DELEUZE, PERVERSION, AND POLITICS

EDWARD P. KAZARIAN

Once again, what matters here is to act quickly, what matters is speed.
(Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 136)

In this paper, I want to pursue some of the implications of the notion of “perversion” in Gilles Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense*. Specifically, it seems to me that under this rubric Deleuze offers us a way of thinking about deviance that avoids reducing it to the simply abnormal or pathological; a way of thinking, that is, which recognizes the integrity of the errant or aberrant movement as such, without tying it to the figure of a standard or norm and thereby subjecting it to pre-conceived, pre-given evaluative criteria. Such criteria may take several forms: identity, origin, *telos*, systematic coherence, etc. But they all share a common feature, the tendency to give rise to a restricted economy of value that can only ever take into account what might count as objectively determinate and determinable features of things or actions. Put differently, such criteria, as the ideal centers to which all possible evaluations of particular elements are referred as being either positive or negative determinations, amount to static principles of selection. They do not admit of modification or re-ordering in the face of the appearance of new or different elements—indeed, they are not even capable of recognizing these except as fundamentally negative or improper.

By elaborating a concept of the perverse that does not refer itself to such static systems, Deleuze makes room in his philosophy for serious thought about the nature of “experimental” or creative practices of various sorts. In this paper, I will concern myself with the intersection of perversion, aesthetics, and politics. In other words, I want to look carefully at how Deleuze’s re-valuation of the perverse invites us to rethink our understanding of what is at stake in certain kinds of practices we have typically labeled as either aesthetic or political. I will have more to say about what I take to be the concrete advantages of working with such a conception in my conclusion.

For the moment, let me begin with the example of what Deleuze says about Diogenes’ perversions, or at least some of the most interesting of them:

Diogenes the Cynic answers Plato’s definition of man as a biped and featherless animal by bringing forth a plucked fowl. And to the person

who asks "what is philosophy?" Diogenes responds by carrying about a cod at the end of a string. . . . The fish is indeed the most oral of animals; it poses the problem of muteness, of consumability, and of the consonant in the wet/palatized element—in short, the problem of language. (Deleuze 1990, p. 135)

What are we to make of these gestures, these responses? They are jokes, certainly, but we must be careful not to read the "humor" here as indicative of a simple lack of seriousness. On the contrary, humor holds a privileged place in *The Logic of Sense*, since Deleuze takes it to be the one figure of speech that breaks the stranglehold of the representative, individuated subject on the practice of speaking.

[I]f irony is the co-extensiveness of being with the individual, or of the I with representation, humor is the co-extensiveness of sense with nonsense. Humor is the art of the surfaces and of the doubles, of nomad singularities and of the always displaced aleatory point . . . the savoir-faire of the pure event. . . . (Deleuze 1990, p. 141)

If Diogenes responds with these jokes, it is because he is playing a very serious game indeed—or more to the point, because he is first and foremost trying not to play the game in the same old—serious!—way, in the way that he is being asked to play it.

The power of the humorous response lies in its peculiar relationship to the subject, the concept, and the entire system of propositional speech and communication in general. This is why we can say that the most important characteristic of Diogenes' response is that it poses problems in the place of solutions. To see exactly how this is the case is a somewhat longer story, and telling it involves the careful description of a two-fold operation characteristic of humor in Deleuze's mind. Essentially, what Diogenes does is to designate something—anything—in a way that undermines the function of "successful" speech (in this instance, the "proper" response) in the service of the normative project of communication. In so doing, he poses the problem of philosophy and all its related problems in the place of a determinate answer to the question which has been posed. This is what it means for us to say that even though his response takes the form of a designation—a proper kind of response—it nonetheless remains essentially improper.

But what exactly does it mean to say that Diogenes substitutes a problem for a solution? It is here that care is needed. On the one hand, we can say that Diogenes' operation has to do with confronting the conceptual, categorizing, subsumptive language of philosophy with "the ground of bodies and the groundlessness of their mixtures" (Deleuze 1990, p. 135). His operation would then amount to that of presenting philosophy with something that it cannot think, either from the point of view of *logos* or that of logic, just insofar as there is available to it no science of the singular or the chaotic.

