Mastering the Major Discourse

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"Great books are written in a kind of foreign language." This quote from Proust has been used by nearly all commentators on the work of Deleuze, and indeed, it brings out the common trait in the many works by him. His oeuvre, as has also been pointed out by nearly all commentators, consists of commentaries on the works of other philosophers and artists. Nevertheless, Deleuze's peculiar ways of working with these texts make him a highly original and notoriously difficult thinker. Instead of adding another layer of commentary, Deleuze gains insight by looking at the intersection of seemingly opposite, or opposed, ideas. Instead of showing how a preceding philosophy might have influenced another, he thinks with these texts to demonstrate what will always be new in them. These ways of reading amount to a style that is characterized neither by the loaded buzzwords of pseudo-philosophy nor by the idiosyncrasy of poetry. Like T.E. Lawrence, a writer Deleuze admires, Deleuze *becomes* the object of his study, without attempting to *be* the author under consideration. As Deleuze explains: "Lawrence speaks Arabic, he dresses and lives like an Arab, even under torture he cries out in Arabic, but he does not imitate the Arabs, he never renounces his difference, which he already experiences as a betrayal" (Deleuze, 1997a: 117). This movement, the becoming which always recognizes difference, is not one of imitation but of 'minorization,' as Deleuze calls it. Deleuze does not mix two or more discourses, he makes a new use of a given discourse. Deleuze, Beckett and Kafka share a similar strategic program, "they make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch's line, ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms, following an incessant modulation" (Deleuze, 1997a: 109).

The problem for a reader of Deleuze is not the minor language, not immediately that is, but first to master the major discourse in order to see where Deleuze handles it differently. This is exactly why the outstanding commentaries on Deleuze have been

written by specialists in the field in question. For example, one of the best books on Deleuze is *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* by D.N. Rodowick. Rodowick, a film scholar, limits himself to a study of the two cinema books by Deleuze. A thorough knowledge of Bergson, film history, *auteur*-theory and semiotics is necessary to grasp the radicalism of Deleuze's notion of extracting concepts of cinema and taking these concepts to do philosophy. To put it blandly: it is always preferable to read a novel in the original language. However, if one doesn't speak this language fluently, it is hard to judge where and how the text deviates from the normal, the 'major' usage.

A book that sets out to provide an introduction to Deleuze should therefore follow two strategies. It should think with Deleuze, just as Deleuze works with other texts – becoming Deleuze and acknowledging difference from him - and provide a translation of the above mentioned 'strange or foreign language' for those of us who do not master it. This makes the declared goal of John Rajchman's book, *The Deleuze Connections*, look promising: "This book is thus a map meant for those who want to take up or take on Deleuze philosophically as well as those engaged in what Deleuze called the 'nonphilosophical understanding of philosophy'"(p. 5). However, instead of thinking with Deleuze, Rajchman sounds like a pedantic academician, seeking to press Deleuze back into a major narrative. He mentions names and concepts, without ever enlightening his declared target audience about what they mean in his opinion. Words are put in quotation marks and it is not clear if this indicates a quote, a reference, or stands in for a 'so-called.' The following sentence is a typical example of Rajchman's convoluted style:

> We are accustomed to enclosing empiricism within the 'analysis' of Russell's logic, and opposing to it the historicism or metaphysics of the Continent, perhaps counting the holism of Quine as a correction of its 'protocol' in Viennese philosophy. (p.18)

The quote is also an example of Rajchman's penchant for namedropping, whose unnecessary showiness is undermined by the insufficient editing evident in the embarrassing misspelling of 'Weltanschauung' and, twice, of 'Rechtsstaat.' Indeed, one wishes for a better proofreader for his manuscript.[1] Not only does he mention some things twice,[2] Rajchman often quotes without giving a proper source. The important word 'noology' appears on page 35 without reference or quotation marks. It would have been helpful to note that it can be found in *A Thousand Plateaus* in the chapter on the 'War Machine', where its meaning is explained (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 374-75).[3] Another practice, which is conventional in the dominant academic discourse, is to refer to the English edition of a work cited, and in case of one's own or revised translation

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1 Apart from these embarrassing misspellings, the text changes between 'Riegel' and 'Reigel', 'Liebniz' and 'Leibniz' and the postface to Beckett's Quad is not listed in the list of works cited but quoted later.

