

Matt Lee
Taking Deleuze (On)

Gilles Deleuze
Negotiations: 1972-1990
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'Creation takes place in bottlenecks . . . A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities and thereby creates possibilities.' (133)

'Appearing' is the bottleneck for me, a word that, taken in its singularity as verb, chokes the air from my lungs, causes the stammering response that follows. How do I take Deleuze, how do I take 'Negotiations'? Twice a day, along with the anti-biotics perhaps. Taking it to take me elsewhere. First, though, the book.

This book is a series of interviews, articles and short texts from the period 1972-1990. It is divided into five sections, one of which is specifically organised around the theme of 'cinema'. I will come back to the question of the work's relevance to 'cinema' later in the review, but my first interest is in bringing out the appearing of the work. The pieces circle around a number of themes and often return to similar arguments and points, reiterating motifs and thoughts along the way. Reading it is a little like glancing through a magazine and the fact that the pieces were often originally designed for publication in such a format no doubt encourages such a take.

To approach the work as though it were anything other than a series of sketches and notes seems to me absurd. Firstly, the vast bulk of these pieces are literally 'off the cuff', being interviews and comments for magazines or newspapers. Secondly, the length of each piece rarely exceeds ten or fifteen pages, and yet moves rapidly through quite a wide range of subjects, literally suggesting the 'flight' that might be associated with lines of flight. There is much movement here, but that, of course, presents serious methodological problems for the philosopher when trying to then engage with the work. The work cannot be 'put on the side', its schemas and models extracted and displayed in the amphitheatrical exhibitionism of analysis. There are of course pointers, even brief arguments, though as Deleuze says at one point, when talking about *Anti-Oedipus*, 'what matters is whether it works, and how it works, and who it works for. It's a machine' (22). Work, not truth, as the criteria of judgement, though this simple split would fail to take account of the work of truth, a work that would no doubt resemble the work that is desired in the machinic book. The arguments themselves need to be judged and evaluated -- found to matter or not, even -- on very strange grounds, grounds that are only there in the works working.

It might have been called 'Interventions' as much as 'Negotiations' because many, if not all the pieces display a philosopher at work in society, intervening into the thoughts of a time and a history. The term 'negotiations' no doubt does more justice to the approach Deleuze adopts, or wants to adopt, in his activity of philosophising because the interventions are those of a self-declared impotent. 'Not being a power', Deleuze writes in the epigram that opens this collection, 'philosophy can't battle with the powers that be, but it fights a war without battles, a guerrilla campaign against them'. It is with this 'in mind', as it were, that we approach this work. It is also here, in this peculiar space of the role of these pieces, that the strongest sense of a failing of the book comes to the fore. The context is somehow gone for most of the pieces. At times I felt like I was listening to voices from the past, from past moments of importance, making comments, passing judgements of times long gone, issues perhaps now irrelevant. There is a strong sense of the historicity, the 'pastness' of much of this work. And yet.

And yet there is a continued vitality to the work, to the pieces that are gathered together here. It is a vitality which arises in a greater fashion precisely because the context of each intervention has become partially or wholly redundant. The re-presenting of the pieces brings out an odd sense of a vitality in fragments, of a non-organic power, one that maintains itself in spite of its disparity. Interestingly the tone and nature of the pieces is still very much that of the philosopher rather than the activist that might fight the guerrilla war, whose imagery and metaphor provides the opening framework for reading this text. The philosopher, unlike the activist, still trying to maintain some distance between the events that force the activists words and deeds, and his own words and deeds. At one point Deleuze says that we should 'stop allowing philosophers to reflect 'on' things. The philosopher creates, he doesn't reflect' (122). This sort of comment sits oddly with a work in which it seems, at times, that Deleuze is doing little else than commenting and reflecting on his own work, on society, on television and the 'control society'. These sorts of comments and the difficulty of pinning down what was going on in the interviews was the greatest problem for me with regard to reading this work. I was aware that the book is often used in commentaries on Deleuze, in a secondary literature that seems set to rapidly explode into academic life, and at the same time was peculiarly unsettled by the reliance on such a loosely constructed work. That is until I began to read it aloud, to read it out to my partner.

