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Hallward's Strangely Elegant Car Crash

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review of: Hallward, Peter (2006) *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. London: Verso. (PB: pp. 199, £14.99, ISBN: 1-84467-555-6)

Reading Hallward

This was an enjoyable book to read. Somehow, multiple and disparate parts of Deleuze's corpus have been brought together into a systematic and approachable handful of clear and illuminating chapters. Difficult and obscure ideas are presented with clarity and fluidity, and situated with a certain mastery and rhythm among Deleuze's various philosophical contemporaries and forebears. The extensive pages of footnotes provide detailed and meticulous page references, comments and qualifications to the text in a way that allows the main body of the book to flow, while accompanying it with a consistent and impressive scholarly rigour that is admirable and sets a high standard for Deleuze scholarship to-come. The overall effect of the text on this reader was a hint of the atmosphere of wonder and imagination that has often been one of the great pleasures with reading Deleuze's philosophy, and the small Verso paperback edition, with swirling shades of blue and white on its cover had the effect at times of picking up a story-book and being carried away with Hallward into his Deleuze. And Hallward indeed has a story about Deleuze to tell, some might say a fantasy, which we are told will take us "right to the heart of Deleuze's philosophy" (p. 1). For those of us who like our stories with surprise endings however, Hallward disappoints, giving the end to his story upfront. In his Introduction Hallward sums up the book's argument, that Deleuze's philosophy is what he calls 'extra-worldly' (p. 3). For Hallward,

> Rather than a philosopher of nature, history or the world, rather than any sort of 'fleshy materialist', Deleuze is most appropriately read as a spiritual, redemptive or subtractive thinker, a thinker preoccupied with the mechanics of dis-embodiment and de-materialisation. Deleuze's philosophy is oriented by lines of flight that lead out of the world; though not other-worldly, it is extra-worldly. (p. 3)

In this concern of Hallward's with the neglect of the 'worldly', we might hear echoes here of debates within organization studies relating to the claim to represent or engage with the realities of organization: from those who place the emphasis on what have been called the insistent 'structural' and 'material' realities of organization (e.g. Reed, 1997),

to those who rather look to the role of language in the construction of such realities (e.g. Chia, 2003) – or, even, what others have considered to be the unrepresentability of the Real in our the perverse relationship between organization and the symbolic (e.g. Contu, 2006). Hallward's concern for the 'worldly' can also be seen to have an implicit relevance beyond the concerns of contemporary 'Deleuze studies', to the broader ways we interrogate our own intellectual practices, and the extent to which they may or may not be adequate to the political and organizational realities of the world 'out there'; or furthermore, to the haunting question of what being 'in' (an) 'organization' might mean (cf. O'Doherty, 2007: 27).

In terms of how Hallward's story progresses, in the opening chapter, Hallward sets up his understanding of Deleuze's ontology of the virtual, moving on in the second chapter to make a case for the priority of the virtual over the actual in Deleuze's philosophy. The third chapter then describes the notion of the 'anti-creativity' of actual 'creations' (e.g. p. 63), moving on in the fourth chapter to the theme of the 'recovery' of the creative through processes of 'counter-actualisation'. The fifth and sixth chapters discuss the role of art and philosophy, respectively, in movements of 'redemption' from the actual back to the unity of the virtual, moving on in the Conclusion to what he understands to be the political import of his reading. Hallward's final judgement, as he concludes in the final words of the book, is that, for all the inspirational qualities of Deleuze's philosophy, "those of us who still seek to change our world and to empower its inhabitants will need to look for our inspiration elsewhere" (p. 164).

Hallward and Badiou

This Deleuze-story of Hallward's will come as a surprise to some; for others, it could even administer 'a shock to thought' (Massumi, 2001). For those who haven't been aware of its reception among Deleuze scholars, among its first reviewers there has been a recognition of elements of distinctiveness and originality in Hallward's reading; even timeliness. For John Protevi for example, Hallward's text is a 'fine work', which, in pointing out what are considered by Hallward to be the errors of Deleuze, it "forces you to think" and forces one "to go back to Deleuze with a fresh eye" (2007: 1) – an indicator for Protevi of "the maturation of philosophical work on Deleuze" (*ibid.*). For Jason Read, meanwhile, Hallward's book "represents something of an event in the Anglo-American reception of Deleuze" (2006: 1). For Read,

> Whereas for years the dominant trend of writing on Gilles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) has been a series of 'guides' and 'introductions' to the dense and perplexing philosophy of Deleuze, Hallward's book is, by contrast, a critical engagement, even a polemic. (*ibid*.)