Deleuze reminds us, however, that taken by itself this confrontation is not sufficient. If Diogenes wishes to escape the system of "hypostatized significations" constituted by the Ideas, he cannot do this merely by replacing them with "the absurd as that which is without signification" (Deleuze 1990, p. 135). This is because the absurd in this context is only the "other" of the proposition, a negative determination. Absurdity as such does nothing to challenge the priority of the proposition and of language—i.e., their status as the validated ends of communication, which here functions as the standard in relation to which various instances of "speech" are fixed and evaluated as more or less positive determinations.¹ To put it another way, we can say that the problem with the absurd is that it fails to be genuinely deviant, genuinely different. In which case Deleuze's caution amounts to the claim that it is an inadequate definition of the deviant to say that it (like the absurd) differs from the normal (communicative speech) simply by being its negation—in the terms of our example, by remaining mute without challenging the status of muteness as simply the privation of speech. The problem we are left with, then, is as follows: we remain caught in a static opposition which admits of no possibility of doing anything else, anything different.

What interests Deleuze is whether there is "any way out" of the circle of the proposition, of the hegemony of what he calls the "ideal constant" [*constant idéal*] (Deleuze 1978, p. 154).² His suggestion is that the way out of the circle is provided by a certain way of traversing the circle itself: "[by] the same movement with which language falls from the heights and then plunges below, we must be led back to the surface where there is no longer anything to denote or even to signify, but where pure sense is produced" (Deleuze 1990, p. 136). The way out is not transcendence but deviance. The longer story which must now be told is that of how exactly all of this works.³

I.

In the essay on Michel Tournier's *Vendredi* that is appended to *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze gives the clearest definition of perversion to be found anywhere in the book: "This Robinson does nothing perverse, properly speaking. Yet how are we to free ourselves from the impression that he is himself perverse, according to Freud's definition of the one who deviates with respect to aims?" (Deleuze 1990, pp. 303-04). This phrase, "deviance with respect to aims," borrowed from Freud's essay *The Sexual Aberrations*, forms the core of Deleuze's understanding of the perverse. Nevertheless, Deleuze deviates from the letter of Freud's text in important ways.

In his essay, Freud considers two general forms of deviance, one "with respect to objects," and another "with respect to aims." Freud only introduces the term "perversion" when he begins to discuss the latter. "Per-

versions are sexual activities which either (a) extend, in an anatomical sense, beyond the regions of the body that are designed for sexual union or (b) linger over the intermediate relations to the sexual object which should normally be traversed rapidly on the path towards the final sexual aim" (Freud 1962, p. 16). This definition does not take the term "perversion" beyond the scope of what Freud considers a deviation with respect to aim. However, by the end of the text, Freud seems to be using the term more broadly, simply as the opposite of "normal." He makes reference to the way in which neurotic symptoms "give expression (by conversion) to instincts which would be described as *perverse* in the widest sense of the word" (Freud 1962, p. 31). And lest we doubt how generally this usage extends, he refers to a complex of determining factors at the root of "perversion." "[W]e must put sexual repression as an internal factor alongside such external factors as limitation of freedom, inaccessibility of a normal sexual object, the dangers of the normal sexual act, etc., which bring about perversions in persons who might perhaps otherwise have remained normal" (Freud 1962, p. 36). It seems, then, that this "wide" sense of the perverse includes, for Freud, considerations of deviant object-choice and not just deviance with respect to the aim of sexual activity irrespective of the object chosen.

Nevertheless, Freud explicitly denies, in the first part of the essay, an adequate understanding of "inversion" and other deviant object-choices on the basis of insufficient data (See Freud 1962, pp. 12-13). Furthermore, in his general conclusion to the first part, he emphasizes the relative unimportance of object-choice for understanding the sexual instinct. "Under a great number of conditions and in surprisingly numerous individuals, the nature and importance of the sexual object recedes into the background. What is essential and constant in the sexual instinct is something else" (Freud 1962, p. 15). The point here seems to be that object-choice may, in the final analysis, appear to be almost entirely subservient to situational considerations and that the mechanisms underlying deviant object-choices may appear to be better explained in terms of the deviations in aim which, at the end of the essay, Freud connects explicitly to neuroses as the "negative" expression of perversions. "[I]t is by no means only at the cost of the so-called *normal* sexual instinct that [neurotic] symptoms originate . . . symptoms are formed in part at the cost of *abnormal* sexuality; neuroses are, so to say, the negative of perversions" (Freud 1962, p. 31). Though Freud is careful to say that he does not have sufficient data to make such a broad based claim about object-choice, the claim is nonetheless implied by the fact that considerations of object-choice creep back into his discussion of perversion when he begins to connect it to neurosis.

