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GILLES DELEUZE: CONDITIONS FOR THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF ART IN CONTROL SOCIETIES

The most natural point for art and philosophy to meet seems to be the philosophical theory of art, or what is traditionally practiced as aesthetics. However, it is known that interesting meetings also take place in unexpected places and times. And so it is in the case of Gilles Deleuze whose ties to art were as intense as complex. Let us try to take the less beaten track and pose questions concerning, to a lesser extent, Deleuzian art theory^[1] and the artists he valued the most (and the reasons for this recognition), but rather, to a greater extent, how his understanding of the figure of the artist is linked to his philosophical diagnosis of actuality.

The elements of this diagnosis are highly dispersed in Deleuze's writings. One can, however, assemble and combine them into a cohesive entirety, starting with the theory that constituted the source of many of his inspirations, namely Foucault's theory of discipline. Michel Foucault outlined the theory of modern disciplinary power – a power whose objective, unlike that of the power exercised by a sovereign ruler, primarily involves the maximum utilization of the forces inherent in the human body (an individual body or the body of population). Contrary to its historical predecessor, having its culmination in torment, in the act of execution in which the sovereign ruler confirmed its absolute right to take the life of any of its subjects, the new power fulfills itself through a regime of training and taming, in which the life of every person and the lives of all form matter undergoing constant molding and become the driving force of production. In a certain sense Deleuze "extends" this analysis; however, at the center of this critical and sometimes even polemical extension, there is the issue of the nature and the dynamics of capitalism – which, although present in Foucault's work, is related to the main themes of his "microphysics of power" in a manner that is not entirely consistent.

Historically speaking, the transfer from sovereign power to discipline took place within the frame of capitalist relations – the birth of disciplinary society converges in time with the period of industrialization, the period of maturation of classical, industrial capitalism, which requires reasonable factory organization and the implementation of universal panoptical supervision models (an abstract system of observation and normalization applied in various disciplinary centers – in the factory, but also in school, hospital, prison, military barracks). Though, this means that capitalism is not linked to a single form of power, as well as that its historical dynamics permits (if not induces) a profound transformation of the way human resources are used. Moreover, it may be shown that the historical dynamics entails certain inherent trends, or that it is directed in a way that results from the very essence of capitalism.

In *Anti-Œdipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari endeavored to capture the specificity of the capitalistic social machine with the help of an odd pair of definitions: deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In principle, the intuitive thought standing behind these two concepts is clear – capitalism is based on the double movement: on the one hand (as already described by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto), it denotes the radical dismantling of existing structures (political and legal, but also the ones related to daily life, customs, etc.), and the annulations of privileges and the hierarchy of the feudal era, along with the vast universe of symbols and convictions justifying those privileges. And, on the other hand, it introduces a certain new order, no less rigid though predicated on different rules. The difference between the Marxist and the Deleuzian approaches involves, among other things, the special emphasis Deleuze places on the inseparability of these two aspects or movements. Strictly speaking, this is a single movement whose two aspects mutually complement and define one another. Capitalism does not eradicate the remains of feudal relations in order subsequently to establish a new order, based on exploiting hired labor. This new order itself, the new territory where capital is reproduced, lays the law of deterritorialization as its paradoxical foundation.^[2] This order is predicated on the principle of fluidity and dehierarchization...

The essence of capitalism, understood in this way, is not revealed, however, until a certain moment in its historical development. Deleuze attempts to capture precisely this specific moment in a frequently quoted writing, in which he extends Foucault's vision of the disciplinary society to include the notion of control: "Discipline would in its turn begin to break down as new forces moved slowly into place [...] we were no longer in disciplinary societies, we were leaving them behind."^[3] According to the de- and reterritorialization model, the dismantling of disciplinary dispositifs could not mean the simple absence of power dispositifs as such. "Control" is precisely a synonym of this new order, based on the law of fluidity and dispersion. The disciplinary regime corresponded to this form of capitalism

in which the basic issue was the production of an army of normalized and simultaneously individualized workers/students/patients/soldiers – subjects were trained to operate in every center of disciplinary power and expend energy rationally within a certain hierarchical structure. Although this was no longer the "pyramid of power," with a sovereign ruler at the top, the impassable horizon was still demarcated by the logic of binary divisions (doctor/patient, student/teacher, convict/police officer, worker/capitalist) and more or less rigid hierarchies (for example, hierarchies among workers themselves, within a factory). In turn, in controlled societies the maximum degree of flexibility is advanced: the place held by "molds," used to make specialized individuals ready to play precisely defined roles, is superseded by a system of "modulation" or "a self-transmuting molding continually changing from moment to the next,"^[4] which produces something that should rather be called a "dividual,"^[5] a multi-functional being capable of infinite division within the framework of its various employment engagements. As Deleuze puts it, if under disciplinary order things were always starting from the beginning (from school to factory, from factory to prison or hospital), then control would allow nothing to end – it would be a system of permanent continuing education, preventive treatment, etc. It would no longer be possible just to leave the factory – in a modern enterprise, the boundary between "work time" and "leisure time" is erased, of course, to the former's considerable advantage... Just like the transfer from sovereign to disciplinary power, and the process leading to the installation of a system of control in place of the former disciplinary dispositifs signifies the emergence of a new type of power, i.e. a power corresponding to the current phase of development or emergence of capitalism in its post-industrial form – as some sociologists would say.

