Control and Becoming

Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Antonio Negri

Negri: *The problem of politics seems to have always been present in your intellectual life. Your involvement in various movements (prisoners, homosexuals, Italian autonomists, Palestinians), on the one hand, and the constant problematizing of institutions, on the other, follow on from one another and interact with one another in your work, from the book on Hume through to the one on Foucault. What are the roots of this sustained concern with the question of politics, and how has it remained so persistent within your developing work? Why is the relation between movement and institution always problematic?*

Deleuze: What I've been interested in are collective creations rather than representations. There's a whole order of movement in "institutions" that's independent of both laws and contracts. What I found in Hume was a very creative conception of institutions and law. I was initially more interested in law than politics. Even with Masoch and Sade what I liked was the thoroughly twisted conception of contracts in Masoch, and of institutions in Sade, as these come out in relation to sexuality. And in the present day, I see Francois Ewald's work to reestablish a philosophy of law as quite fundamental. What interests me isn't the law or laws[1] (the former being an empty notion, the latter uncritical notions), nor even law or rights, but jurisprudence. It's jurisprudence, ultimately, that creates law, and we mustn't go on leaving this to judges. Writers ought to read law reports rather than the Civil Code. People are already thinking about establishing a system of law for modern biology; but everything in modern biology and the new situations it creates, the new courses of events it makes possible, is a matter for jurisprudence. We don't need an ethical committee of supposedly well-qualified wise men, but user-groups. This is where we move from law into politics. I, for my own part, made a sort of move into politics around May 68, as I came into contact with specific problems, through Guattari, through Foucault, through Elie Sambar. Anti-Oedipus was from beginning to end a book of political philosophy.

Negri: *You took the events of '68 to be the triumph of the Untimely, the dawn of counteractualization.[2] Already in the years leading up to '68, in your work on Nietzsche and a bit later in Coldness and Cruelty, you 'd given a new meaning to politics—as possibility, event, singularity. You 'd found short-circuits where the future breaks through into the present, modifying institutions in its wake. But then after '68 you take a slightly different approach: nomadic thought always takes the temporal form of instantaneous counteractualization, while spatially only "minority becoming is universal." How should we understand this universality of the untimely?[9]*

Deleuze: The thing is, I became more and more aware of the possibility of distinguishing between becoming and history. It was Nietzsche who said that nothing important is ever free from a "nonhistorical cloud." This isn't to oppose eternal and historical, or contemplation and action: Nietzsche is talking about the way things happen, about events themselves or becoming. What history grasps in an event is the way it's actualized in particular circumstances; the event's becoming is beyond the scope of history. History isn't experimental,[3] it's just the set of more or less negative preconditions that make it possible to experiment with something beyond history. Without history the experimentation would remain indeterminate, lacking any initial conditions, but experimentation isn't historical. In a major philosophical work, Clio, Peguy explained that there are two ways of considering events, one being to follow the course of the event, gathering how it comes about historically, how it's prepared and

then decomposes in history, while the other way is to go back into the event, to take one's place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities. Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to "become," that is, to create something new. This is precisely what Nietzsche calls the Untimely. May 68 was a demonstration, an irruption, of a becoming in its pure state. It's fashionable these days to condemn the horrors of revolution. It's nothing new; English Romanticism is permeated by reflections on Cromwell very similar to present-day reflections on Stalin.[4] They say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming. These relate to two different sets of people. Men's only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable.

Negri: A Thousand Plateaus, *which I regard as a major philosophical work, seems to me at the same time a catalogue of unsolved problems, most particularly in the field of political philosophy. Its pairs of contrasting terms—process and project, singularity and subject, composition and organization, lines of flight and apparatuses/strategies, micro and macro, and so on—all this not only remains forever open but it's constantly being reopened, through an amazing will to theorize, and with a violence reminiscent of heretical proclamations. I've nothing against such subversion, quite the reverse . . . But I seem sometimes to hear a tragic note, at points where it's not clear where the "war-machine" is going.*

Deleuze: I'm moved by what you say. I think Felix Guattari and I have remained Marxists, in our two different ways, perhaps, but both of us. You see, we think any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed. What we find most interesting in Marx is his analysis of capitalism as an immanent system that's constantly overcoming its own limitations, and then coming up against them once more in a broader form, because its fundamental limit is Capital itself. A Thousand Plateaus sets out in many different directions, but these are the three main ones: first, we think any society is defined not so much by its contradictions as by its lines of flight, it flees all over the place, and it's very interesting to try and follow the lines of flight taking shape at some particular moment or other. Look at Europe now, for instance: western politicians have spent a great deal of effort setting it all up, the technocrats have spent a lot of effort getting uniform administration and rules, but then on the one hand there may be surprises in store in the form of upsurges of young people, of women, that become possible simply because certain restrictions are removed (with "untechnocratizable" consequences); and on the other hand it's rather comic when one considers that this Europe has already been completely superseded before being inaugurated, superseded by movements coming from the East. These are major lines of flight. There's another direction in A Thousand Plateaus, which amounts to considering not just lines of flight rather than contradictions, but minorities rather than classes. Then finally, a third direction, which amounts to finding a characterization of "war machines" that's nothing to do with war but to do with a particular way of occupying, taking up, space-time, or inventing new space-times: revolutionary movements (people don't take enough account, for instance, of how the PLO has had to invent a space-time in the Arab world), but artistic movements too, are war-machines in this sense.