In general, then, it seems to be the case both that (a) from the point of view of classification, object-choice is a different problem than that of

the “ends” of sexual activity, and that (b) from the point of view of causation, abnormal object-choice is one of a number of possible deviations all of which depend on a particular coincidence of endogenous and environmental factors conditioning and modifying the so-called “normal” expression of the sexual instinct. Having drawn this distinction between two points of view, we may at least provisionally conclude that Freud’s wide use of the term “perversion” is not intended to supplant the classificatory distinction, but rather to refer to what is generally “abnormal” from the point of view of causation.

When Deleuze takes Freud’s definition of perversion to be “deviance with respect to aims,” he is affirming the classificatory schema. But at this point, those who are familiar with Deleuze’s work find themselves waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop. In this case, these expectations are fulfilled in the form of a critique of Freud’s “causal” or “aetiological” usage of “perversion.”

[p]erversion is not defined by the force of a certain desire in the system of drives; the pervert is not someone who desires, but someone who introduces desire into an entirely different system and makes it play, within this system, the role of an internal limit, a virtual center or zero point (the well known Sadean apathy). (Deleuze 1990, p. 304)

We need to pay very careful attention to the meaning of this objection since it proceeds from the core of Deleuze’s own project. In other words, the difference between Deleuze and Freud at this point is essential to the character of their respective enterprises. Perhaps the easiest way to clarify this difference is to note that the figure of Freud is being invoked here in the context of Deleuze’s critique of what Constantine Boundas calls “the ‘poststructuralist’ displacement of an alterity, in name only, which is still under the thumb of sameness and identity” (Boundas 1993, p. 36). On this level, Deleuze’s objection to Freud is of a piece with his claims against transcendental phenomenologists from Husserl to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

What happens most generally in the Tournier essay is that Deleuze uses the Freudian notion of “perversion” to characterize the way in which Robinson becomes progressively de-humanized in the course of the novel. According to Boundas, what attracts Deleuze to the novel is that it “is an exquisitely refined description made by a ‘radical phenomenologist’ of what would happen to an insular world were the others to disappear,” which facilitates “the testing of Deleuze’s hypothesis according to which the structure-other is indeed contemporaneous with the structure-object, but only when the subject is from the very beginning endowed with individuality and personality” (Boundas 1993, p. 37). It is, of course, a fundamental tenet of Deleuze’s philosophy that there is no original necessity to the endowment of the “subject” with individuality and personality.

To suppose such necessity is to commit “the error of the traditional duplication of the empirical in the transcendental” (Boundas 1993, p. 40). The danger of this duplication is that it precludes the possibility of any novelty; that is, it traps difference within the context of sameness and reduces it to “negative difference.” And this, Deleuze thinks, is to block in advance any possible understanding of the continual production of new effects that does, in fact, take place.

In a text that goes a long way towards explaining the significance of “perversion” in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze writes:

We seek to determine an impersonal and pre-individual transcendental field, which does not resemble the corresponding empirical fields and which nevertheless is not confused with an undifferentiated depth. This field cannot be determined as that of a consciousness. . . . A consciousness is nothing without a synthesis of unification, but there is no synthesis of unification of consciousness without the form of the I, or the point of view of the Self. What is neither individual nor personal are, on the contrary, emissions of singularities insofar as they occur on an unconscious surface and possess a mobile, immanent principle of auto-unification through a *nomadic* distribution, radically distinct from fixed and sedentary distributions as conditions of the synthesis of consciousness. (Deleuze 1990, p. 102)

As far as Deleuze is concerned, Tournier’s Robinson shows us that “beyond alterity and selfhood,” we must posit a “real nonhuman world of intensive and extensive magnitudes . . . ‘nomadic’ singularities” which are “the signs of our presence to the real transcendental field” (Boundas 1993, p. 40). At which point, the question for Deleuze becomes twofold. On the one hand, there is the need to account for “the constitution of alterity, no less than the constitution of the subject/individual or subject/person” (Boundas 1993, p. 37) on the basis of this understanding of the transcendental. On the other hand, there is the question of how to bring this impersonal transcendental element into contact with the already constituted empirical subject in order to allow that subject to become something else. Tournier’s novel is an experiment in such deviance, not only from the point of view of phenomenology and science, but also from the point of view of art and desire.