2 It is mentioned twice, that the title of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* is an anagram of nowhere/now here, while the word 'Urdoxa' appears several times without being explained. The same sentence is printed in the text and the footnote: Rorty and "his youthful enthusiasm for Whitehead" (p. 19/n.10). This is a typical mistake of 'cut and paste' and symptomatic of the sloppy editing.

3 Why John Rajchman spells it 'noo-ology', I can't tell.

mark it as such. Rajchman refers only to the French editions of Deleuze's works, often without page numbers, while he quotes Foucault mostly from English editions.

Maybe Rajchman's book is not intended for interested 'nonphilosophical' readers? Maybe it is intended for those of us who read Deleuze in French and can identify the numerous quotes that appear without source? The sloppiness in the editing mirrors a far greater flaw: Rajchman jumps to conclusions without making it possible to follow his argument. Indeed, one could suspect an intentional blurring of sources to make criticism impossible. A typical example is a discussion of Deleuze's relation to modern art, where several of Gilles Deleuze's ideas are conflated. Rajchman rightly detects a moment of violence in the event of art:

> What then would it mean to think of art or the work of art in its relation to such violence? Developing some ideas of Blanchot, Foucault had tried to understand the 'madness' peculiar to the modern work as a kind of 'absence d'oeuvre,' a kind of 'un-work'; in this way he rediscovers his own view of the anonymity of discourse as a condition or event, or the emergent of something new. Deleuze himself often refers to this attempt, developing it in his own way – he talks about making vision or language stutter, as if speaking in a foreign tongue saying '...and, and, and' rather than 'is.' But Deleuze never wanted to make a theology out of such 'absence,' as though it were the mark of some Law; for him it was a matter of multiplicity or construction [*sic*] multiplicity, not of some transcendental void or emptiness. (p.124)

A footnote that appears after the first sentence in the above quoted paragraph refers to an article by Foucault in the French edition of *Dits et Ecrits*. It would have been more interesting for the reader to see in another footnote where, according to Rajchman, Deleuze "often refers to this attempt". It would have helped to clarify what "this attempt" actually is. Though Foucault is quoted throughout Rajchman's book, the complicated intellectual and personal relationship between Foucault and Deleuze, and Deleuze's commentary on Foucault (cf. Deleuze, 1999) are not mentioned. The equally fascinating figure of the writer/critic Maurice Blanchot, who influenced both Foucault and Deleuze, is just mentioned *en passant*.[4] Blanchot, quoted on numerous occasions by Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991: 59), develops the notion of an outside (*dehors*) that is paradoxically not exterior (*extérieur*[5]). Foucault interprets Blanchot's notion in an article, which shows the affinity between these three thinkers (Foucault 1990). It is this 'dehors', the limit and the base for thinking, that can also be found in works of art and in philosophy: "Perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think *the* plane of immanence as to show that it is there, unthought in every plane, and to think it in this way as the outside and inside of thought, as the not-external outside and the not-internal inside – that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought..." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 59). Here, the programmatic distinction between art and philosophy, formulated by Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* is very helpful.

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4 Rodowick, who does mention the influence of Blanchot, cites the source and thus gives his readers the opportunity to follow up on this important resource (cf. Rodowick, 1997: 229, n.3).

5 Deleuze and Guattari, 1991: 59: "Le dehors non extérieur." Engl. Ed. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 60): "the not-external outside and the not-internal inside."

It is aesthetic experience and not philosophy that opens up a *dehors*, which is a field of virtuality, a field we were not willing or able to think of as such up to now.

But let us go back to the paragraph by Rajchman quoted above: It would be interesting to know where Deleuze "talks about making vision or language stutter". Looking at the article 'He Stutters' in *Essays Critical and Clinical* by Deleuze we find the sentence Rajchman probably paraphrased: "a great writer is always like a foreigner in the language in which he expresses himself, even if this is his native tongue." (Deleuze, 1997b: 109) It refers not to the absence of an oeuvre but to the creative process of minorizing a language. Rajchman seems to misunderstand this concept entirely when, earlier in his book, he mentions that one has "to invent a minor language" (p.80, again without source). However, according to Deleuze, what these authors do "is invent a *minor use* of the major language within which they express themselves entirely" (Deleuze, 1997b: 109).[6] Deleuze's own emphasis in this quote makes it clear that the difference is crucial to him. The process is linked to the becoming that is never an imitation of a certain mode of existence, but rather an exhaustion of all possible modes within the major language. Deleuze's great essay on Beckett, 'The Exhausted', might give an even clearer idea of how Deleuze looks at language. Since Rajchman mentions the same essay later in the same paragraph, let us assume the reference of 'vision and language' is to Deleuze's discussion of *Quad*, Beckett's short plays for television. Here, Deleuze shows a way to the outside/dehors by exhausting the form of language. Deleuze distinguishes three languages: Language I is an "atomic, disjunctive, cut and chopped language". Language II is a language of 'voices', a language "that no longer operates with combinable atoms but with blendable flows" (Deleuze, 1997c: 156). Language III, "which is no longer a language of names or voices but a language of images, resounding and coloring images", (Deleuze, 1997c: 161) is the impossible image that remains when all possible permutations are exhausted. This empty image, "one that is nothing but an image", is foremost an exhaustion of form and not a construction of multiplicity.