As a philosopher I am perhaps lucky to have a partner that enjoys finding out about what I'm up to, what the latest thing is I'm reading, what subjects are in play. One way of doing this is for her to have me read out loud, a practice which, as we are both writers, we find we do quite often anyway. Philosophers tend to become classified in part by their tendency to aid sleep or thought in this situation, with the intense prose of a Derrida or a Heidegger barely capable of being read aloud whilst the lightness and speed of Nietzsche is something we soon learned to share. With Deleuze a similar torpor occurred in reading *Difference and Repetition*, a slowness and density that, as a philosopher, I enjoyed and felt offered almost infinite opportunities for exploration, but that, out loud, seemed to tie the tongue into impossible phrases and partial

expressions, into structures barely containable within the memory of the listener. It wasn't until reading *Negotiations* that the sheer speed of thought that is one of Deleuze's 'trademark' concepts even began to become apparent.

Negotiations is, first and foremost, a text as script. It is possible to read this work too slowly. It is not possible to read too often, perhaps, but to read this book as though the words weighed heavily on the tongue is, for me, to miss the most vital thing about it, even in translation, and that is that the voice of the author, Deleuze's phrasings and pedagogical stance, becomes both visibly and aurally present in a way that few of his other works achieve with such success. Of course were we to only have this one book then it would be possible to dismiss this as the interesting but essentially unpacked thoughts of a vibrant but unexpressed thinker. As it is *Negotiations* is, I would argue, one of the best introductions to Deleuze's thought **after** reading a number of his other texts -- an introduction after-the-fact, a 'taking into' the work of elsewhere. I would think of this in terms of the aircraft taking flight. Before any ascendancy can be achieved the craft has to be constructed and powered, a force placed within it that allows take-off. The throttle then has to be brought forward and that power employed for the experience of defying gravity to really come home. In that sense *Negotiations* is a little like the moment of take-off, the tilt back as the plane veers towards the skies, the sense of exhilaration and the emptiness of air afterwards.

To approach the work, then, as a series of sketches was vitally important, but not in the sense of lack that the 'sketch' brings with it when thought of in terms of the artists sketch, the outline, the 'rough sketch'. These are sketches in a truly theatrical sense, sketches as found in a comedians repertoire, sketches that allow language its performance. I mention 'comedians' because one of the people this book brought to mind as I felt increasingly aware of its sketch-structure was an actor called Ken Campbell. Campbell is one of those peculiar variants on the comedian who plays with that form in order to exploit its pedagogical possibilities (Bill Hicks being another favourite). If there was one thing I would want to recommend in terms of the role of a review it would be to **read this book like a play**. The interesting thing here is that the text itself does not become some form of final arbiter on its own meaning but rather its performance comes to the fore as an exemplary aspect of its production of meanings. It literally comes down to the quality of the performance that can be achieved, not to some final transcendent text as signifier.

Of course, merely suggesting a way in which a work can fruitfully be approached is only part of what might be expected by you in terms of a review. A number of other tasks are often expected of any review, at least any I read, these commonly being reduced, it seems, to the presentation of some sort of precis of the work. Whether this is to really review a work or to allow overworked academics to attempt, fruitlessly, to keep up with the stream of words that flow from publishing houses is another matter, though my own feeling is that reviews too often operate as sophisticated crib notes, providing a poor job at even that lowly task. Plainly, though, one task of the review is to attempt an engagement with the work at hand. In this situation, where the work is one that I would recommend as being worth performing, part of that engagement is to encourage others to read and perform it. 'A 'must read' might hang off the back cover

of this book in the way film posters blandly state inanities like 'the most shocking film ever made' or 'this years ultimate movie'. Such a statement would obviously be little more than bland inanity. How then is it possible to engage with a work of philosophy that itself seems to avoid one of the dominant structures of philosophers work, that is, the text that operates as 'ultimate signifier' of a philosophers thought?

