Deleuze as a Theorist of Power

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Introduction

In the current controversial and intense debates on theories of power, Deleuze is something of a foreign body. He denies easy access. He denies it because he does not fit the usual coordinates and because he asserts apparently contradictory things. As a structuralist, he pleads for a "generalized anti-Hegelianism" (2004: xxvii) – and thus meets expectations which deem to recognize in structuralism a position that is fundamentally dissociated from dialectical thought (and from the category of subjectivity used by it). On the other hand, as a theorist of capitalism, who describes the dynamics of the global economy in terms of processes of de- and reterritorialization, he does not only offer linking points for postmarxist discourses, but also works against a Marxist background in his own theorizing. He agrees with Foucault that, in contrast to the prevailing views of the theoretical tradition, power is not to be regarded as unproductive and merely negating or limiting, as a prohibition or a limitation of the freedom to act – and neither as an individually or institutionally manageable resource to bring about effects, e.g. to enforce or to thwart actions. However, despite his closeness to Foucault, he considers it necessary to relate the concept of resistance to that of power in a different way. At one point he writes that he does not want to forgo considering "effects of repression" (1997: 186) And it is well known that he clearly distinguishes what he calls 'control societies' from 'disciplinary societies', while Foucault does not seem to draw much of a distinction between *surveiller* and *contrôler*.

The list of equivocations could easily be extended. In order to end it for the time being and to take a step forward, it is worth recalling that Deleuze (1992) makes a suggestion to reformulate Foucault's concept of the *dispositif*. In his reading, the *dispositif* is transformed into an *agencement*, i.e. a composition or compilation which, as ordered, is at the same time an order (and an ordering), even if without the guarantee of some sort of stability, however constituted. A kind of agency that collects and mediates by creating conditions, conditions for actions as well as things, for the visible as well as the sayable. In English the term is translated as 'assemblage'; in German mostly as *Gefüge*. In the present context, it can also simply be rendered as power or power relation. With regard to Foucault, the conceptual shifts to be observed here are quite

similar to those in the case of 'genealogy', insofar as it is understood as a method of investigating power relations. In both cases, the conceptual shifts can be reconstructed by addressing the underlying character of the immanence of power. Immanence, I suggest, is conceived quite differently by Foucault and Deleuze. If Deleuze is to be invoked as a theorist of power, one is bound to elucidate his understanding of power as immanence. This, in turn, makes it necessary to recapitulate his reading of the philosophical positions which have shaped his own conception of the subject: Nietzsche and Spinoza.

Power as Immanence

In contrast to Foucault, the concept of immanence in Deleuze can be used to describe his philosophy as a whole (cf. Bryant 2008; Rölli 2011; Beistegui 2012). Already in his book on Nietzsche (1962), the demand is made to realize with Nietzsche a critique that goes beyond the Kantian critique. This philosophically radical critique is conceived as an "immanent critique" (Deleuze 2002: 91) which generalizes the immanent use of reason – in the Kantian sense, yet also turned against Kant. Essentially, Deleuze's aim here is not only to relate the ideas of reason (in the field of theoretical philosophy according to Kant) to experience, but to reject the metaphysical foundation of structures a priori, which in turn (against Kant) transcend experience. It is even possible to rediscover this thought in schematic form in his study on Hume (1953), where empiricist immanence is played off against the consolidation of fixed structures of transcendental subjectivity (cf. Deleuze 1991). This is important in that the term 'philosophy of immanence' rightly refers to an empiricism which claims a new radicality for itself around 1900 – not only in Nietzsche and representatives of a philosophical psychology, but also in the context of pragmatism and empiriocriticism.