You say there's a certain tragic or melancholic tone in all this. I think I can see why. I was very struck by all the passages in Primo Levi where he explains that Nazi camps have given us "a shame at being human." Not, he says, that we're all responsible for Nazism, as some would have us believe, but that we've all been tainted by it: even the survivors of the camps had to make compromises with it, if only to survive. There's the shame of there being men who became Nazis; the shame of being unable, not seeing how, to stop it; the shame of having compromised with it; there's the whole of what Primo Levi calls this "gray area." And we can feel shame at being human in utterly trivial situations, too: in the face of too great a vulgarization of thinking, in the face of TV entertainment, of a ministerial speech, of "jolly people" gossiping. This is one of the

most powerful incentives toward philosophy, and it's what makes all philosophy political. In capitalism only one thing is universal, the market. There's no universal state, precisely because there's a universal market of which states are the centers, the trading floors. But the market's not universalizing, homogenizing, it's an extraordinary generator of both wealth and misery. A concern for human rights shouldn't lead us to extol the "joys" of the liberal capitalism of which they're an integral part. There's no democratic state that's not compromised to the very core by its part in generating human misery. What's so shameful is that we've no sure way of maintaining becomings, or still more of arousing them, even within ourselves. How any group will turn out, how it will fall back into history, presents a constant "concern."[5] There's no longer any image of proletarians around of which it's just a matter of becoming conscious.

Negri: *How can minority becoming be powerful? How can resistance become an insurrection ? Reading you, I'm never sure how to answer such questions, even though I always find in your works an impetus that forces me to reformulate the questions theoretically and practically. And yet when I read what you 've written about the imagination, or on common notions in Spinoza, or when I follow your description in The Time-Image of the rise of revolutionary cinema in third-world countries, and with you grasp the passage from image into fabulation, into political praxis, I almost feel I've found an answer. . . Or am I mistaken ? Is there then, some way for the resistance of the oppressed to become effective, and for what's intolerable to be definitively removed? Is there some way for the mass of singularities and atoms that we all are to come forward as a constitutive power, or must we rather accept the juridical paradox that constitutive power can be defined only by constituted power?*

Deleuze: The difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. One might say the majority is nobody. Everybody's caught, one way or another, in a minority becoming that would lead them info unknown paths if they opted to follow it through. When a 'minority creates models for itself, it's because it wants to become a majority, and probably has to, to survive or prosper (to have a state, be recognized, establish its rights, for example). But its power comes from what it's managed to create, which to some extent goes into the model, but doesn't depend on it. A people is always a creative minority, and remains one even when it acquires a majority^ it can be both at once because the two things aren't lived out on the same plane. It's the greatest artists (rather than populist artists) who invoke a people, and find they "lack a people": Mallarme, Rimbaud, Klee, Berg. The Straubs in cinema. Artists can only invoke a people, their need for one goes to the very heart of what they're doing, it's not their job to create one, and they can't. Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame. But a people can't worry about art. How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people's created, it's through its own resources, but in away that links up with something in art (Garrel says there's a mass of terrible suffering in the Louvre, too) or links up art to what it lacked. Utopia isn't the right concept: it's more a question of a "tabulation" in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson's notion of tabulation and give it a political meaning.

Negri: *In your book on Foucault, and then again in your TV interview at INA,[6] you suggest we should look in more detail at three kinds of power: sovereign power, disciplinary power, and above all the control of "communication " that's on the way to becoming hegemonic. On the one hand this third scenario relates to the most perfect form of domination, extending even to speech and imagination, but on the other hand any man, any minority, any singularity, is more than ever before potentially able to speak out and thereby recover a greater degree of freedom. In the Marxist Utopia of the Grundrisse, communism takes precisely the form of a transversal organization of free individuals built on a technology that makes it possible. Is communism still a viable option? Maybe in a communication society it's less Utopian than it used to be?*