The work working, this would be an event. The event forms the centre that used to be occupied by essence. The fresh arrival, this twisting away from the essence, is absolutely central to Deleuzian work and goes right through his corpus. In *Difference and Repetition*, for example, we find this central breach of the role of essence located quite abruptly in a framework that would take us straight back to Aristotle's *Analytics* and its definitions of possibility, necessity, accident, and essence.

'It will be said that the essence is by nature the most important thing. This however, is precisely what is at issue: whether the notions of importance and non-importance are not precisely notions which concern events or accidents, and are much more 'important' within accidents than the crude opposition between essence and accident itself.' (*Difference and Repetition*, p. 189)

Importance, for Deleuze, is an event. The work working is an event. More importantly this concept allows him 'to introduce elementary novelistic methods into philosophy' (25). With this we reach a point from which we can begin to return to the work Deleuze produces, work such as *Negotiations*, returning in such a way that we can do some justice to the author and begin to read again, read novelistically the work he is putting into play.

Does any of this tell us much about the relation to notions of cinema and film within the book? This work doesn't put forward any cartographies of cinema in the way that the 'natural history' of the cinema found in the *Cinema* books might be said to. It does, however, address the role that the image plays for Deleuze, and it touches on a number of other issues such as the role of the imaginary, a self-characterisation of the *Cinema* books which might operate, in part, as a way into those works, and also the relationship of cinema and film to that oft-abused younger sibling, television. As someone who 'makes films', though primarily on video, the attitude Deleuze displays towards television came as one of the most interesting points at which to begin an engagement with the work. Before moving on to that particular focus let me first suggest a little of what is going on in other aspects of the work.

Five chapters make up the second part of the book devoted to 'Cinemas'. The plural itself suggests a not uncommon emphasis on multiplicity found in Deleuze. Indeed, if Deleuze is anything it is the perennial advocate of the multiplicity. Interestingly he distinguishes between multiple and multiplicity, a distinction that may even be considered 'critical' for Deleuze. In telling the 'story of multiplicity', as Deleuze calls it in *A Thousand Plateaus*, he marks this as the moment of the substantive, the substantive multiplicity. Here a clear attempt is desired to distinguish the multiple, as

many singular unities, from the multiplicity, in which the unity is, precisely, the multiplicity. He suggests, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that,

'the creation of this substantive marks a very important moment. It was created precisely in order to escape the abstract opposition between the multiple and the one, to escape dialectics, to succeed in conceiving the multiple in the pure state, to cease treating it as a numerical fragment of a lost Unity or Totality or as the organic element of a Unity or Totality yet to come, and instead distinguish between different types of multiplicity.' (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 32; cf. *Difference and Repetition*, p. 182)

For myself, though I like the desire, I find the distinction barely perceptible -- barely but not impossibly. It quivers very delicately in this arena of presence in which it seems entirely conceivable but barely expressible. Still, we have the multiplicity that is 'cinemas', presumably, and it is to that part of *Negotiations* that I will turn.

The first chapter of this part of the book is an interview about Godard. Almost as soon as it begins we have the fabulations that Deleuze is so fond of. He begins telling a story about Godard's 'solitude', a story that spins out from a single point, a point made by Deleuze that 'as someone who works a great deal, he must be a very solitary figure' (37). 'Must be'? This itself is odd, but perhaps indicative of a sort of weaving thought that is less concerned with how it can say what it says, rather with where what it says can take it. This is no 'loose' thought either. Deleuze begins to approach the question that *Cahiers du Cinema* (for whom the interview is conducted) ask with the declaration that he is going to explain his 'image of Godard'. In a sense this is Deleuze down to a tee. Ask Deleuze a question and he seems to answer with 'his image' of an answer that, even just by being 'his image', refuses to be 'an answer'. Deleuze maps his own thoughts, his own attempts at concept creation, onto the world around him -- and throughout *Negotiations* we find this constant mapping, remapping, marking and remarking going on. What looks like commentary, philosophy on film, turns into something else. The question here is how necessary 'film' or 'cinemas' or 'politics' or anything is to the explication of the thoughts of Deleuze, whether anything rises above the vehicle of expression, whether even philosophy transforms into little more than -- nothing else than -- forms of expression. This worry begs our indulgence. Why bother with this author rather than that? Why Bergson or Proust rather than Irvine Welsh or the weekly tabloid. For a cultural theorist this may seem illuminating, intoxicating even. Deleuze firing off arrows all over the place, allowing others to pick them up and fire them on again because they merely fell rather than hit a target, stopping dead. In this situation Deleuze may well be a spur to productivity. As a philosopher it seems at times debilitating, removing any truth, any sense of purpose, any function to the work of philosophy. Functions, as Deleuze and Deleuzians would no doubt tell me, are for science however and their loss in philosophy is perhaps nothing other than a realisation of the true role of philosophy. The fear that there is no point, however, still lingers, a fear even Deleuze would shoulder with his explicit declarations of meaning as the point of a statement (129).

