The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. [...] We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our

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20 In *What Is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari describe how science occupies itself with 'functives'. Even if it is very hard to get a grip on what 'functives' are, its reductionist stance – not least contrasted philosophy and art – is clear. We might say with an important expression from *Difference and Repetition*, that Deleuze and Guattari's reductive thinking on the issue of hard science is guided – or rather restricted – by well known 'images of thought'.



own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. [...] To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I.<sup>21</sup>

As Deleuze explicitly pointed out the important effect joining forces with Félix Guattari had on his work, especially in regard to its social and political implications, however implicit they may be, it is even more important to remember (a fact that DeLanda does emphasise) that in *Intensive Science* he does not interpret Deleuze's words, but *reconstructs* his world. In a sense we are here faced with a *virtual Gilles Deleuze*, because there is a point in the fact that Deleuze is not the author of *Intensive Science*: for Deleuze, a construction of an ontology might be 'true', but cannot in itself be relevant without the lines of flight that motivates his pen, the search, not for hope, but for new weapons in the tightening war against History, Interpretation, State violence and everyday Fascism. Naturally, not least to the 'non-analytical' reader, this certainly does take away some of the real edges and provocations of Deleuze and Guattari's work: DeLanda, not only in this book, but in his writings more generally, seems strangely a-political, in my view in stark contrast to the sources of his analysis. However, one should bear in mind that a-political is *not* the same as un-critical, and we might think of DeLanda as a paradoxical a-political revolutionary.

Given these precautions, Manuel DeLanda's extremely scholared and informative book is highly recommended for a much broader audience than the one he constructs in the introduction. On top of that, both new readers of Deleuze (and Guattari and their joint crowd) and more experienced ones will benefit from the Appendix, where different concepts are reconstructed and slightly changed through their different books: for instance, the 'quasi-causal operator' in *Difference and Repetition* has a counterpart in the 'abstract machines' of *A Thousand Plateaus*.

The social sciences, and not least its more or less illegitimate offspring, organisation studies, became boring to the degree of paralysis in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is no hope of salvation in the war machines released by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, but they have already shown ability to intensify what has become dull, move what has become static, and transform what has become rigid and trapped in self indulgence and *acedia* into flows and desire.

Manuel DeLanda remains one of the most powerful relays in this transformation.

#### the author

Bent Meier Sørensen has, since his last appearance in *ephemera*, maintained his interest for marshal arts and he is – haphazardly ignoring his obvious lack of bodily as well as mental flexibility – currently heading for brown belt graduation. In between, he is working the nightshift at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. Don't do this magnificent city without mailing [meier@cbs.dk](mailto:meier@cbs.dk).

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21 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.3.