



S L A V O J Ž I Ž E K

## Notes on a Debate “From Within the People”

MY FIRST SURPRISE IN reading Daniel W. Smith’s critique of my Deleuze book is his insistence on how I use Deleuze only in order to “Lacanianize” him, not being attentive to Deleuze’s precise line of argumentation . . . look who’s talking! Is, of all philosophers, Deleuze not *the* one known for his ruthlessly appropriative reading of other philosophers, for using them as vehicles to articulate his line of thought! Linked to this is my second surprise: after outlining his basic point about Lacan and Deleuze (how Deleuze was effectively much closer to Lacan than it may appear, how *Anti-Oedipus* aims at saving Lacan from Lacanians, etc.), one would expect Smith to confront (critically reject or whatever) my specific reading of Deleuze: the central thesis on two heterogeneous currents in his thought (becoming as the impassive sterility of the event versus becoming as the generative process), the insistence on Deleuze’s disavowed proximity not only to Lacan but also to Hegel, and so forth. What we get instead of this is the expanded version of the standard “Deleuzian” party line on Lacan: it is already Lacan who, especially in his late writings, breaks out of the Oedipal constraints, searching for a more direct approach to the texture of the Real; in their *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari merely want to go further (to the end) in this direction. All the principal concepts of *Anti-Oedipus*, from “body without organs” to flux of desire, are different names for the pre-Oedipal libidinal dynamics of the Real, for a multitude not yet totalized into a One through the Oedipal prohibition.

My reply to this line of thought is that it misses the point of the Lacanian Real: the Real, for Lacan, is *in itself* thwarted, the name for the gap of a radical “negativity,” it stands for a paradoxical (non)entity that has no ontological consistency in itself, but can only be discerned retroactively, from its effects, as their absent Cause. For this reason, for Lacan, to “go to the end” and approach “the Real in itself” is precisely what one should *not* do. Nowhere is this difference more palpable than in the different ways Lacan and Deleuze deal with the relationship between neurosis (hysteria) and perversion. Deleuze and Guattari ultimately

condone the standard “libertarian” approach: neurosis (as exemplified by the feminine hysteria) is a compromise formation, a half-protest against the oppressive Law that simultaneously remains attached to it, while a perverse subject “goes to the end,” directly enacting what the neurotic subject is only able to fantasize about. Lacan, however, restores hysteria to its Freudian place of honor, agreeing with Freud that a perversion, far from directly displaying the unconscious, blocks the access to it most thoroughly—nowhere is the unconscious more occluded than in perversion.

In other words, my thesis is that in *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze/Guattari do to Lacan what Carl Gustav Jung did to Freud. Remember that for Jung also, the Freudian unconscious was not yet the deeper “real” unconscious, the impersonal domain of collective archetypes; it remained caught in the superficial social and familial web. No wonder, then, that an admiration of Jung is Deleuze’s corpse in the closet: the fact that Deleuze borrowed a key term (*rhizome*) from Jung is not a mere insignificant accident—rather, it points toward a deeper link.<sup>1</sup> In his early text on Sacher-Masoch (1961), Deleuze extensively relies on Jung in his critique of Freud.<sup>2</sup> His reproach to Freud concerns three clearly interconnected features. First, because of his focus on the figure of the father, Freud neglects the key role of the woman (Mother) in masochism: the masochist contract is a contract with the all-devouring Mother; as such, masochism stages a “regression” toward the earlier period of (individual and collective) history in which women played a crucial role in society—Sacher-Masoch cannot be properly understood without Bachofen. Second, the Freudian unconscious remains the “superficial” hysterical unconscious, the unconscious of an individual caught in the Oedipal struggle with the paternal authority; Freud ignores the deeper collective (preindividual) strata of the “maternal” unconscious—that is, he does not “enter into the profound dimensions where the image of the Mother reigns in its own terms.” Third, Freud denies the symbolic autonomy to the unconscious, reducing it to a shadow theater reflecting what goes on in nonsymbolic reality, either in real social life or in the biological real of the instincts. In contrast to Freud, Jung was much more sensitive to all of these three features: he was aware of the key fundamental role of the maternal principle later repressed by the paternal one; he clearly identified the need to penetrate beneath the “superficial” hysterical-individual-Oedipal unconscious to the collective pre-Oedipal one; and he elaborated the autonomous universe of primordial symbols (“imagoes”), which are not to be interpreted as pointing toward another reality, but are themselves the unsurpassable horizon of meaning: “It was not left to /Freud/ to grasp the role of original Images. / . . . / The irreducible datum of the unconscious is the symbol itself, and not an ultimate symbolized.” This crucial difference between Freud and Jung determines the radically different approach to therapeutic practice: for Freud, the goal of analysis is the interpretation of the neurotic symptom; its meaning is thereby