The second part of Rajchman's sentence ("…as if speaking in a foreign tongue saying '...and, and, and' rather than 'is'") is, as it turns out, another unattributed quote from Deleuze. After stating in an interview that traditional philosophy depends on the unifying verb 'to be' Deleuze says that "'and…and…and…' is precisely a creative stammering, a foreign use of language, as opposed to a conformist and dominant use based on the verb 'to be.'" In French 'et' - meaning 'and' - and 'est' ('is') are homophones, which the translator of the interview dutifully notes. This 'and' - the 'et' that marks an absent 'est' - can create a link between the most adversary concepts; it is "diversity, multiplicity, the destruction of identities" (Deleuze, 1995: 44). The creation of multiplicities, then, is attempted through the exhausted 'et…et…et' that bears the visible absence of the 'est…est…est' and *thus* destroys the ontological inventory of homogenized beings in favor of a multiplicity of links.

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6 Italics in the text. "Major and minor languages … qualify less as different languages than as different usages of the same language" (Cf. Deleuze, 1997d: 244).

The Deleuze Connections by John Rajchman does not fulfill its promise. Instead of creating connections within and between works by Deleuze or connections between Deleuze and other thinkers, the book associatively mentions Deleuze's and others' concepts without establishing any link. Rajchman's *Deleuze Connections* looks like a typescript from a graduate lecture class, hastily edited under the 'publish or perish' pressure of a big American university. It displays the typical mix of jargon, name-dropping and a conflation of ideas, disguised as new insights, combined with the refusal to provide sources. The problem with books like this is that they make it difficult to engage critically with the argument, and thus fall short of an engagement with Deleuze.

Deleuzism: A Metacommentary by Ian Buchanan lays out a clear program. The book is divided into two parts, 'Deleuzism' and 'Applied Deleuzism', and provides source material. But *Deleuzism* is not just a piece of standard academic scholarship. Buchanan reads with and through Deleuze. To do this, he relies mainly on two authors. He refers often to *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* by Michael Hardt. In part Buchanan's work reads like a second volume to Hardt, who concentrates mostly on Deleuze's earlier works. However, where Hardt reads Deleuze's work mainly as an alternative project to Hegel, Buchanan offers his readers an ally for reading Deleuze that seems at first surprising. His reference is to the Marxist critic Frederic Jameson, especially to his books *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (cf. Jameson, 1997). While the style of writing (and thinking, one might add) of Deleuze and Jameson cannot be further apart, they share a curiously similar analysis of the phenomenon of postmodernity.

Jameson's approach describes the problem of postmodernity as a loss of 'memory', whose functioning as foundational structure is no longer possible.[7] Instead, a nostalgic momentum of space is evoked. The Past as collective experience cannot be lived anymore, because it is no longer bound to a historical subject or a time.[8] Gilles Deleuze would not contradict Jameson on that point - we live in a capitalist culture without memory, where everything we claim to remember is (re-)constructed by ourselves. Rather, Deleuze gives the argument a different slant: We are creating our memory only in the form of a realization of the possible, because we have lost our connection to the virtual, a fundamental momentum of memory and time. Deleuze would thus agree with the claim that we have lost our ability to remember. Collective memory as rootedness, which in modernity could be re-constructed as authentic experience, is no longer possible. According to Deleuze, the basic function of memory is Virtuality. With a notion reminiscent of Benjamin, he states that we no longer remember what did *not* happen. This virtual archive, not to be confused with what was possible, has its own reality. The virtual concerns an event that did not happen, but that exists in a virtual world.

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7 I paraphrase the first sentence of the introduction to Jameson (1991).

8 Apart from Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* from 1984, see here especially the chapter on film: 'Nostalgia for the Present'.