And in a manner of speaking, Hallward's engagement is indeed critical, indicating upfront his intention to 'help us consider anew' Deleuze's various concepts and notions – a Deleuzian conceptual lexicon that for Hallward has become "casually familiar while often remaining unhelpfully arcane" (p. 2). It can also be said that Hallward also makes an impressive reading of Deleuze across his different works, creating what some might call a transversal line through the different stages of his intellectual transformations, and which is arguably one of Hallward's most distinctive and impressive achievements here.

It would seem however, that, perhaps to its detriment, Hallward's reading of Deleuze exists in the shadow of another secondary reading published six years earlier, surely the text most deserving of the title of a disruptive event in the Anglo-American reception of Deleuze: Louise Burchill's translation of Alain Badiou's *Deleuze: La Clameur de l'Etre* (2000 [1997]).

Badiou's interpretation has been described as having had "the effect of a bomb" on Deleuze scholarship,[1] in terms of its evaluation of Deleuze as 'an aristocrat of thought', and as a 'physicist' in the pre-Socratic tradition (2000: 102). At the core of Badiou's reading is the judgement that, "Deleuze's fundamental problem is most certainly not [as previously thought] to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One" (2000: 10). It is the influence of this other text that will mean that for some, Hallward's arguments will have a faint but persistent tinnitus-like ring of familiarity about them, and it is in the aftermath of Badiou's controversial reading of Deleuze's philosophy that Hallward's reading is perhaps best understood. Indeed, a fairly good case could be made that Hallward's (re)interpretation of Deleuze directly builds upon and takes forward core elements of Badiou's radical reading – a reading which can be seen to have inspired Hallward's evaluation of Deleuze's philosophy as being extra-worldly. The plausibility of such an interpretation of Hallward's work would seem to also be affirmed by Hallward's status as one of the most thorough and affirmative readers of Badiou's work, as demonstrated in his two substantial books on Badiou (Hallward, 2003; 2004), and by his translation of Badiou's *Ethics* (2002), with Hallward describing Badiou's reading of Deleuze as both "concise and illuminating" (p. 86). In his other writing, Hallward has at times engaged critically with Badiou's work, so it is perhaps disappointing to find that he appears to have been so strongly influenced here by Badiou's forceful reading. It should perhaps be stressed here though, that in its tone and balance, this review is intended to provide an affective engagement with Hallward's text, with the intention of stimulating those who haven't yet read it to seek out the book for themselves; and, for those already familiar, to stimulate debate and to shake up settled evaluations, hopefully bringing the reader back to reconsider Hallward's arguments and to reassess his controversial conclusions. As a result, the review will be taking up certain themes and ideas that are seen to characterise Hallward's reading, while not intended to be comprehensive in its treatment of the text in its detail – a sort of letter to a harsh critic, if you will (cf. Deleuze, 1992). In terms of the layout of the review then, in the next section we will begin by considering what will be posited as Hallward's Badiouan understanding of the Deleuzian virtual and its consequences, before moving on to what will be seen as his inheritance of the notion of a 'monotony' in Deleuze's work. We will then appraise Hallward's call for a separate register of the political, taking a closer look at his representation of Deleuze's essay 'Desert islands', drawing some wider conclusions of our own regarding the tenor of Hallward's Deleuze encounter.

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1   Comment by Wlad Godzich, University of Geneva, cited on the rear cover of Badiou's *Deleuze* (2000).