Deleuze’s critique of Freud proceeds from the second question. The issue of “perversion” is not a question to be addressed at the level of the subject, but rather in terms of a conception of the unconscious and of desire that is analogous to the “impersonal” transcendental field. It is absolutely crucial to avoid supposing that everything is ultimately determined in relation to the Ego. For Deleuze, contra-Freud, desire does not belong among the individual’s sentiments any more than it indicates a feeling of lack. In an article published the year before his death, Deleuze sums up his conception this way:

For me, desire implies no lack; neither is it a natural given. It is an *agacement* [arrangement, organization] of heterogenous elements that function; it is process as opposed to structure or genesis; it is affect as opposed to sentiment, it is "*haec-eity* (the individuality of a day, a season, a life) as opposed to subjectivity; it is an event as opposed to a thing or a person. (Deleuze 1997(a), p. 189)

For Freud, the theory of drives—or "instincts" in the case of "the sexual instinct"—is intended to provide a genetic account of structure, sentiment, subjectivity, and personality. In order to achieve these aims, Freud must concern himself with desire *ex post facto*, from the point of view of the already constituted ego and the repressive or expressive purpose of certain types of behavior. But for Deleuze, the pervert is not defined as someone who desires the wrong way, with the wrong aims in view or in relation to the wrong object. Rather, the pervert is someone whose activity is concerned with desire as such, with desire as a "virtual" arrangement or a pure process. This is the truth of Freud's first formulation, that perversion is ultimately a "deviance with respect to aims." The pervert's specific manner of deviance takes the form of "using" desire or process, characterized by their "nomadic distributions," as an "internal limit, virtual center or zero point" with which to confront a thoroughly constituted system whose elements are arranged in a "fixed and sedentary distribution"—a system of objects, persons, statements, concepts, institutions, etc. The pervert's aim is to avoid fixity and completeness, stable and harmonious distributions as such, to avoid ever carrying the process "to its end."

This leads us to think that "perversion" is analogous to what Michel Foucault finds in two notions he borrows from Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot respectively: "transgression" and "contestation." "Transgression" is the passage to (beyond) a limit which is constituted therein and which has no being outside of this movement which crosses it.⁴ As such, transgression forces the appearance of a limit precisely where there is not one, within a system that has been deprived of its outside by the death of God—a limit which can only be virtual, which cannot possibly have any objective place in the order of things, which appears only in the process of its being overstepped. Similarly, "contestation" is linked by Foucault to the discovery of a "philosophy of non-positive affirmation," which "does not imply a generalized negation, but an affirmation that affirms nothing, a radical break of transitivity" (Foucault 1977, p. 36). Like transgression, contestation is an activity, a gesture that is independent of an actual object or end; it is an affirmation *in process of process*.

II.

If the pervert is someone who deviates with respect to aims, then it now appears that this is precisely because s/he refuses to acknowledge them insofar as they could be seen to be divorced from this process-character of desire as virtual. But then what is the status of the perverse gesture in relation to the actual systems wherein it begins and from which it deviates, and in relation to the virtual element of desire which it introduces into the actual system? It seems that this gesture, this movement, cannot be said to belong precisely to either.

But it would also be incorrect to think of the perverse according to a logic of alterity. On the contrary, in his discussion of Tournier's novel, Deleuze links the perverse to the destruction of the "structure-Other," the *transcendental structure of alterity*. The Other in this sense is that which guarantees the coherence of the perceptual field, and by extension the very structure of the possible.⁵ In so doing, the Other forms the condition under which a self can be constituted at the center of the perceptual field and under which everything that is not presently perceived can be seen as nevertheless belonging within a coherent system of possible perceptions. If perversion amounts to the destruction of this Other, then it must also point to *something else* entirely, something a-systemic. It "functions in an entirely different way—[it] indicates another, supposedly true world, an irreducible double. . . . Not an Other, but something *tout autre que l'autre*" (Deleuze 1990, pp. 316-17). In refusing the structure which amounts to "the a priori principle of the organization of every perceptual field in accordance with the categories" (Deleuze 1990, p. 309), the perverse gesture makes possible the appearance of something which is not simply the reduplication of what is, not simply a possible duplicate of the real, but which is rather irreducibly different, new, or "untimely."⁶

Consider the case with which Deleuze concerns himself in *The Logic of Sense*, that of propositional speech. From this point of view, the virtual double of the proposition is its sense. More specifically, sense is "the expressed of the proposition, . . . an incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition" (Deleuze 1990, p. 19). As such it amounts to "a supplementary instance," "irreducible to individual states of affairs, particular images, personal beliefs, and universal or general concepts" (Deleuze 1990, p. 19). So even though the proposition is the expression of sense, it is impossible for a proposition to "say" its own sense, to confine sense entirely within its own domain. In relation to the conditions of the proposition it is completely "'neutral,' altogether indifferent to both particular and general, singular and universal, personal and impersonal" (Deleuze 1990, p. 19). Pure sense can never be said unparadoxically, i.e., under the conditions of good sense and common sense.⁷ And yet, the

proposition would be nothing without sense because it is incapable of founding itself upon any of its other dimensions: denotation, manifestation, and signification.