consciously appropriated by the subject, and the symptom dissolves. Jung, on the contrary, accomplishes the key step from psycho-analysis to psycho-synthesis: his goal is not just to analyze the symptoms, but to enable the subject to accept as part of his personality the repressed content of the primordial Images (say, to accept that the pre-Oedipal maternal dimension is no less part of his personality than the dominant paternal one). The patients are “to be reconciled with themselves, that is, to reintegrate in their personality those very parts which they neglected to develop, and which are as if alienated in Images, where they lead a dangerously autonomous life.”

There is thus a direct lineage from Jung to *Anti-Oedipus*: the idea that beneath the “superficial” Freudian unconscious in alliance with consciousness there is the “true” impersonal unconscious that explodes the Oedipal triangle has Jungian origins written all over it. In this way, of course, the whole point of Freud’s discovery of the unconscious is missed: it is not a simple “decenterment” toward a more “fundamental” unconscious as the true center of human personality, but, on the contrary, the total desubstantialization of the unconscious—Freud’s whole point is to separate his unconscious from the impersonal “primitive” unconscious of *Lebensphilosophie*. This reference to Jung also prevents Deleuze from fully deploying and properly understanding the consequences of his own elaboration of the notion of the “masochist contract,” that is, of the way this contract (with the woman to whom the masochist cedes authority) undermines the paternal authority:

the application of the paternal law is delivered back into the hands of the Woman or the Mother. The masochist holds out for something specific in this transference: *that the pleasure that the law forbids be given to him precisely through the means of the law*. For the pleasure that the paternal law forbids, he will taste through the law, as soon as the law in all its severity is applied to him by the woman. . . . his extreme submission signifies that he is offering up the father and the paternal law to derision. . . . *The same law which forbids me from realizing a desire on pain of the consequent punishment is now the law which puts the punishment first and orders me accordingly to satisfy the desire*: here we have a properly masochistic form of humour.

What Deleuze does not fully take into account is the strictly limited nature of the masochist “regression”: far from simply “regressing” from the paternal to the maternal level, the masochist, *while remaining within the domain of the paternal* (contract), reintroduces the Woman as the partner in the contract—not in order to fully enjoy the Woman, but in order to *mockingly undermine the paternal authority*. The masochist thus stages an uncanny short-circuit, a monstrous travesty of the Law: in her very elevation to the undisputed Master, whose every whim

the masochist is obliged to obey, the Woman is turned into a puppet effectively controlled by her slave, who controls the game, writing its rules—the explicit asymmetry of the masochist contract (at the level of enunciated: man's subordination to woman) relies on then opposite asymmetry at the level of the position of enunciation. The humor of masochism is therefore not directed only at the figure of the father; it relies on the ridiculous (and, simultaneously, monstrous) incompatibility or discord between the symbolic place of symbolic power and the element who occupies it. Is therefore masochism, the masochist contract, not the ultimate proof of the fact that “Woman is one of the Names-of-the-Father”? To put it in Lacan's terms, the wager (and the deception) of the masochist is that *the Woman exists*. Deleuze's “the Woman or the Mother” is here indicative; for Lacan, the Woman (*La Femme*) only exists qua Mother (*quod matrem*)—where, then, is there a place for a woman who is *not* Mother, for the void of feminine subjectivity proper? It is significant that Deleuze does not mention here the notion of superego—in contrast to the symbolic Law, superego is precisely the law (commandment), which is not prohibitive, which is not yet disjunct from enjoyment.

If I pass in silence over Kaufman's review of Badiou's and my Deleuze books, it is simply because I basically agree with her (inclusive of her critical call for more betrayal of Deleuze). So let me just conclude with a brief remark on how I see the difference between Heidegger, Deleuze, and Badiou with regard to the Event.