These early references notwithstanding, it is only the book on Spinoza (1968) that first marks the definitive key position of the concept of immanence (cf. Deleuze 2005). With Spinoza, immanence moves to the center of Deleuzian philosophy – and there it remains up to the very last texts, together with the high appreciation for Spinoza, or better: with the systematic weight of the philosophical endeavor of his *Ethics*. The Spinozist principle of immanence is at the center of the ontology of univocity which Deleuze unfolds in the first chapter of *Difference and Repetition*. And in *What Is Philosophy?*, published in 1991 and coauthored with Guattari, immanence denotes a philosophical plane of thought, an indispensable orientation in thought, or a "modern" (1994: 54) (no longer morally-metaphysically stylized) "image of thought" (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 54) which, by law, excludes the illusions of transcendence. All conceptual thinking presupposes immanence – and can therefore be analyzed genealogically. "We will say that THE plane of immanence is, at the same time, that

which must be thought and that which cannot be thought. It is the nonthought within thought. It is the base of all planes, immanent to every thinkable plane that does not succeed in thinking it. It is the most intimate within thought and yet the absolute outside […].” (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 59) And if there was a philosopher who understood “that immanence was only immanent to itself […]” (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 48), then it was Spinoza. “Perhaps he is the only philosopher never to have compromised with transcendence and to have hunted it down everywhere. […] Spinoza is the vertigo of immanence from which so many philosophers try in vain to escape. Will we ever be mature enough for a Spinozist inspiration?” (Deleuze/Guattari 1994: 48)

The use Deleuze makes of Spinoza revolves around an ontologically conceived difference. A difference which declares itself from the being itself – by referring philosophically to temporally, spatially, and otherwise determined processes of becoming, which cannot be grounded in fixed identities. A difference in which being or blocks of being splinter, which makes it possible to think relations of immanence. Herein lies one motive for the philosophical relevance of Deleuze and the frequently expressed view that the ontology sought after today, an ontology of processes, nature or life, of modes of existence and collectives, or of a new realism and a new metaphysics, is most likely to make a find in his ontology of difference. However, one must be careful not to confuse the differential ontology of processes with a romanticism of indeterminacy[1]

It therefore seems natural – in the sense of an antidote – to define immanence as power. This approach is supported by the sources that Deleuze names foremost: Spinoza and Nietzsche. After all, the concept of the will to power is one that Deleuze utilizes for the development of his ontology; and in Spinoza, too, power – understood as *potentia agendi* – must be conceived as an immanent process which affirms and amplifies itself. I will return to these aspects in a moment, but before, an obvious problem has to be pointed out, a problem that, it seems, Deleuze shares with Foucault.

After all, power and counter-power, power and resistance – or, put differently: representation and difference, are not the same. Or are they? Is the dark power not confronted by another, whereby it – the tacit agreement with it – can be fought? From my point of view, these questions are not easy to answer; they rather require complicated answers. And although Deleuze and Foucault share this problem, they answer it in different ways, with different accentuations (cf. also Saar, forthcoming).

The theory of power which Foucault outlines in *The Will to Knowledge* meets the demand placed upon it to conceive power as a productive force. Power is understood as

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[1] Desire – one could think of the Spinozist *conatus* here – operates according to a logic of the divine machine. It implies relations of force in the sense of a social unconscious that can be mapped. In contrast, the appeal to a 'vitalistic nature of man' etc. shields itself off from, e.g., technically mediated relations of immanence, which function as man's condition.

a complex formation of differential relations that produces identities, forms of individualization, orders of the visible and the sayable, strategies for the regulation of a politically manageable life of populations. This is, in other words, a *dispositif*, which, on the one hand, exhibits "the moving substrate of force relations" (Foucault 1978: 93), "which by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable" (Foucault 1978: 93), and which, on the other hand, consolidates the "representation of power" (Foucault 1978: 88) that results from their strategies. They form in their entirety the unity of the *dispositif*, their "general design or institutional crystallization" is embodied in the "social hegemonies" (Foucault 1978: 93). One might say that power comprises at least three things: (1) differential micro-relations, (2) strategies of specific forms of actualization, and (3) actualities as concentrations of power that consolidate social hierarchies. Foucault focuses on the two last points. With Deleuze, on the other hand, there is at first a strong tendency to concentrate on points one and three – and to contrast them: difference versus representation, immanence versus transcendence. At the same time, however, he also keeps the connecting dimension in view – and he discusses it in terms of processes of actualization and repetition. But he does not do so with regards to a theory of power. It is only in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), in reaction to Foucault's deliberations, that he and Guattari take up the notion of power processes as productive actualizations which occur in a differential milieu – and which nevertheless have fatal consequences. Here, the distinction becomes important that, with Deleuze, one can also make *between* power and immanence. Immanence which is only immanent to itself – or which corresponds to a purely differential ontology – may be thought as power (in the sense of power 1). But it will not create conditions that, in the sense of a strategically directed unification of the differential, cement power blocks (in the sense of power 3). In other words: nomadology is not subject to any *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense, whereas sovereignty-bound state thinking (or the juridical representation of power – that is, of the modern power of discipline and of life) is.