Like desire then, sense is virtual, a pure event as opposed to the proposition. Nevertheless, its virtuality does not mean that sense is any less real than the proposition. On the contrary, for Deleuze what is virtual is just as real as the actual, but qualitatively different from it. "[T]he absolute condition of non-resemblance" between the virtual and its incarnations and actualizations "must be emphasized. . . . The possible and the real resemble one another, but not the virtual and the actual" (Deleuze 1995, p. 279). Sense has no "being" outside of the proposition which expresses it. It is immanent to the proposition but irreducible to what is actualized therein. In other words, sense is never exhausted by "what is said"—in which case, it can no more be made subject to the conditions of truth and falsity; it can no more be what is known.⁸

How are we to understand the relationship between these two non-resembling strata, virtual and actual, sense and proposition? As the virtual double of propositional speech, its "otherwise-other," sense can be seen as the "problem" to which propositions are "solutions." However, since the problem and the solution, as virtual and actual, must also be different in kind, speech can never "solve" the problem completely.

Problems are of the order of events—not only because cases of solution emerge like real events, but because the conditions of a problem themselves imply events such as sections, ablations, adjunctions. In this sense, it is correct to represent a double series of events which develop on two planes, echoing without resembling each other: real events on the level of the engendered solutions, and ideal events embedded in the conditions of the problem. . . . (Deleuze 1995, pp. 188-89)

Problem and solution are incommensurate. While the problem (in this case, sense) is what engenders its solutions and is therefore immanent to them, it develops as well within its own series, one that has nothing to do with the series of solutions to which it gives rise, in which case it is both immanent to and transcendent of the solutions.⁹

We confront here the "intransitivity" of the problematic, and of sense. For example, Deleuze points out that the grammatical form of sense is verbal: more exactly, infinitive. The sense of "to cut" includes and makes no distinction between the condition of "being cut" and "not being cut," or between "cutting" and "being-cut." As with desire, sense is nothing but an *agacement*, an arrangement of "heterogenous elements that function . . . process as opposed to structure or genesis" (Deleuze 1997(a), p. 189). It can never be fixed, identified, or made to stay in place and submit to the conditions of completely successful enunciation. It is difference, process, or intensity.

I have argued that the perverse gesture is one which makes the “virtual” function as the internal limit of an “actual” system entirely different from it. This difference can be correlated to the relationship between “problems” and “solutions,” or between sense and the speech which expresses but cannot state it. And this allows us to state more exactly what the “deviance with respect to aims” that defines perversion amounts to. To return to the example of Diogenes, his response is “perverse” because it does not conform to the conditions of what can be said in the proposition, or because it does not conform to the end or aim specified by the question itself, its solution—or at least, failing that, a wrong answer. As pervers, Diogenes aims directly at the problem rather than offering the solution which the question demands. But if aiming at the problem is to aim at what is intensive, singular, or virtual, then this amounts to taking a pure process as one’s aim, rather than seeking from one’s activity a result. The pervers then, could be said to be the one who acts without regard for the result but only for the sake of the event or process itself.

III.

With this we can proceed to the question of what in particular perversion does for us where politics is concerned. In the Eighteenth Series of *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze renews his concern with what he calls, in *Difference and Repetition*, “the image of thought” (see Deleuze 1990, pp. 127-133). Here, however, he distinguishes three such images which find their archetypes in Platonism, the Pre-Socratics, and Stoicism, respectively. Each of these images specifies for thought a domain and determines for it a movement: the ascent into the heights for Platonism, the descent into depth for the pre-Socratics, and the play of the surface for Stoicism. Thirdly, Deleuze specifies an activity (and in some cases, a sickness) belonging to each figure: conversion (and manic-depression) for Platonism, subversion (and schizophrenia) for the pre-Socratics, and perversion for the Stoics.