In some sense there is an almost pragmatic sense of meaning in Deleuze. 'What we call the meaning of a statement is its point. That's the only definition of meaning and it comes to the same thing as a statement's novelty.' (130) This passage, however, like all passages, continues. 'You can listen to people for hours, but what's the point? . . . That's why arguments are such a strain, why there's never any point arguing'. Statements like these are startling in their brutality. A philosopher, professional pedant some might say, asserting that arguments are pointless, that they are merely a 'strain'? What sort of philosopher is this? No doubt the best sort, Deleuze would say, no longer a philosopher but a misosopher (*Difference and Repetition*, p. 139). No longer the teller of truths but the fountainhead of falsehoods. This approach is, in the wake of the linguistic turn, Heidegger's obsession with Being, and Derrida's permanent postponements, an almost liberating call to creativity in a discipline that is desperately searching for its lost cause. What, though, of cinema? I want to return to this theme, to film, this review desperately clawing its way back to the 'theme' and yet the book forces us away from any theme, forces us to read a philosopher at work, even if it may be at work in destroying philosophy as we know it (if only it had the power). What does Deleuze say about Cinemas, we might ask? Too many things, would be the answer. Why do you even ask? What do you say about cinemas?

Look again at the statement about meanings and points. Even here I am unsure. I haven't the French version to hand and so to read subtleties through translators may 'betray' the 'original text' but who cares. The statement reads 'what we call the meaning of a statement is its point', and this seems clear enough. Except there would be a difference, all the difference in the world perhaps, if the statement read 'the point of a statement is its meaning'.

We have here 'point' and 'meaning'. Point as in purpose or function would lead us to the pragmatic interpretation. Something like, 'every statement plays a role in a language game and this role, its use in the game, is its meaning', to take a late-Wittgenstein caricature as the 'pragmatic' reading. Then the point demands description in the language game that operates to distinguish uses and we find ourselves tangled, as Wittgenstein himself was, in notions like 'forms of life' and language games 'reflecting' such forms of life. What I would suggest, though, is that in this pragmatic interpretation there would be a **reductive reading of meaning**, reducing it to use via the point being defined as the statements' use, which is something we presumably find out through contextualisation, examination of language games and forms of life. Deleuze's statement doesn't seem to be incapable of being read this way. Yet there is a transcendental reading also. In the reductive reading we might say that the statement's point is its meaning, meaning thus reduced to use or point (function). If, however, the meaning is the point then the transcendence of the very possession of meaning gives the statement a point in the first place. Here the very fact of having meaning is the critical focus of investigation and reading.

Such attempts to 'pin down' Deleuze's readings seem almost impossible. Any desire to pin the text to a point of view, to a static shot, would flounder all too quickly. Reading Deleuze, not only do we find plenty of grounds to carry out the sort of reading that might be termed 'deconstructive', where we locate some binary with implicit hierarchy

that betrays explicit intentions, but we find that such a reading would do little. It would have no point. It would stall the text in its undoubted aporias, aporias that elsewhere Deleuze speaks of as 'propadeutics' when discussing Plato's dialogues (*Difference and Repetition*, p. 188). So, given these difficulties, given this constant problem one faces when in any way 'interpreting' Deleuze -- a difficulty that is often neglected in secondary literature on his work -- what might we find for cinemas.