When Deleuze accuses Foucault of marginalizing resistance, Foucault can reply that he hypostatizes resistance (along with the lines of flight of immanence). This just about summarizes the state of their discussions in the second half of the 1970s.[2] While Foucault analyzes the productivity of power, in order to extract the *dispositif* of sexuality along with the discourses of truth and freedom that are connected with it, Deleuze accentuates micropolitics and the processes of becoming-minoritarian, i.e. practical forms of resistance that coexist with a thinking of the immanence of power (and connected with this: with a critique of its forms of representation geared towards transcendence). In the inability of representation to think its own emergence the

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[2] Deleuze has documented his reflections on the theory of power in Foucault's *The Will to Knowledge* in a short text: cf. Deleuze 1997. For a discussion of this text, cf. Krause/Rölli 2005.

Foucauldian idea is reflected that the power in the *dispositif* ensures that it has secrets – and at the same time installs the imperative to lift them, to recognize the truth, to finally be free. Yet, the secret is nothing other than the misconceived productivity of power itself – or put differently: its hedged ignorance. In *The Will to Knowledge*, truth functions as meaning and as something desirable with nihilistic qualities because it helps to maintain a striving for power that – in contrast to its aims and ideals (or in contrast to the juridical representation) – cannot affirm itself.

Will to Power – Nietzsche

In the chapter on subjectivation of the book on *Foucault* (1986), analogous to the new discussions of the technologies of the self and the relations of the self to itself of the ancient Greeks conducted by Foucault starting with the second volume of his history of sexuality, Deleuze adds another dimension to the forms of knowledge and power discussed so far (cf. Deleuze 2006). This is a dimension concerning the self-referentiality of power or a folding of forces which, in their movement, break from the strict codes. By no means does it assume the ontological function of establishing a natural correspondence between the visible and the sayable. Rather, it interrupts the (by nature subject-logical) mediation, creates a milieu of pragmatic relations, and at the same time escapes the framework of its regular assignment. With this consideration, Deleuze combines the aspect of subjectivation with an extension of the Foucauldian theory of power, insofar as he focuses on its "points of deterritorialization" (1997: 187) (power 1), makes these coextensive with the primacy of immanence and resistance, and separates them from the diagrams (power 2) that form current social hierarchies and monopolies of governance (power 3) (analogous to the structures of discipline or sexuality). The self-referentiality of power, in turn, is explained with recourse to Nietzsche: "It was necessary to recover force, in the Nietzschean sense, or power, in the very particular sense of 'will to power' […]." (Deleuze 2006: 93) According to Deleuze, this force exhibits the self-referentiality which can be developed from the immanence of power (power 1). With it, the focus of the notion of immanence no longer lies in a specific mode of reference between power and knowledge, or in their reciprocal implication, but is shifted into an area which is independent of the orders of knowledge and power.

As early as at the beginning of the 1960s, Deleuze had described the will to power as a "genealogical element of force" or as power's "principle of the synthesis" (2002: 51, 50). Genealogical means both, differential *and* genetic – in the sense of an immanent production of empirical ("differentiated and qualified", Deleuze 2002: 68) conditions. Thus, the will to power functions as an "internal element of […] production" (Deleuze 2002: 51), insofar as differential differences of quantity generate empirical qualities of their own accord. From Deleuze's point of view, it is, *firstly*, possible with Nietzsche to

determine power immanently or genealogically, by referring it to the will to power. *Secondly*, the phenomena of the denial of the will – and the becoming-reactive of forces connected with it – can be reconstructed. And *thirdly*, it can be shown that there is a link between nihilism and representation which is substantial for the theory of power.