The absence of a pathological figure for Stoicism and perversion is undoubtedly significant, but interpreting this significance poses a problem. It seems that there are at least two options. Either perversion saves us from the sickness of the other images of thought, or it simply does not presuppose a sickness as do the others. But it seems that both of these alternatives are inadequate. They misconstrue what is most important about perversion, that it is “diagnostic” in a manner which must always be opposed to “curative.” This diagnostic practice is precisely what is exemplified in Deleuze’s discussion of Diogenes; a practice which neither reproduces the circle of the proposition nor oscillates between bodies and significations as equally impossible founding instances for speech, but which rather aims at the pure sense which escapes both of these—but only

and precisely insofar as it is a "problematic" instance. Perversion is a pathological because it is deviant in a specific way, because it aims at problems and not at solutions.

This is also what makes perversion a matter of aesthetics, and specifically a matter of experimentation. But "experimentation" must be distinguished from more traditional conceptions of what is at stake in artmaking. "Aesthetics," Deleuze notes, "suffers from a wrenching duality. On the one hand, it designates a theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience; on the other hand, it designates a theory of art as the reflection of real experience" (Deleuze 1990, p. 260). As we have seen, the "sensibility" at stake here is just that which Deleuze understands to have its condition in the presence of the structure-Other as that which makes possible the appearance of a self which is the subject of all actual experience and which determines that real experience will be structurally isomorphic with what is representable, that is, with what can be integrated within the system governed by the conditions of transcendental apperception.

To overcome this duality in aesthetics, Deleuze thinks that "the conditions of experience in general must become the conditions of real experience; in this case, the work of art would really appear as experimentation" (Deleuze 1990, p. 260). This would require the destruction of the structure-Other. To make "possible experience" the condition of real experience is to subject experience to the conditions of self-identity, and to subject sensibility to the rigors of conceptual representation. Real experience, on the contrary, does not depend on the presence of a transcendental ego but upon a "virtual" transcendental field, equivalent to the unconscious, which is composed entirely of "singularities, and thus of anti-generalities, which are however impersonal and pre-individual" (Deleuze 1990, p. 99). This is precisely what Deleuze takes Tournier's novel to demonstrate, and it is also what he admires about Sartre's *Transcendence of the Ego*.¹⁰ What, then, are the conditions of experience in general? Among them we must number sense and the pure event, the problematic and the virtual, and the simulacral image. The conditions of experience in general are, in other words, all the various aspects of process or arrangement (*agacement*). And it is just insofar as it refers to these that the artwork, the gesture in all its forms, can be said to be experimental—or perverse.

A Deleuzian aesthetics concerns itself with simulacra, with images that have lost their groundwork in the structure of representation and identity. Deleuze notes that the simulacra "is not a degraded copy. It harbors a positive power which denies the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction. . . . Far from being a new foundation, it engulfs all foundations, it assures a universal breakdown, but as a joyful

and positive event" (Deleuze 1990, pp. 262-63). Aesthetic activity in this sense must therefore be distinguished from one governed by what Deleuze calls "artifice." "The artificial and the simulacrum are not the same thing. They are even opposed to each other. The artificial is always a copy of a copy, which should be pushed to the point where it changes its nature and is reversed into the simulacrum" (Deleuze 1990, 265). "Artifice" here is precisely "mimesis" *à la* Plato in the *Republic*. Deleuze's gambit is to push the mimetic relationship to the point where it encounters a limit, a singularity (in the thermo-dynamic sense), a threshold beyond which it must spontaneously manifest a new kind of organization, which he calls simulacral.¹¹

This disconnection of the image from any "original" or identical center is what "perversion" and "experimentation" have in common. Perversion is an experimental and aesthetic practice in precisely this sense—isn't this just the meaning of the definition the pervert as "someone who introduces desire (the virtual, the problematic) into an entirely different system and makes it play, within this system, the role of an internal limit, a virtual center or zero point?" (Deleuze 1990, p. 304). The pervert is like Diogenes' gesture with the fish. S/he is mute, non-communicative insofar as this presupposes all the conditions of identity. Her gestures appear paradoxical. They contain none of the determinateness of solutions.

The pervert does this, however, not simply as a negative gesture—not simply to silence. It is for this reason exactly that Diogenes' fish is not by itself enough. It is precisely not a matter of opposites—of oppositions any more than of identities. It is here that Deleuze shows a profound affinity between the theoretical difficulties which are created for aesthetics by a certain set of artists and philosophers whose work points us towards the simulacral and the problematic, on the one hand, and the trap of a theory of politics that can only understand what is at stake for political actors in terms of identity and communication—in terms of making yourself as visible as possible, of making your demands heard and of getting what you want. The problem is, put bluntly, that as long as you can ask for what you want you won't get anything else—only more of the same.