What does all this have in common with art? Deleuze certainly was not one of the thinkers possessed by the idea of "engagement." The slogan of engaged or critical art never appears in his work. In what way then is his apology of the artist and creativity related to the diagnostic theme, outlined here, the path of the artist – to the trajectory of the emergence of capitalism? Well, this linkage is very explicit, although it is not direct. It begins, above all, on the level of the conditions for the im(possibility) of creation as such. If the conditions of the im(possibility) are being discussed, then this is due to the fact that possibility and impossibility are very tightly interwoven, just like the two aspects of the process of capitalism emerging (i.e. deterritorialization and reterritorialization). Moreover, those conditions result from the very specificity of this dual process. And since this is the case, then the artist's situation in a controlled society must be just as ambivalent as capitalism itself.

On the one hand, to the extent to which we are dealing with the installation of new and increasingly sophisticated power dispositifs, it is justified to say that the space for possible artistic creation is being narrowed radically. In a certain sense, it becomes "increasingly difficult" to create – the more aggressively the imperative of creativity is imposed on everyone (not just artists), the more difficult it gets to create. In his writings, Deleuze did not spend a lot of time on criticism in its traditional meaning (critique of existing power, of everything leading to deadlock, blockage, exhaustion); however, a coherent negative image of contemporary culture emerges from the scattered fragments. Control, as power's new order, is a system of the overall neutralization of creativity. Controlled societies, besides the fact that they promulgate dehierarchization and dispersion, are also societies of inclusion, participation and induced interactivity, while in the case of art this inclusion and interactivity must, above all, succumb to the rule of cultural "producing for the market."^[6] Just as in the case of critical theory analyzing how the "cultural industry" operates, this matter does not concern only a purely economic aspect, the simple fact that a work of art may become a commodity, the fact that there is an "art market" forming part of the tout court market, but that artistic production has become a production in response to a purchase order placed by society, a conformism compelling artists to "voice their opinions" only on subjects deemed up-front by society to be of importance. All creative art must submit to the requirement of broadening the cultural offer. In the fields of art that are particularly close to Deleuze, this translates into the dominance of the "journalistic" element in literature and the "television" element in the cinema (the latter will be discussed below). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault wrote that "visibility is a trap," having in mind a system of continuous observation constituting the grounds for disciplinary power. Analogically, one could say that in controlled societies participation, the imperative of voicing one's opinion, turns out to be a trap: "Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, even rarer, thing that might be worth saying."^[7] How is it possible that despite the strength of the mechanisms posing a threat to creativity, something rare, something worthy of being expressed constantly, appears against all odds? Deleuze put particular emphasis on