The act of remembering is, in the words of Deleuze, always a 'genuine creation'. He writes:

> Such is the defect of the possible: a defect which serves to condemn it as produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it. The actualization of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation. Actualization breaks with resemblance as a process no less than it does with identity as a principle. (Deleuze, 1994: 212)

Following Kierkegaard and Pascal, Deleuze points out in the seventh chapter of his book on the movement-image, that a choice in the Actual results in the typical notion of an outside power, forcing somebody a certain way or another. The crucial difference of the Virtual to this pseudo-choice by force is reflection. Since the Virtual is not opposed to the possible, this Virtual choice can be remembered. Even if out of duty or some other motive one chooses the wrong path, the other way still exists as what Deleuze calls "a mode of existence" (Deleuze, 1986: 114).

Curiously, Buchanan completely leaves out the discussion of the virtual and memory, (re)constructing instead "the set of presuppositions logically prior to everything Deleuze ultimately says, but never actually expressed by him – his double" (p.10). This plane, which Buchanan calls 'Deleuzism', is where Deleuze comes closest to Marx. To support his theses, Buchanan first draws a comparison with Deleuze's contemporaries. He then points out the closeness of Deleuze and Guattari to the Anti-Hegelianism of Marx, drawing his examples mostly from *Anti-Oedipus*.

Buchanan's argumentation is very careful. He always makes clear when his interpretation differs from received comments on Deleuze, interjecting an "it is my belief that" or "I want to suggest." Although this might not always lead to a smooth writing style, it does make *Deleuzism* a very 'user-friendly' book. For example, when Buchanan in his last chapter openly states his tactics for reading Deleuze, a fruitful discussion can develop: "… I needed to conceive Deleuze's work as a whole and posit an outside, then read one in relation to the other, which is precisely a dialectical procedure. This is exactly … what Deleuze himself does" (p.194). The "base of thinking" mentioned earlier, the "not-external outside and the not-internal inside", has indeed a relationship to the whole of a piece of art. However, it can be argued that Deleuze tries to avoid the concept of totality and instead uses, among other means, the already mentioned process of an exhaustion to come closer to this unthinkable base of Philosophy, what Deleuze describes, already quoted above, as "that which cannot be thought and yet must be thought."

To show his method at work, Buchanan provides a reading of *Blade Runner* in Deleuzian terms and a reading of the Bonaventure Hotel, which is a revisiting of Frederic Jameson's famous essay *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Here, Buchanan brings together in a surprising turn Jameson's process-oriented concept of Utopia and the Deleuze and Guattari notion of Schizophrenia.

> [I]t is Jameson's practice to bracket schizophrenia as a critical and/or aesthetic term, whereas Deleuze and Guattari posit it as an unmediated ground, so to bring the two together involves a substantial epistemological shift. Utopia would have to be supposed an immanent concept for it to

be properly equivalent to Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenia, and this is exactly what I take it to be. (p.165)

The question Buchanan poses could thus be formulated as "What is the plane of 'Deleuzism'?" The answer would be to perform the unachievable, utopian task of reading Deleuze with Jameson and Jameson with Deleuze at the same time. Whether this plane of mutual reading needs to be called 'dialectic' is open for discussion.

The fortunate reader is one who does not need any introduction to Deleuze, but who can indulge in Deleuze's fascinating insights without any secondary sources. But this reader would have to possess the enormous knowledge Deleuze has about every subject he comments on. To best appreciate the radical nature of Deleuze's thought one ought to approach his work with sound preparation in the given field. For example, reading the two books Deleuze wrote on cinema is not fruitful unless one is steeped in the discourse of film history and theory. His writing performs a breaking free from the conventions he writes about, and to fully understand the breaking free, one must understand the conventions. The reader, too, must be willing to break with convention if his thinking is to have any affinity with Deleuze, but, paradoxically, this affinity precedes the encounter with Deleuze.

A book that sets out to introduce the work of Gilles Deleuze must be mindful of the reader's experience, or predicament, and thus has to demonstrate how Deleuze manipulates the major discourse, how he *minorizes* it. Before reading Ian Buchanan, *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary,* I recommend reading Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*. A person interested in Film Studies and the fascinating concept of virtuality will most likely prefer *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* by Rodowick. The books by Hardt, Buchanan and Rodowick are traditional scholarly books, with plenty of footnotes and references. Their approach of reading with and through Deleuze seems to me more promising – and more 'Deleuzian' – than an essayistic attempt to sound like or mimic Deleuze.

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