The political problem is the same as the aesthetic problem is the same as the philosophical problem. It is, put simply, "how are we to do something else?" Deleuze's answer is that we must be perverts and experimenters, concerned with what is at stake in putting certain processes into play as opposed to seeking certain results. And there is no question of simply "giving examples." Just insofar as something might be "exemplary" of the perverse and the experimental, just insofar as the experiment has succeeded or the perversion can be recognized as such, we should suspect that it has lost its momentum.

Marcel Duchamp is instructive in this respect. Would there have been any point in remaining a "dadist" for very long? But even better is Artaud, who was undoubtedly sick for much of his life and whose theatre certainly remained—remains—unworkable, but who also produced a genuinely important body of work. Artaud interests us for none of this, however; neither insofar as he often fails or insofar as he sometimes succeeded. What is important about him is neither the long periods where he slipped away into illness, literally consumed by the depths of his body, nor his "books," his theories, insofar as they are or are not workable, insofar as they can or cannot be put into practice. What interests us is that despite all of this, Artaud was able to do something else, to find gestures that can only be problematically referred either to his illness or to a sane and practical system of work; gestures that are unassimilably problematic—is not the entire essay on "The Theatre and Plague" just such a gesture, one which refers us not to a work or to an individual, but to a process that cannot be contained in either sphere? (Artaud 1958, pp. 15-22).

Of course, the pervert cannot prevent h/er gestures from being reterritorialized, recoded and re-identified, detached from the processual space in which they occur and evaluated as to whether or not they "succeed" or "work" according to some criterion or another—isn't this the problem that has confronted "experimental" theatre since its inception? But this is a trap only insofar as s/he remains tied to them, identified by them; insofar as her experiments and inventions must be understood as solutions which can be said to succeed or fail—even Artaud's most lucid texts, for instance, cannot possibly be understood from this point of view. And worse, just insofar as they work, won't her experiments always risk being tied to some figure of identity being thereby re-converted into artifice. It is certainly instructive to consider the fate of the Drag Queen from this point of view, insofar as s/he passes, makes it. But the point is that it would not be h/er failure that makes h/er interesting either. S/he passes, s/he's a woman; s/he fails, it's "really" a man. More interesting is the process, the "going both ways at once," the becoming more or less woman and man—the perversity of it.

This does not, it is true, offer us a program—for politics or for art. It is the opposite of that. It does not promise salvation, or even "significant" change. If we refer to art, we do so not in order to "politicize" it—on the contrary, we seek perhaps only to de-politicize generally, to disengage our practices from their "ends." The reference to art, in this case, speaks to what it might mean to do something else, something poly-vocal and poly-systemic rather than simply anti-systemic, something perverse rather than simply "subversive."

1 In this connection, see Deleuze 1978.

2 "Minority and Majority are not opposed in a simply qualitative manner. Majority implies an ideal constant, like a standard-meter in relation to which it is evaluated" (Deleuze 1978, p. 154, my translation).

3 For another example of an artistic practice that can be related to this theory of perverse gestures, see Deleuze's essay on Caramelo Bene's theatre (Deleuze, 1997(b)).

4 "[T]ransgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration, and thus it is made to return once more to the horizon of the uncrossable . . . the limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess" (Foucault 1977, p. 34).

5 "The Other is the existence of an encompassed possible. Language is the reality of the possible as such. The self is the development and explication of what is possible, the process of its realization in the actual" (Deleuze 1990, p. 307).

6 See Deleuze 1990, p. 263 ff. for Deleuze's discussion of "the untimely" and "the eternal return."

7 Good sense is the correlate of individuation; "the principle of an already fixed and sedentary organization of differences" (Deleuze 1990, p. 116). It establishes the linearity, directionality, and purposiveness of time. "[G]ood sense is said of one direction only: it is the unique sense and expresses the demand of an order according to which it is necessary to choose one direction and hold to it" (Deleuze 1990, p. 75). The point of this, Deleuze notes, is to begin with difference, "to give itself a singularity" but only "in order to stretch [it] out over a whole line of ordinary and regular points which depend on it, but which also avert and dilute it" (Deleuze 1990, p. 76). This dissolution of the singularity as pure difference within a directional order thus amounts to the movement from "the most differentiated condition"—its origin, a pure past—to "the least differentiated condition"—towards a condition which amounts to nothing else than a complete determination. It is thus that Deleuze calls good sense "combustive and digestive" (Deleuze 1990, p. 76).