The Virtual

To begin with Hallward's relationship to Deleuze's much discussed Bergsonian-derived concept of the virtual, it is with some reluctance that we observe a recurring implication throughout Hallward's text that Deleuze's interest in the 'virtual' must mean that he is not interested in what Hallward might call the 'actual world'. Such an interpretation of Hallward's would seem disappointingly wayward given the impressively detailed work of reading that Hallward has clearly conducted of Deleuze's writings. Meanwhile, Hallward's reading of the primacy of the virtual – and Hallward's associated 'theophanic' thesis – can be seen to be based upon elements that have been carried over from Badiou's earlier critique of Deleuze.[2] We can see this influence perhaps most clearly in Chapter Two of Hallward's text, where he makes the case for "the unqualified dependence of the actual on the virtual" (p. 47), and represents Deleuze's philosophy as one whereby "the virtual alone is constituent" (p. 37). Hallward also makes a connection here with his 'theophanic' thesis – which in turn would be true to Badiou's reading of Deleuze as submitting thinking to a "renewed concept of the One" (2000: 10) – suggesting that we might 'cautiously' call the pure impulse or élan of the virtual "a sort of virtual creator" (p. 37). This leads Hallward to conclusions in this chapter such as Deleuze's reliance upon "an intensive form of power whose primary medium is spiritual and whose paradigmatic vehicle is divine" (p. 54). While we might agree with Hallward's citation that, in Deleuze's thought, "what is decisive is always the movement of de-actualisation or deterritorialisation that 'liberates a pure matter' and dissolves the pertinent forms of identity or stability by dispersing them along a line of flight" (p. 40), there is no necessary reason why we would then be led to the conclusion that "the virtual alone is real" in Deleuze (p. 35).

On Badiou's critique, Keith Ansell-Pearson writes authoritatively, arguing that his "curious affirmation" of the univocity of the actual "shows he has inadequately understood the role of the virtual in Deleuze and [furthermore] discloses a fundamental incoherence in his own thinking" (2002: 98). While this is clearly not the place to recount all of Ansell-Pearson's extended and sophisticated critique, we can look to his conclusions to see that in his reading, for Badiou, the actual is reduced to being nothing more than the "function of its virtuality" (*ibid.*). By contrast, for Ansell-Pearson in fact, "the virtual is not of the order of transcendence" and, instead, with respect to ontology, "the virtual has to be seen as an immanent and not an eminent power" (*ibid.*: 8). It is striking the extent to which this analysis of Badiou by Ansell-Pearson might be carried over to an analysis of Hallward's reading (or misreading) of the relationship between the virtual and the actual in Deleuze. Indeed, Ansell-Pearson's citation above of Badiou as understanding the actual-virtual pair as proceeding from the transcendent virtual, and involving a passive and static role for the actual, can be seen to be one of the defining characteristics of Hallward's reading. To quote Hallward here,

> ... since [Deleuze's philosophy] acknowledges only a unilateral relation between virtual and actual, there is no place in Deleuze's philosophy for any notion of change, time or history that is

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2   A similar criticism is also made regarding aspects of Slavoj Žižek's recent book on Deleuze & Guattari by Eric Alliez (Alliez, 2005; Žižek, 2003).

mediated by actuality. In the end, Deleuze offers few resources for thinking the consequences of what happens within the actually existing world as such. (p. 162)

This misreading of the nature of the actual-virtual relation can be seen to have been the basis of Hallward's persuasively argued, but fundamentally misguided 'theophanic' thesis, by which he means where, "every individual process or thing is conceived as an expression or manifestation of God, or a conceptual equivalent of God (pure creative potential, force, energy, life...)" (p. 4). By contrast, as emphasised in a recent essay by the Deleuze scholar Constantin Boundas, and which summarises our point nicely here,

> Becoming, instead of being a linear process from one actual to another, should rather be conceived as the movement from an actual state of affairs, through a dynamic field of virtual/real tendencies, to the actualisation of this field in a new state of affairs. This schema safeguards the relation of reversibility between the virtual and the actual. (2006: 5)

In conclusion on this point then, contrary to Hallward's (and Badiou's) reading, we would argue that we should not understand the virtual in Deleuze philosophy as something 'extra-wordly' or 'Godlike' (cf. p. 4-5), where the actual 'creatings' of the world ('creatures') must aspire to achieve unity through subtractive, redemptive strategies, but instead, that we should rather understand the virtual as being an ontological dimension of the (material) real that provides the basis for dynamic movements between one actual state of affairs to another – 'political' or otherwise.