The shift from substantial Reality to (different forms of) Event is one of the defining features of modern sciences: quantum physics posits as the ultimate reality not some primordial elements, but, rather, some kind of string “vibrations,” entities that can only be described as desubstantialized processes; cognitivism and system theory focus on the mystery of “emerging properties,” which also designate purely processual self-organizations, and so forth. No wonder, then, that the three crucial contemporary philosophers—Heidegger, Deleuze, Badiou—deploy three thoughts of the Event: in Heidegger, it is the Event as the epochal disclosure of a configuration of Being; in Deleuze, it is the Event as the desubstantialized pure becoming of Sense; in Badiou, it is the Event the reference to which grounds a Truth-process. For all three of them, Event is irreducible to the order of Being (in the sense of positive reality), to the set of its material (pre)conditions. For Heidegger, Event is the ultimate horizon of thought, and it is meaningless to try to think “behind” it and to render thematic the process that generated it—such an attempt equals an ontic account of the ontological horizon. For Deleuze, one cannot reduce the emergence of a new artistic form (film noir, Italian neo-realism, etc.) to its historical circumstances, or account for it in these terms. For Badiou, a Truth-Event is totally heterogeneous with regard to the order of Being (positive reality). Although, in all three cases, Event stands for historicity proper (the explosion of the New) versus historicism, differences

between the three philosophers are crucial, of course. For Heidegger, Event has nothing to do with ontic processes; it designates the “event” of a new epochal disclosure of Being, the emergence of a new “world” (as the horizon of meaning within which all entities appear). Deleuze is a vitalist, insisting on the absolute immanence of the Event to the order of Being, conceiving Event as the One-All of the proliferating differences of Life. Badiou, on the contrary, asserts the radical “dualism” between Event and the order of Being.

However, what unites them above this difference is that both perform the same paradoxical philosophical gesture of defending, *as materialists*, the autonomy of the “immaterial” order of the Event. As a materialist, and in order to be thoroughly materialist, Badiou focuses on the *idealist* topos par excellence: How can a human animal forsake its animality and put its life in the service of a transcendent Truth? How can the “transubstantiation” from the pleasure-oriented life of an *individual* to the life of a *subject* dedicated to a Cause occur? In other words, how is a free act possible? How can one break (out of) the network of the causal connections of positive reality and conceive of an act that begins by and in itself? In short, Badiou *repeats within the materialist frame the elementary gesture of idealist anti-reductionism*: human Reason cannot be reduced to the result of evolutionary adaptation; art is not just a heightened procedure of providing sensual pleasures, but a medium of Truth; and so on. Additionally, against the false appearance that this gesture is also aimed at psychoanalysis (is not the point of the notion of “sublimation” that the allegedly “higher” human activities are just a roundabout “sublimated” way to realize a “lower” goal?), therein resides already the significant achievement of psychoanalysis: its claim is that sexuality itself, sexual drives pertaining to the human animal, cannot be accounted for in evolutionary terms.<sup>3</sup> This makes clear the true stakes of Badiou’s gesture: in order for materialism to truly win over idealism, it is not enough to succeed in the “reductionist” approach and demonstrate how mind, consciousness, and so forth can nonetheless somehow be accounted for within the evolutionary-positivist frame of materialism. On the contrary, the materialist claim should be much stronger: it is *only* materialism that can accurately explain the very phenomena of mind, consciousness, and so forth; and, conversely, it is idealism that is “vulgar,” that always already “reifies” these phenomena.

From my youth I recall the old Maoist distinction between the contradictions within the people to be resolved through democratic debate, and the contradictions between the people and the enemies of the people to be resolved through merciless struggle—my final claim is simply that the differences between Deleuze, Lacan, and Badiou are of the first type, the differences “within the people”—a debate is possible here.

## Notes

1. "Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome. Its true life is invisible, hidden in the rhizome. . . . What we see is the blossom, which passes. The rhizome remains." C. G. Jung, *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 4.
2. See Gilles Deleuze, "From Sacher-Masoch to Masochism," originally published as "De Sacher-Masoch au Masochisme" in *Arguments*, no. 21 (1961); translation by Christian Kerslake to appear in *Angelaki*.
3. This is how one should locate the shift from the biological instinct to drive: instinct is just part of the physics of animal *life*, while drive (*death* drive) introduces a meta-physical dimension. In Marx we find the homologous implicit distinction between working class and proletariat: "working class" is the empirical social category, accessible to sociological knowledge, while "proletariat" is the subject-agent of revolutionary Truth. Along the same lines, Lacan claims that drive is an *ethical* category.