Deleuze: We're definitely moving toward "control" societies that are no longer exactly

disciplinary. Foucault's often taken as the theorist of disciplinary societies and of their principal technology, confinement (not just in hospitals and prisons, but in schools, factories, and barracks). But he was actually one of the first to say that we're moving away from disciplinary societies, we've already left them behind. We're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication. Burroughs was the first to address this. People are of course constantly talking about prisons, schools, hospitals: the institutions are breaking down. But they're breaking down because they're fighting a losing battle. New kinds of punishment, education, health care are being stealthily introduced. Open hospitals and teams providing home care have been around for some time. One can envisage education becoming less and less a closed site differentiated from the workspace as another closed site, but both disappearing and giving way to frightful continual training, to continual monitoring[7] of worker-schoolkids or bureaucrat-students. They try to present this as a reform of the school system, but it's really its dismantling. In a control-based system nothing's left alone for long. You yourself long ago suggested how work in Italy was being transformed by forms of part-time work done at home, which have spread since you wrote (and by new forms of circulation and distribution of products). One can of course see how each kind of society corresponds to a particular kind of machine—with simple mechanical machines corresponding to sovereign societies, thermo-dynamic machines to disciplinary societies, cybernetic machines and computers to control societies. But the machines don't explain anything, you have to analyze the collective arrangements of which the machines are just one component. Compared with the approaching forms of ceaseless control in open sites, we may come to see the harshest confinement as part of a wonderful happy past. The quest for "uni-versals of communication" ought to make us shudder. It's true that, even before control societies are fully in place, forms of delinquency or resistance (two different things) are also appearing. Computer piracy and viruses, for example, will replace strikes and what the nineteenth century called "sabotage" ("clogging" the machinery) .[8] You ask whether control or communication societies will lead to forms of resistance that might reopen the way for a communism understood as the "transversal organization of free individuals." Maybe, I don't know. But it would be nothing to do with minorities speaking out. Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They're thoroughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature. We've got to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control.

Negri: *In* Foucault *and in* The Fold*, processes of subjectification seem to be studied more closely than in some of your other works. The subject's the boundary of a continuous movement between an inside and outside. What are the political consequences of this conception of the subject^ If the subject can't be reduced to an externalized citizenship, can it invest citizenship with force and life? Can it make possible a new militant pragmatism, at once a pietas toward the world and a very radical construct. What politics can carry into history the splendor of events and subjectivity. How can we conceive a community that has real force but no base, that isn't a totality but is, as in Spinoza, absolute?*

Deleuze: It definitely makes sense to look at the various ways individuals and groups constitute themselves as subjects through processes of subjec-tification: what counts in such processes is the extent to which, as they take shape, they elude both established forms of knowledge and the dominant forms of power. Even if they in turn engender new forms of power or become assimilated into new forms of knowledge. For a while, though, they have a real rebellious spontaneity. This is nothing to do with going back to "the subject," that is, to something invested with duties, power, and

knowledge. One might equally well speak of new kinds of event, rather than processes of subjectification: events that can't be explained by the situations that give rise to them, or into which they lead. They appear for a moment, and it's that moment that matters, it's the chance we must seize. Or we can simply talk about the brain: the brain's precisely this boundary of a continuous two-way movement between an Inside and Outside, this membrane between them. New cerebral pathways, new ways of thinking, aren't explicable in terms of microsurgery; it's for science, rather, to try and discover what might have happened in the brain for one to start thinking this way or that. I think subjectification, events, and brains are more or less the same thing. What we most lack is a belief in the world, we've quite lost the world, it's been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume. It's what you call *pietas*. Our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity *and* a people.

Conversation with Toni Negri *Futur Anterieur* 1(Spring 1990), translated by Martin Joughin.

Translator's notes:

1. *La loi, les lois:* "the law" and "laws" correspond to a judicial system of positive laws enacted in a legal code (such as the Civil Code in France). I use "law" (without a definite article) to translate *droit,* as a system of rights *(droits),* "natural law," Latin *jus* as opposed to *lex.*

2. *Contre-effectuation:* characterized by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* as "counter-acting" the passive encoding of all activity in predefined roles, by playing the self-determining "actor" rather than any externally determined part in events.

3. *L'histoire n'est pas I 'experimentation:* on the twin sense of "experience" and "experiment" in the last word, see "Breaking Things Open," n. 13.

4. Reflections on Cromwell were arguably far more central to French Romanticism—whose birth as a distinct movement is traditionally dated to the publication of Victor Hugo's *Cromwell in* 1827—than to its British precursor.

5. *Souci:* a care, anxiety, worry—something one's always having to think about.

6. The Institut National d'Audiovisuel, set up by the French government in 1975 as a center for training, research, and development in audiovisual media, partly funded by the French TV networks, and producing a small number of programs for network broadcast.

7. *Controle continu,* literally "continuous control," is also the French term for "continuous assessment" in education; *formation permanente,* here translated as "continual training," is also the standard term for "continuing education."

8. A *sabot* was a worker's wooden clog.