The 'Monotony' of Deleuze's Philosophy

A further aspect of Badiou's reading of Deleuze's philosophy that would seem to have strongly influenced Hallward – to the detriment of his account – is the idea of the monotony of Deleuze's productions (Badiou, 2000: 14-16). Hallward, affirms this notion of monotony in adjudging Deleuze's concepts as having been "rigorously consistent" (p. 79) throughout his philosophical career, meaning that for Hallward therefore,

> ... the real challenge in writing about Deleuze's philosophy lies not in the remarkable diversity of materials that he considers, but in the monotony of the underlying logic he invokes to understand them. (p. 2, italics added)

As identified by Jason Read in his review of Hallward's book (2006: 2-3), we can see a systematic tendency in Hallward's reading to 'force a unity' on the work of Deleuze – what John Protevi (2007: 2) has called the 'continuity thesis' regarding Deleuze's output.

While we might congratulate Hallward for the ease with which he carries the reader along with ideas that are seen by Hallward to span Deleuze's different works, we might also say that this has been the source of one of the main weaknesses of Hallward's reading, arguably failing to give due recognition to the mutations of Deleuze's ideas across his texts, and, perhaps more importantly, to the neglect of the detail and specificity of Deleuze's later collaborative works with Félix Guattari. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made here that this latter tendency has contributed to Hallward's

underappreciation of some of the most politically minded aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's collective thought, leading to one of the most controversial aspects of Hallward's reading, where he (rather abruptly) concludes that Deleuze's philosophy lacks any potency as a basis for political action. To quote the concluding sentence of Hallward's book,

> Few philosophers have been as inspiring as Deleuze. But those of use who still seek to change our world and to empower its inhabitants will need to look for our inspiration elsewhere. (p. 164)

It is perhaps unsurprising that Hallward has been led to such conclusions given the way he fails to engage in any sort of way with the 'toolbox' of concepts to be found in the *entre-deux* of Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative works, where he might have found such inspiration for strategies of political change. Furthermore, for a text making such strong conclusions regarding the political Deleuze, it would also seem rather ill fitting that the topic of Deleuze's politics is not raised until the last four pages of the book, or consigned to footnotes to these pages.

Deleuze's Conception of the Political

The idea that the lack of a specifically political register in Deleuze's philosophy is problematic is another aspect of Hallward's reading that we can trace back to Alain Badiou's work. To quote Badiou on this subject:

> How is it that politics, for Deleuze, is not an autonomous form of thought, a singular section of chaos, unlike art, science and philosophy? This point alone testifies to our divergence, and everything could be seen to follow from it. (Badiou, 2004, cited by Alliez 2005: 4)

Indeed, to turn to one of the authors Hallward specifically positions himself to in contradistinction on the question of the political, Nicholas Thoburn takes up exactly this point in relation to Badiou. Badiou proposes an alternative politics to Deleuze's on the basis of the problems that are seen to exist with generalising politics across the terrain of life, as Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy is seen to do (Thoburn, 2003: 5-6). For Thoburn, Badiou's point is an important one, but indicates a fundamental misunderstanding of the distinctive conception of politics developed by Deleuze and Guattari. For Thoburn (*ibid.*: 6), "it is the very difficulty of, and commitment to, [a politics of intervention that is adequate to capital] that necessitates that Deleuze does not delineate the specifically political register of thought that Badiou describes as lacking". For Thoburn, such "an undetermined and continually open, but no less practical project" is "especially evident" in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the minor – outlined in two of the authors' co-authored books, yet overlooked in Hallward's reading of Deleuze (*ibid.*, citing Deleuze and Guattari, 1986; 1988). It could be argued, thereby, that in considering there to be a monotony across Deleuze's cases and works, including his co-authored works with Guattari, both Badiou and Hallward can be seen to have overlooked or misrecognised the distinctive nature of the ideas in these later texts, and following Thoburn's analysis here, have failed to accommodate the distinctive and difficult nature of the politics to which Deleuze and Guattari aspire. In light of Thoburn's arguments then, Hallward's rather terse assessment that all Deleuze

and Guattari have to add to Marx is "a new eschatology" involving the creation of a subject "worthy of the end of history or the end of actuality" seems rather contestable, to say the least (p. 103). We might instead say then, in contrast to Hallward and Badiou, that this idea of Deleuze and Guattari's posing of the question of politics as a problem or a question rather than a set of existing concepts or a predetermined programme (cf. Villani, 2006: 238) is what lends it potency for engaging with the specific material (and territorial) conditions of particular political situations. Yet it is this same characteristic that is, arguably misguidedly, seized upon by Hallward as demonstrating what he calls a fundamentally 'extra-worldly' character.