By 'will to power' Nietzsche does not mean a striving for power. In a paradoxical formulation Deleuze maintains that the will to power in any case does not want the power. It is neither the goal nor the motive of the will's desire. If it were, then power could be identified with an object of representation (power 3). In this way, its immanent determination – and the possibility of a genealogical investigation of representative standards of validity – would likewise be given up. According to Deleuze, precisely this is the case whenever power is reduced to the recognition or the enforcement of domination. "The famous dialectical aspect of the master-slave relationship depends on the fact that power is conceived not as will to power but as representation of power, representation of superiority, recognition by 'the one' of the superiority of 'the other'." (Deleuze 2002: 10) Similarly, Heidegger, in his interpretation, misunderstood the genealogical principle of the will to power, since he believed to recognize in it a figure of unfettered subjectivity which carries representative thinking to extremes.[3] By contrast, what is crucial for Deleuze is Nietzsche's notion that power – which, for structural reasons, cannot develop an affirmative relationship to the will actualizing itself in it – is not good, but rather bad – and this regardless of its potential broad effectiveness. It is bad because and insofar as it is nihilist in itself and collaborates with discursive identities which, in their systematic determination, exclude its genealogy. That means, in other words, that it transcends the frame of validity of its perspectivity and finiteness, the earthly and transient, affective and contingent events – in the metaphysical search for certainty.

So what is the relevance of Nietzsche's thinking on power? It opens up a genealogical or novel power-analytical perspective by immanently making comprehensible what concrete strategies and operations are at work when ideas of a higher power are institutionalized. The focus of his analyses is on topics pertaining to the critique of metaphysics, morality and religion; e.g. feelings of guilt, bad conscience, ressentiment, will to truth, ascetic ideals. One of the most important analytical hypotheses is that the ideas of a higher power are incompatible with the concrete strategies and operations which have historically produced them. Or, more precisely:

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[3] Already Klages had discovered in Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power an all too profane, purpose-driven striving for power, which, supposedly, stood in peculiar contrast to his allegedly romantic, nature-philosophical (Dionysian) aspirations (cf. 1958: 197). One could say with Heidegger that Nietzsche remained trapped in the quasi-psychological spell of (re-)presentation – or, with Sartre, that he could not go beyond the illusion of immanence. According to Deleuze, this aspect of the criticism of Nietzsche is characteristic of phenomenological thinking insofar as it introduces a new figure of transcendence into immanence (intentionality, ecstasy of being, temporal structures of *Begegnen-* or *Anwesen-lassen*, etc.).

that these ideas and beliefs are of a nihilistic type, insofar as they are threatened by the description of their own genesis and, at the core, can even be destroyed by it. In its logic, this procedure corresponds to Foucault's unmasking of the juridical representation of power. Through the demonstration of the productive power relations of the disciplining of the body (in the prison, the barracks and educational institutions) and the regulation of life (in medicine, psychiatry, social statistics and demographic policy) the discursive self-conception of power which is focused on sovereign authorities collapses. But in what way can Deleuze now bring into play the concept of the will to power in order to extend the analysis of power beyond the critical dimension of genealogy? From my point of view, one option lies in further insisting on immanence – an immanence with which power (in the sense of power 1) fuses – and this makes it necessary to speak of Spinoza at the end.