Common sense, on the other hand, has to do with the possibility of conceptual identification. As such, it has to do not simply with determinate individuals, but with worlds and persons as organic unities. "Subjectively, common sense subsumes under itself the various faculties of the soul, or the differentiated organs of the body, and brings them to bear upon a unity which is capable of saying "I" . . . Objectively, common sense subsumes under itself the given diversity and relates it to the unity of a particular form of object or an individualized form of world" (Deleuze 1990, p. 78). Common sense collects what is distributed by good sense, but only with the aim of achieving a complete determination of the concept.

Taken together, good sense and common sense are the conditions under which speaking can also amount to communicating; the conditions of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic determination of the enunciated sign, of speech. But neither good sense nor common sense can serve as a genuine foundation, each points toward a transcendent instance which is in fact only the other—and communication rests on this circular justification or brute repetition of what can

only amount, in the end, to the circle of identity itself. "Good sense could not fix any beginning, end, or direction, it could not distribute any diversity, if it did not transcend itself toward an instance capable of relating the diverse to the form of a subject's identity, or to the form of an object's or a world's permanence. . . . Conversely, this form of identity within common sense would remain empty if it did not transcend itself towards an instance capable of determining it by means of a particular diversity" (Deleuze 1990, p. 78).

8 Likewise, the event "is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present . . . becoming does not tolerate the separation or distinction of before and after, or of past and future . . . but [as] paradox [it] is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time" (Deleuze 1990, p. 1). The event and sense constitute in this way the two sides of a single "surface," one facing the heights of language and the other facing the depths and mixtures of bodies. Since the primary characteristic of sense/events is their intransitivity, this surface bears a paradoxical and asymmetrical relationship to bodies/states of affairs on the one hand, and to propositions on the other. Sense/events thus bear a relationship both to bodies and to language, but the manner of interaction is always "problematic." As Paul Patton has pointed out, this virtual element is expressed in language, it subsists therein as sense but it "happens" to bodies, it is attributed to them (See Patton 1997, ¶ 2). To use Deleuze's example, the phrase "the tree greens" expresses in language the sense which corresponds to the event of "becoming-green" which happens to a physical thing, the tree.

9 This is precisely what Deleuze admires, in the Second Series of *The Logic of Sense*, about the Stoic "splitting of the causal relation." Bodies develop in one series, that of causes and Language develops on another, that of incorporeal effects (which themselves are seen to have a kind of "quasi-causality" in relation to bodies). Language here, of course, has to do with the particularly Stoic sense of an order of *lekton* or "significance"—what Deleuze calls sense.

10 "In fact, this bestowal of sense . . . may occur only within a transcendental field which would correspond to the conditions proposed by Sartre in his decisive article of 1937: an impersonal transcendental field, not having the form of a synthetic personal consciousness or a subjective identity—with the subject, on the contrary, being always constituted. The foundation can never resemble what it founds. It does not suffice to say of the foundation that it is another matter—it is also another geography without being another world" (Deleuze 1990, pp. 98–99).

11 For a more thorough development of the relationship of Deleuze's "singularity" to recent mathematical and scientific investigations of self-organizing systems, (DeLanda 1991, p. 15ff).

REFERENCES

- Artaud, Antonin. 1958. *The Theatre and its Double*. Trans. Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Boundas, Constantine V. 1993. "Foreclosure of the Other: from Sartre to Deleuze." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 24,1 (January): 32–43.

- DeLanda, Manuel. 1991. *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*. New York: Zone Books.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1997(a). Desire and Pleasure. Trans. Daniel W. Smith. In Arnold I. Davidson, ed. *Foucault and his Interlocutors*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1997(b). "One Less Manifesto." Trans. Elaine dal Molin and Timothy Murray. In Timothy Murray, ed. *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- . 1995. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1990. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. Ed. Constantine V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1978. "Philosophie et Minorite." *Critique* 369 (February): 154-155.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. "A Preface to Transgression." Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In Donald F. Bouchard, ed. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1962. "The Sexual Aberrations." Trans. James Strachey. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Patton, Paul. 1997. "The World as Seen from Within." In *Theory and Event*, 1.1. Internet: Johns Hopkins University Press. Available from <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tae/>