Hallward's Desert Island

Some of these perceived problems regarding Hallward's appraisal of Deleuze's (and Deleuze and Guattari's) politics can be seen to be exemplified in his treatment of Deleuze's 'Desert Islands' essay (2004), which we will consider here to be significant for the way it founds a core element of an argument regarding Deleuze's ontology, and which is taken forward and developed through the latter chapters of his book.

Hallward understands Deleuze's essay to be about the way in which "the inhabitants of an island trap it in a static actuality" (p. 23), requiring a labour of virtual 'de-population', 'evacuation' and 'subtraction' to affirm the island in its desertion through the abandonment of a territory (p. 23). Hallward would also read this as a story about "the coherence of a single destiny" in terms of a redemptive reunification with a Godlike virtual whole (p. 26). Yet, if we are to return to Deleuze's (rather beautiful) short essay, we read that in fact for Deleuze there is no strict relation between desert islands and populations at all. Deleuze is clear here that an island doesn't stop being deserted simply because it is inhabited (2004: 10), and moreover, that certain 'uncommon humans' live there already anyway – those human beings that are understood to 'precede' themselves (*ibid.*: 11). Instead, the unity of the deserted island and its inhabitant is for Deleuze, "not actual, only imaginary", and so it is that human beings as such "always encounter the desert island from outside" (*ibid.*: 11). Meanwhile, rather than the geographical meaning of the island, for Deleuze it is "the idea of a *second origin* [that] gives the deserted island its whole meaning", the desert island being about "the survival of a sacred place in a world that is slow to re-begin" (*ibid.*: 14, italics added). For Deleuze, "what must be recovered is the mythological life of the deserted island", "a prototype of the collective soul" (*ibid.*: 13). Yet, importantly for Deleuze, the desert island's destiny is at the same time "subject to those *human conditions* that make mythology possible"; requiring "the collective imagination, [and] what is most profound in it, i.e. rites and mythology" (*ibid.*: 12, italics added). Mythology being subject to certain human conditions suggests that there is a more profound tie between the myth of the island, and the idea of an island as territorial or geophysical entity than Hallward would give Deleuze credit for, in terms of the socio-material aspects of language and thought that would offer the basis for such an imaginary creation, and for the formation of a new collective social whole. For Deleuze humans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents – "an active

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struggle", "either from before or after humankind" and the emergence of an imaginary which Deleuze evokes here can be seen as being part of this struggle (*ibid.*: 9):

> Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter – is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew. Some islands drifted away from the continent, but the island is also that toward which one drifts; other islands originated in the ocean, but the island is also the origin, radical and absolute. (*ibid.*: 10)

In terms of Hallward's reading of an absolute and 'extra-worldly' deterritorialisation, we might instead make reference to concepts outlined in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) – a text we have argued has been undervalued by Hallward in his 'monotonised' reading of Deleuze's corpus – regarding the important additional move here to be a reterritorialisation, following the original separation and pulling away from the human. Such a sociopolitical reading of Deleuze's essay is affirmed in a recent essay by Ronald Bogue (2006), who draws attention to the political significance of the fable in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, in terms of its role in the creation of a 'people to come', seemingly overlooked in Hallward's account. Discussion of the relationship between myths, literature, the social unconscious and the creation of communities to come are all touched upon and connected in some of the more subtle parts of Deleuze's essay, yet are missed or ignored by Hallward in his restricted interpretation of Deleuze's own brush with fabulation. Perhaps if Hallward had looked to Deleuze's later associated essay 'Michel Tournier and the world without others' (1984) (not referenced by Hallward), he might also have developed a better feel for the creative (and some would say 'ethical') intentions and possibilities of the meaning and significance of the phrase "the people are missing", or the political significance of the notions of "a land without a people and a people without a land" (1988: 416). Hallward might also have had a less reactionary response to what he rather dramatically calls "the sacrifice of that most precious sacred cow of contemporary philosophy – *the other*", and to have considered some of the creative energies and potentials that might come with such an accomplishment (p. 92).[3]