Agency – Spinoza

The focus of *Ethics* is on the problem of becoming-active or of increasing the capacity to act in the sense of a power of action (*potentia agendi*). The good and a pure positivity which is rooted in the active self-affirmation of the essential mode of existence – in the desire of pleasure and the pleasure of desire – are intertwined with this power. Apparently, Deleuze connects this power with the immanent causality of an adequate cause of this action, i.e. to realize and to be able to realize that the affects have an activating or pleasure-producing effect. And this presupposes that bodies which affect and are affected by each other jointly increase their capacity to act – and can find (adequate) common concepts only in this congruence. Whereas there is a reduction of the capacity to act wherever it is inhibited – by the advent of passive affects or suffering. With passivity, there appears an external power which separates the existing modes from what they are capable of doing. This powerlessness possesses no positivity in the sense that it expresses only an incapability, a power of negation. With it, the productivity of power is eliminated by preventing the existing modes from associating and from experiencing in their relationships the increasing of their power to affect and to be affected, and thus also: to act and to think. This process of increasing power is neither to be reduced to individuals nor to their selfish interests. Rather, it asserts its immanent character by coming from below and by being effective in all social relations that contribute to the benefit and well-being – but not to the harm and detriment – of the involved parties. There may be particular difficulties in dealing with the ethical criterion of Spinoza (increase or diminution of the power to act). But adherence to transcendent crutches remains an indication of dogmatic preconceptions that obscure the contingent, precarious, and open process (of political association) – through anthropomorphisms,

teleological assumptions, or truths of faith that consolidate hierarchical social structures.

With this minimal sketch of the Spinozist understanding of power, the distinction between Foucault and Deleuze, which was anticipated at the beginning, can be made still clearer. Deleuze distinguishes himself as an (immanence-philosophical) theorist of power not only by conceiving, with Nietzsche, the will to power as a pluralistic concept of the differential, micro-physical processes of power (power 1), but also, with Spinoza, by dealing with a process of becoming-democratic which, in its radicality, remains immanent to itself – and therefore cannot be translated into the text of discipline and control together with their discursive representation. Power comes from below – because, with Foucault, it does not come from above; its productive unfolding demands the king's head in theory, too. But it also comes from below because, with Spinoza, it cannot be reduced to strategies that train the individual body and politically and economically administer the life of the population. It is a power of practice or of micro-practice which undermines the great *dispositifs* and assemblages, even though it itself produces associations and connections. However, these are of a different type because their rules of connection permit heterogeneous concatenations and sabotage the schematic unification of singular constellations.

In this sense one can say that Deleuze succeeds in productively taking up the objections to Foucault's theory of power which were submitted by the theorists of practice (cf. de Certeau 1988). With regard to Latour's objections, it can be said that the knowledge of power relations is not elitist knowledge, provided that power is always also described analytically-critically not behind collective fields of action but in the midst of them. As is well known, with the concept of micropolitics, Deleuze and Guattari build on the microsociology of Tarde. It is therefore not surprising that, like Latour in his sociology of associations, which also draws on Tarde, they describe and compile small assemblages of micropractices which defy the established orders of representation, e.g. because they put things in relation that do not correspond to the canonical lists of serious actors or to stable system boundaries. In contrast to Latour, however, they hold on to the use of the concept of power. This arguably makes sense mainly because their assemblages or *agencements* at the same time integrate all dimensions of power, i.e., run to and fro between the virtual and the actual determinations. They are hybrid constellations of discursive and non-discursive practices which link lines of de- and reterritorialization.

Otherwise it is difficult to imagine how power relations might immanently be criticized. For this, it must be possible to move within power and to take into account the operations of its current formation, the schemata of the dominating cultural identities and the guidelines of normalization. In this sense, with Spinoza, a micropolitics

