

## EDITORIAL

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*Jeremy Gilbert and Chrysanthi Nigianni*

This issue of *new formations* arises from the extraordinary growth of interest in the work of Gilles Deleuze (in particular, but not exclusively, his work with Félix Guattari) in the English-speaking world in recent years; an explosion which has generated enough heat and light to have attracted the attention even of the notoriously Anglo-indifferent French philosophical scene. In truth, like any event, this 'turn to Deleuze' is not the sudden emergence that it might appear to be, but is the cumulative effect of a long and often piecemeal process of translation, interpretation, appropriation and accommodation. From the earliest translations of fragments of Deleuze & Guattari's work in the 1980s, through the pioneering major translations by scholars such as Brian Massumi and Paul Patton and the experimental take-up of schizoanalysis by groups of researchers in the UK, USA and most notably Australia in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, to the recent establishment of a dedicated English-language journal of Deleuze Studies, the consolidation of a body of interpretation and application of Deleuzian ideas in English has in truth taken several decades, even if it is only recently that this work has become central to the corpus of Anglophone cultural theory.

Given the historic concerns of cultural studies and cultural theorists in the English-speaking world - not least those best represented in the pages of *new formations* - it is perhaps strange that this should have taken so long. Their projects to delineate a fully materialist ontology and a fully social and political theory of the psychic, their attempts to give expression to a politics which is at once libertarian and radically collectivist in its orientation, the radical and militant interdisciplinarity which characterises their work, would all seem to mark out Deleuze & Guattari as natural resources and allies for work in the tradition of cultural studies; much more so than many better-known theoretical sources (Lacan, Althusser, Derrida, even Foucault). The question of why their take-up has been so slow, despite the early advocacy of influential figures such as Lawrence Grossberg, deserves a study in its own right, but that is not our topic here. Rather, we hope to present a range of work which both demonstrates and, occasionally, questions, the usefulness of Deleuzian ideas for addressing key cultural theoretical questions in novel and politically productive ways.

The vast range of subjects upon which Deleuze wrote, and the number of disparate fields within which his ideas have proved influential, would make it quite impossible for any one volume to offer a fully representative picture, so our focus here is primarily on the relevance of Deleuzian ideas for the key motivating concern of *new formations* throughout its history: namely, the

question of the political uses and implications of cultural theory. We do not present Deleuzian politics as a given fact, but rather seek to pose the question of its productive possibility in the current intellectual and political conjuncture. A particular concern of several of our papers is the possible radical implications of Deleuze's thought for a reformulation of sexual politics, and these papers were mostly presented in an initial form at the 'Deleuzian Lines, Queer Flights' conference at the University of East London, October 2005. We suggest that while this is by no means the only political usage of Deleuzian ideas as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, sexual politics at this time clearly presents a set of problems and questions which are in desperate need of reformulation and re-radicalisation. The normalisation of liberal feminism seems to mesh every-more tightly today with a neoliberal culture of individualisation, neurotic self-management, unmitigated consumerism, celebrity-fixation and restrictive over-sexualisation; and this is especially, if not exclusively, true for those girls and young women, who seem to have had the range of publicly-desirable modes of being available to them squeezed dramatically in recent times. Where the decades following the emergence of second-wave feminism saw a vast expansion of the freedoms and opportunities available to them, we seem to find ourselves today in a world in which pink princess dresses and celebrity-endorsed glamour define the parameters of normative femininity for girls and young women respectively. At the same time, the deterritorialisation of the twentieth-century family model has in the vast majority of cases only exposed parents and children to different forms of the regulation of desire, as parents work longer hours, while children are exposed to historic levels of advertising (explicit and disguised), and schools are pressured to serve exclusively the needs of the competitive labour market. If a radical and collectivist politics of desire, becoming, and sexual multiplicity were ever needed badly, then they are needed now.

Jeremy Gilbert's introductory contribution sets the scene for the rest of the volume. This piece attempts both to identify the key problematic issues involved in investigating the question of 'Deleuzian politics' and to identify some of the differences and similarities between Deleuzian thought and other traditions which have centrally informed Anglophone cultural theory.

Véronique Bergen's essay explores the most fundamental questions concerning the role of politics in Deleuze's thought, with particular reference to his elaboration of a vitalist ontology. For Bergen, this vitalism both motivates the normative direction of Deleuze's thought and informs its analytical and pragmatic approaches to questions of power, desire and agency.

Rosi Braidotti's article pursues this theme further, addressing a paradox: how to engage in affirmative politics, which entails the production of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which means resisting the present. Drawing on the neo-vitalism of Deleuze, with reference to Nietzsche and Spinoza, the article argues in favour of an affirmative ethics, defined as a radical ethics of transformation.

Claire Colebrook starts from Deleuze's and Guattari's distinction between

passive and active vitalism as set out in their last book, *What is Philosophy?* Her article posits the possibility of a new conceptualisation of political bodies outside notions of individual will, intent and agency: mobilising forces of change from within the act of encountering.

Jorge Camacho explores and evaluates the philosophical and political divergence between Deleuze and Guattari and their recently-influential friend, Antonio Negri: assessing this divergence in the light of the period of revolts and radical political experimentation that broke out in Argentina since 2001. Siding with Deleuze, philosophically and politically, it concludes that the positive outcome of such 'tragic' perspective is a constant concern for launching and re-launching instances of concrete political experimentation.

Patricia MacCormack's essay examines the ways in which Irigaray, Deleuze and Guattari each posit a challenge to phallogocentric paradigms via reconfigurations of enfolded subjectivity and the deployment of concepts such as multiplicity, fluidity and connectivity. As an experiment in extending and exploring these concepts, while simultaneously attempting to create a fold between the theories, this article offers the idea of 'becoming-vulva'.

Chrysanthi Nigianni's essay begins from the argument that Deleuze's method of 'transcendental empiricism' requires a shift in the way we conceptualise both 'ethics' and 'politics'. This shift is examined in relation to the cinematic thinking of the film *Breaking the Waves*, since the latter problematises established ideas of what an ethics of (sexual) difference might be, as well as received political values tied to modern individualism, such as freedom, autonomy, and reason.

Nicholas Thoburn's paper is a critique of the political figure of the militant. In particular it seeks to understand the ways militancy effectuates processes of political passion and a certain unworking or deterritorialisation of the self in relation to political organisations and the wider social environment within which militants would enact change.

Finally, our round-table presents a discussion between four leading commentators on 'Deleuzian politics'. Éric Alliez, one of the world's leading exponents of Deleuze's and Guattari's work, and the author of such major works as *Capital Times: Tales from the conquest of time* and *The Signature of the World: What is Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy?* joins Peter Hallward - Deleuze's most prominent critic in the English-speaking world and author of *Out of this World: Deleuze and the philosophy of creation* - and our contributors Claire Colebrook and Nicholas Thoburn, for a riveting discussion of the philosophical, ethical and political issues at stake in any elaboration or critique of Deleuze's thought.