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3 For Hallward, "Nothing is more foreign to Deleuze than an unconditional concern for the other qua other" (*ibid.*), and Hallward sees this lack of concern for the other illustrated in Deleuze's distinctive reading of Robinson Crusoe, where Deleuze writes that "it is the Other who disturbs the world. The Other was the trouble" (p. 93, citing Deleuze, 1990). We might associate Hallward's criticism here with his concern for "the exclusive primacy of non-relational difference" in Deleuze's philosophy – what he calls "a notion of strictly intra-elemental rather than inter-elemental difference" (p. 153). For Hallward this leads to Deleuze's inability to provide "a coherent theory of relation between terms," in that "once Deleuze rejects every notion of mediated difference he rejects any viable theory of inter-individual relations as well" (p. 152). We might also associate this with Hallward's general unease with what Deleuze and Guattari have called the "three virtues" of "imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality" (p. 81, citing Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 81), pointing towards what could be seen as Hallward's implicit interest in the revival of a politics of the subject. Common ground with Badiou can again be interpreted here, such as seen in Badiou's ethical concern that Deleuze's machinic conception "precludes any idea of ourselves as being, at any time, the source of what we think or do" (2000: 11-12).

Crashing Deleuze

In conclusion, what we have called Hallward's 'restricted' reading of Deleuze's 'Desert Islands' essay could also be seen to exemplify tendencies in his wider reading of Deleuze in terms of his refusal in the last instance to take Deleuze's writing on its own terms, and, more specifically, in terms of Hallward's evaluation of Deleuze's problem of the political by an alien set of criteria adapted from Badiou. In judging Deleuze's philosophy in such alien terms, is this not what we might call trying to put a round philosophical peg in a square hole in the sense of using a set of ideas that are foreign to Deleuze's philosophy to search for a language and a logic that cannot be found there, and, in the process, to then overlook the distinctive value of the alternative conceptualisation to be found there? As a sympathetic alternative conclusion, we might suggest instead that in a certain sense Hallward has taken Deleuze's own methodology for reading other philosophers and turned it against him. The epigraph at the beginning of Hallward's Introduction would appear to support this, for example, with Hallward quoting Deleuze's statement that, "Rather than repeat what a philosopher says, the history of philosophy has to say what he must have taken for granted, what he didn't say but is nonetheless present in what he did say" (p. 1). What is arguably missing here in Hallward's engagement, however, is a sense in this reader that Hallward has achieved such a creative reading. As Deleuze and Guattari knew, lines of flight are risky, and sometimes in our endeavours we can end up riding "a pure cold line of abolition" (1988: 229-30). We conclude instead that Hallward's reading is better characterised – appropriately perhaps? – as more typical of the way that Alain Badiou has described his regard for Deleuze: as a 'nonrelationship', rather than, say, a constructive relation of difference (2000: 1).[4] In a rather perverse recovery though, perhaps like an assassination attempt, or like the shock of a near death experience, perhaps Hallward's reading will sharpen and intensify our appreciation of the vital Deleuze, and, out of a negative movement, produce a rather perverse creative effect. In slowing down and gaping as we get a good look at Hallward's strangely elegant car crash of a Deleuze reading we might rescue something still breathing from the wreckage. In any case, we might say to Hallward that if he is left feeling after having read Deleuze that he needs to look elsewhere for his political inspiration (p. 164), perhaps we might suggest instead that he return to Deleuze, this time not as a means to a hermeneutic assassination, by "forcing the nature of things" (p. 161), but in the interest of cultivating desert islands-to-come.

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4   In this spirit, might we say then that producing a terminal 'critique' of Deleuze (or, as in this case, a critique of a critique) is about as inappropriate (or ironic?) as we might consider to be producing a biography of Foucault (or indeed, a biography of his biographer) (cf. Halperin 1995).

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