We might find a philosopher at work. In Deleuze's terms this means a philosopher who is creating concepts, lines of thought. This is not a philosophy of the cinema, even though in the *Cinema* books we do find someone who appears to be much closer to attempting what might be called a philosophy of cinema. What we might find, also, is philosophy. More than anything this book, *Negotiations*, is philosophy. More than anything. Cinema moves inside it as does literature or politics or physics or mathematics. Cinema doesn't repeat, for Deleuze it maps out images that themselves, if they're successful, create, have a force. 'The choice isn't between written literature and audio-visual media. It's between creative forces . . . and domesticating forces' (131).

I would myself come back, at this point, to the idea of pedagogy, to philosophy as a creating of concepts. Such creation is not, I would suggest, an arbitrary practice, one without purpose, though the purpose would have to be understood as different from the work of science in creating functions, according to Deleuze, a difference that is undoubtedly connected to notions of use, goal or aim. The purpose of the creation of concepts would need much more unpacking to clarify its role in relation to the creation of scientific functions, but for now I would ask that the difference merely be noted. Thus we would work, with Deleuze, in creating concepts if we were 'doing philosophy' and in this particular aspect some elements of the relation of television to cinema that Deleuze works with can be brought out.

The creation of concepts in philosophy, as philosophy, drives against something I find most appealing in Deleuze's thought and that is the 'war' on stupidity. Not error but stupidity. This is the guerrilla war Deleuze speaks of. This rage against the stupid, against the idiotic, can be found beautifully in *Difference and Repetition* where it is not an enemy to be overcome, not the object of a movement of **aufheben**, but the factor against which thought thinks. We do not conquer the stupid. We do not rationalise the world. We merely fight the guerrilla war whose aim, principally, is the creation of autonomous zones, of enclaves of freedom. In terms of thought, philosophy operates as the groundforce of the liberated zones. In the conclusion to *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze argues for an opening to the difficulty of grounding, of 'to ground', as centring on the problem of determining the indeterminate. He wants to think into this difficulty, not rest in its aporia. Here Deleuze speaks best for himself:

'This indeterminate or groundlessness is also the animality peculiar to thought, the genitivity of thought: not this or that animal form but stupidity (betise). For if thought thinks only when constrained or forced to do so, if it remains stupid so long as

nothing forces it to think, is it not also the existence of stupidity which forces it to think, precisely the fact that it does not think so long as nothing forces it to do so? Recall Heidegger's statement; 'what gives us most cause for thought is the fact that we do not yet think'. Thought is the highest determination, confronting stupidity as though face to face with the indeterminate which is adequate to it. Stupidity (not error) constitutes the greatest weakness of thought, but also the source of its highest power in that which forces it to think.' (275)

From this opening Deleuze can take us into Kant and the introduction of the concept of the determinable, which itself opens onto the question of time, and from which Deleuze explicates the famous notion of the 'fractured I'. Yet it is the intimacy of the relation of stupidity to thought that interests me here, the willingness to almost accept the necessity of stupidity inside thought in order to open thinking. This relationship of intimate connection is one that is rich and constructive and would give the ground for much further thought and yet in terms of cinema there is another relation, between television and cinema, that mirrors the relation of stupidity to thinking.

Television, for Deleuze, is undoubtedly viewed as the 'weak partner' of cinema, indeed at times it almost appears as though it were a corrupting or corrupted development. Some of the comments made in passing regarding television are notable precisely by their hostility to the medium. Deleuze speaks of a 'shame at being human . . . in the face of TV entertainment' (172), and says that 'it's from television that there comes the new threat of a death of cinema' (75). There is an ambiguity however that opens the realm of the 'ought', opens the space of choice in terms of action, creation, production. The virulence with which we find Deleuze speaking at times is plainly for me an ethical opposition and this in itself is fascinating. There is an imperative at work, however explicitly or implicitly, that drives against certain forms of television that are seen as oppressive, constrictive, controlling and stupid. 'Art is resistance: it resists death, slavery, infamy, shame' (174). Such a view places art into a field of obligation, though undoubtedly an ungrounded obligatory, and this curiously ethical approach is one that is to the fore in the comments on television.