this ability of the forces of creation to survive despite all, what's more – on their operation which continuously destabilizes all the power dispositifs. There is always a certain line of flight unlocking the flow – and that, which pertains to the Deleuzian theory of desire, also refers to understanding of the essence of creation. Eradicating blockages requires the existence of favorable conditions including solitude, idea and necessity. The first one constitutes a prerequisite – one has to establish an autonomic zone, where autonomy is defined not as art leaving the battlefield, its withdrawal to a safe zone beyond any antagonisms (or its exultation above social and political antagonisms to the realm of “strictly esthetic” strife) or the romantic autonomy of a “genius,” but as a peculiar tactical maneuver, a refuge enabling the artist to obtain a new weapon^[9] against the forces of social and artistic conformism, a “multiple, creative” and “extraordinarily animated solitude” – as Deleuze said in a short interview on the subject of Godard's TV broadcasts. [9] If creativity is to be something more than just the market production of opinions and projects, then an act of strategic severance, a refusal to participate must occur. In this sense, it is a blessing “not to have an opinion,” not to be able to know what everyone else knows. There is a need for radical alienation from the communication community – a kind of disability, stammering (taking the shape of broken syntax, a bizarre montage, various types of dissonance, etc.). However, the severance itself does not guarantee fulfillment and animation of the autonomous zone. For this, ideas are needed. Deleuze uses this traditional expression, overgrown with a multitude of associations, in a manner that greatly transcends the traditional contexts. It is not that art should be a medium for great, just ideas (*idée juste*), but that it itself should generate just en ideas, not necessarily just (*juste une idée*). “The just ideas are always those that conform to accepted meanings or established precepts . . . while ‘just ideas’ is a becoming-present, a stammering of ideas.”^[10] Only having or rather generating certain ideas, the artist finally submits to the necessity of some other type (besides the market necessity), only then may her/his work evade the label of “having had” to be written, filmed, etc. The artist no longer creates for a social demand, undertaking “important topics.” Rather s/he autonomously determines the hierarchy of importance and draws the boundaries between the problematic and the banal. Certain ideas must be expressed – this is the moment when the condition of possibility of creativity turns out to be a solitary confrontation with the implausible, with the inability to operate using the prevailing ideas and meanings: “We have to see creation as tracing a path between impossibilities”^[11] – the impossibility of speaking, seeing, depicting, etc. “A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities and thereby creates the possibilities.”^[12] When those fundamental conditions are met, creativity, worthy of that name, becomes possible. Does it therefore emerge and confirm its existence only contrary to the existing social conditions? Are we dealing here with a simple mutual exclusion of two orders – the order of power and the order of creation? If we identify power (in its contemporary form of control for Deleuze) with the market reterritorialization process, then the answer to the second question must be positive. However, social reality, as seen by Deleuze, is always something more than just the sum of the mechanisms of power functioning within it. To the same extent, a more complex and ambiguous relationship exists between the “social conditions,” determined by the logic of the emerging of capitalism and the conditions for creativity. Art itself constitutes part of the grand deterritorialization process, as a result of which the social machine, still operating, continuously dismantles itself. The machine always operates in a broken state – this is one of the basic theorems of the Deleuzian machinism, referring, first of all, to the social machine. Contrary to the Marxist model, this does not concern the “dialectical contradiction,” which drills the capitalist way of production, but dispersed creative processes, destabilizing the network of social relations, institutions, etc., from the inside, i.e. an anti-network which, to a certain degree, is immanent to the control network. Art intervenes, although not necessarily in the sense of “interventionist art.” Deleuze himself rarely invoked situations in which the artist had a direct impact on institutions, transforming them from inside, etc. Most frequently he followed the “lines of flight” whose nature was more subtle, one would like to say – virtual; lines through which, in literature, language escapes the imposed manners of expression, or those through which, in painting, images escapes the entrenched perception models... They are all real processes of deterritorialization, activities which are creative and, at the same time, provocative, which undermine a certain politics of speaking/seeing. However, intervention sometimes becomes direct. Perhaps such situations are particularly important at the present time because of the growing awareness among artists of the “institutional” context of their activities and the progressing institutionalization of art itself. For example, does active counteraction to the decay of the cinema, its progressive “televisionization” – which should be understood as an entire set of processes, including ones that reach the deepest levels of the structure of the image itself, as well as

ones translating into shallow morality, psychologism and evident intellectual conformism of ideas of contemporary productions, which are visible to the naked eye – have to involve just “making good cinema”? In this context, it is worthwhile once again to take a look at Godard's case, as described by Deleuze. Godard undoubtedly made great movies, resisting the prevailing trends. But he also managed to launch some sort of a... counterattack. Namely, he, as a cinema man, managed to enter television. And he made this entry in a most radical sense: not for the purpose of showing his work there (television unilaterally makes this gesture, of course not in prime time), but for the purpose – as Deleuze says – of “animating it differently.”^[13] Six of Godard's broadcasts (with each one consisting of two parts – *Six fois deux*) effectively changed something “at the heart of TV (questioning people, making them talk, showing images from a variety of sources, and so on).”^[14] The rules of a certain local system have been undermined (rules causing the person to whom the voice is given, never really to say anything that exceeds the obvious or the role assigned to her/him). The syntax of a certain language has been disrupted. For a moment, images regained their subversive power. However, this happened only thanks to Godard the artist; in other words, only insofar as he refused to communicate obeying the existing principles and to the extent that he had to express certain ideas in his intervention. The basic conditions – solitude, necessity and idea – must be fulfilled regardless of how direct the artist's intervention in reality is, regardless of whether s/he crosses the doorstep of official institutions or whether s/he remains behind the doorstep of her/his workshop.

Footnotes

- [1] This may be found, above all, in: Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1994. *What is philosophy?* Trans. G. Burchell, H. Tomlinson, London: Verso, pp. 163-200.
- [2] See Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1983. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. H.R. Lane, R. Hurley, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press (especially chapter III, pp. 9-10).
- [3] Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. *Postscript on control societies*. In *Negotiations. 1972-1990*. Trans. M. Joughin, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 178.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
- [5] *Ibid.*, p. 186.
- [6] Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. *Mediators*. In *Negotiations. 1972-1990*, op. cit., p. 131.
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- [8] See Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. 1987. *Dialogues*. Trans. H. Tomlinson, B. Habberjam, London: Athlone Press, pp. 135-136.
- [9] See Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. *Three Questions on 'Six Times Two.'* In *Negotiations. 1972-1990*, op. cit., p. 37.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- [11] Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. *Mediators*. In *Negotiations. 1972-1990*, op. cit., p. 133.
- [12] *Ibidem*.
- [13] See Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. *Three Questions on 'Six Times Two.'* In *Negotiations. 1972-1990*, op. cit., p. 37.
- [14] *Ibidem*.