opens up which is related to the presence of representation and can set off from it processes of becoming-other.[4] Deleuze and Guattari have developed the concept of becoming-minoritarian for this process. As in the case of becoming-other, the processes of becoming-minoritarian are also characterized by the fact that they expose the involved group identities to mutual changes. They are, as it were, critical practices that intervene in hierarchical power relations by strengthening the immanent processes. How is that possible? A becoming-minoritarian always happens when a majority, which acts as a representative standard, is disturbed. The majority is here not to be misunderstood as a numerical quantity. Rather, it is defined as a human (cultural, economic) norm: male, white, adult, rational, healthy – and we could add: heterosexual, Christian, employed, productive, flexible, functional, informed, well-dressed and well-proportioned. Its standards not only define goals of normalization, they can also be abandoned or changed. While minorities, like majorities, can be regarded as fixed identities, becoming-minoritarian refers to a development that triggers transformation processes in both directions – in relation to the majority and at the same time to the minority. In this context, Deleuze and Guattari speak of a "block of becoming" (2005: 238) or of a "double movement" (2000: 259): "one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, and another by which a term (the medium or agent) rises up from the minority." (2005: 291) Becoming-Jewish, becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-invisible. In all these cases, standards of the distinguished identity of being human, which embody the asymmetrical power relations, are abandoned by at the same time breaching the definition of the minority as minority. "As Faulkner said, to avoid ending up a fascist there was no other choice but to become-black." (Deleuze/Guattari 2000: 292) A minority loses its identity of an inferior existence, defined in a majoritarian way, only by itself *becoming* minoritarian – i.e. by undermining the hierarchical distribution of power along with its discursive and institutional support. It is a question of becoming. Becoming-minoritarian brings forth associations which result from a reciprocal transformation of the (majoritarian/minoritarian) identities, so that an increase of the joint agency (power 1) is achieved – and this automatically at the expense of a power of representation (power 3) which can only become effective in the reduction of the collective capacity to act.[5] This is not a utopia but the reality of a variety of everyday practices, which here and there merge into small social movements.[6]

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[4] For Latour, on the other hand, it seems to be sufficient to assign the accepted stock of social givens, stabilized facts and that which is already assembled, to the traditional 'sociology of the social', while the new 'sociology of associations' describes the empirical connections and real processes that take place in the actor-networks – which are distinguished from the representative social stock. He underlines that the given is rightly taken into account, but should not be used for explanations (of something else). It remains questionable how the two can be neatly separated if the actors – and at the same time their own theories in a sociologized world – are to be followed. Cf. Latour 2007.

[5] Transferred to the ethnological analysis of one's own colonial tradition, this means: It is not enough to describe the minor – or that which has been declared primitive – in order to abolish the colonial status,

If it is true that the crisis of discipline described by Deleuze has long since arisen – and that the present situation has produced new power mechanisms of control – then this diagnosis does not alter the fact that there are immanently determined forms of resistance and power (power 1) in becoming-minoritarian. According to Deleuze, the regime of control, too, must be one that emerges from below, by establishing through the use of novel strategies (power 2) living conditions which, in turn, are based on discursive representations (power 3).[7] It is easily possible to distinguish the three dimensions of power, even if they transform in their concrete manifestations. With the term 'control', Deleuze aims at the virtual-real modeling of conditions of action, the mechanisms of which are problematic where they integrate blockades into the relations of immanence and curtail possibilities of association. Controlled, authorized identities result from selective processes or filtration systems – and as always there is a remainder which, due to its non-representation, must contain minoritarian determinations. They contain the potentials of becoming, which, however, can only unfold in a process of change involving both sides (majority and minority).

translated from German by Florian Cord

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but it is rather a question of adopting a *participant* perspective which is so constituted that processes of change in both directions set in.

[6] Applied to the current 'refugee debate' in Germany, the process of becoming – to which, as a democratic process, there is effectively no alternative from my point of view – can be described as follows: the Germans must become Syrians and Iraqis – and the Iraqis and Syrians must become Germans. It should be noted, however, that the Iraqis and Syrians will not become Germans if the Germans for their part are already becoming Iraqis and Syrians. And vice versa. (The Germans, too, cannot become Syrians and Iraqis if these are already becoming Germans.) In this doubling of becoming, the untenability of the fixed identities of representation becomes manifest. Both sides become different, but they become something that does not exist, that does not exist in a given form. It also becomes clear that the integration and assimilation strategies are problematic because they implicitly operate with hierarchical power relations. They basically obscure the impossibility of simply staying as you are. This is just not possible. Change is inevitable. And this is a truth that the populists today exploit – as there are many who want to refuse this change. There are, however (from the point of view of the theory of power), no good reasons for this.

[7] According to Deleuze, Kafka's handling of the juridical representation of power already documents the transition from the disciplinary society to the society of control. In their book on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari (1986) have developed the concept of 'minor literature' in the sense of an art of becoming-minoritarian.

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