What is Deleuze's principal argument against television? What is his problem with the little box in the corner? The fundamental problem -- and it is one which applies to literature and the 'media' more generally -- is the role of these forces as forces of social control. Deleuze makes explicit use of Foucault's notion of 'control societies' and inserts the media in its variegated forms, with television at its forefront, as agencies of social control and **as such** they constitute a danger to cinema, to art, to thought. Thought and art and even good television opposes such agency of social control -- and there is 'good' television. Deleuze spends one of the interviews discussing a series made for French television by the film-maker Godard, and deals at length with the way in which Godard approaches time and expression, and in this we can find some of the possibilities of television being offered. In his 'Letter to Serge Daney' Deleuze also offers both the dangers of television and its possibilities precisely by locating the dangers not in the medium itself but in its function as an agency of social control, and he even offers a possible diagnosis:

'Cinema ought to stop 'being cinematic', stop playacting, and set up specific relationships with video, with electronic and digital images, in order to develop a new form of resistance and combat the televisual function of surveillance and control. It's not a question of short-circuiting television -- how could that be possible? -- but of preventing television subverting or short-circuiting the extension of cinema into the new types of image.' (76)

He cites the pop video, 'up to the point where it lost its dreamlike quality' (76), as showing a glimpse of openings, a citation that chimes with a comment he makes on page 60 in a discussion of *Cinema 2*, and later on page 149 where he says that 'for a moment they bordered on something connected with thought'. Again, the loss of this opportunity came through the reduction of this opening to the necessities of the market and one is reminded of Deleuze's disparaging remarks in *What is Philosophy?* regarding advertising executives and their 'invention' of concepts to sell products.

My point here is that Deleuze's hostility to television appears to come from his analysis of its role as a form of social control and that the possibilities involved within it face a very serious danger of co-option and destruction by such forces. However a second and slightly more hidden line of thought plays alongside and that is a line of argument that puts forward the thinking of the event as the critical point of breakage, as the basis of division between the cinema and good television on the one hand and television/radio/journalism as forms of social control on the other. (There is a third line of argument that works on a basis similar to Heidegger's notion of idle chatter and which uses a notion of 'noise', but I will leave this aside for now as I don't see it as interesting as the arguments of social control and forgetfulness of the event.)

This concept of the event is central to Deleuze's work. 'I've tried in all my books to discover the nature of events' (141). He then argues that the media have a 'limited capacity or inclination' (159) to grasp an event and that what occurs is the reduction of the audience to onlookers, to voyeurs. In Britain at least, a spate of 'pseudo-documentaries' that follow 'ordinary people' around hotels or driving schools or some other god awful plane of tedium tends to bear out the tendency of television and other elements in the media to offer a vicarious soap-opera as substitute for the event of reality. 'The most ordinary event casts us as visionaries, whereas the media turn us into mere passive onlookers, or worse still, voyeurs.' (160) Interestingly, in this passage Deleuze names such a reduction by the term 'spectacular', and similarities with Debord and situationism offer themselves to us very strongly. It is also at this point that the motivation for the earlier ethical stance, the idea of 'art as resistance' (another 'slogan' one would not find out of place in situationist texts) becomes apparent and that is that the social control, the noise, the failure and reductivity of the media and the necessity of opposition, is based upon a sense of importance ascribed to the event. For Deleuze there is, it appears, a danger of an event occurring, continuing to occur even -- that event being the loss of the event.

There is a lot of thought worth pursuing in these texts, a lot of life that flows through the pages of text that belies the often dry and abstract nature of thought and opens Deleuze's work in such a way that further exploration and study is almost called for by these very texts. It is, often, as though Deleuze was offering glimpses, brief flicks that leave us with a sense of wanting more. There is also, though, a sense of urgency to the texts that is refreshing to see in any philosopher, and one that perhaps should remind us that there is a 'commitment' to the work of Deleuze that cannot be forgotten. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the sense of an event of thought itself that is offered to us in these words, an event as powerful as any work of art, an event that might make us want to throw the book against the wall or learn sentences off-by-heart, but one that involves its own unavoidability. That itself should surely be the best recommendation of any work of philosophy.

University Of Sussex, England

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