

REVIEW

## Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari *en rétrospective*

**Antonio L. Rappa\***

Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore

**\*Correspondence:**Antonio L. Rappa,  
rappa@suss.edu.sg**Received:** 20 March 2023; **Accepted:** 28 March 2023; **Published:** 13 April 2023

Like Dolce and Gabbana, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were at one point the most fashionable of left-leaning Western European intellectuals. This paper invokes several of their most accessible and logically appealing pieces and weaves them into a simplified, complex comprehension that is neither simplistic nor superfluous.

**Keywords:** late modernity, capitalism, libertarianism, justice, distributive justice, fairness, the state

### Introduction

Gilles himself described himself as a French philosopher, and his erstwhile intellectual partner, Félix Guattari, was a French psychoanalyst and (occasional) political activist. It is only by accident that they share that linguistic similarity with Dolce and Gabbana (*D and G*). But the similarity stops there, as the *D and G* of the fashion world, known for their hyper-expensive, bizarre, and outlandish clothing and designs, pale in comparison to the appeal of the real Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are perhaps best known as the D and G of Western European designs, the *Dolce and Gabbana* of the intellectually fashionable.

Gilles Deleuze has always been, in my opinion, the heavier of the two, that is to say that Gilles Deleuze usually carries a greater intellectual weight than his incomparable logical partner, Félix Guattari. This was why even Foucault tended to mention Deleuze (rather than Guattari). “One day, perhaps, this century will be Deleuzian,” Michel Foucault once wrote, and of course, as usual, Foucault was right.

Deleuze, while highly critical of his greatest intellectual influences, never neglected to remind all and sundry of his debt to them, listed here in no specific order, preference, or rank: Nietzsche, Bergson, Sartre, and Spinoza.

Together they produced a remarkable range of books, including *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and articles that were trendy if not always accessible. Their concept of

schizoid analysis (schizoanalysis) arises from the former and was considered a significant contribution to Western philosophy at the time.

### Influence

No one can possibly annotate the entire corpus of works that have been influenced by Deleuze and Guattari in a single article or even in a book, as such an endeavor would take several books and years to write and edit. The works are so voluminous that it would take a book-length manuscript of hundreds of pages simply to list the works that have attached themselves and their other selves. This is why it seems better to focus on what we consider our favorite works of theirs.

### Anti-oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia

In my favorite work, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1), Deleuze and Guattari write, “The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. . .” They make use of a multi-faceted metaphor of a rhizome, which was a single yet a thousand plateaus, bewildering, subsequent, consequent, ambiguous, amorphous, alternating; problematic of divergence and difference; multiple peaks of which all sought to be higher than the other; and a range of different peaks and

troughs rising, falling, beginning, and ending. The rhizome has no center but many centers, on psychoses, politics, and directionless, with “different speeds and different intensities” [*Anti-Oedipus*, (1)]. For them, the rhizome has no beginning or end and is timed and timeless. It has started but not yet begun. It was Deleuze and Guattari’s post-modern putsch on the engulfing prison of modernity. Recall how Friedrich Nietzsche went insane. He became insane when he observed a man whipping a horse to death. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1), Deleuze and Guattari developed several psychoanalytical concepts with a focus on schizophrenia and its variations using their version of what some refer to as a stand-point theory. This is where the concept of madness arising from witnessing the whipping of the poor horse to death emerges, or at least is used. Deleuze and Guattari developed a kind of consumer-materialist “psychoanalytic,” a non-medical psychiatric model based on the collective or aggregate human processes of desire and the repurposing of Marxian historical materialism. Their book, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1), was so impactful that it generated a virtual paradigm shift in contemporary psychoanalytic and political philosophy. While Jean-François Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy* (2) has been accused of appropriating several concepts from Freud without acknowledging Freud—especially the aspect of how sexual energy flows in the human body—Deleuze and Guattari promote the opposite, while simultaneously linking desire with materialism.

Contrapuntally, and in an alternative search for expressing the ethics and aesthetics of forms, De Landa and others (who would do so much later) interpret Deleuze and Guattari’s works as something similar to a series of [chaotic] connections expressed through diagrams and images in which they (Deleuze and Guattari) emphasized the critical “morphogenetic capability of matter to generate form on its own” [(3): 33–41], which resulted in heavily influencing several academic fields in genetics and the social sciences, but not all of them.

## Deleuze and the theologians

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari pose the question: “what can a machine produce when it is pre-programmed to do so?” Deleuze rejects the Lacanian concept as well as, more importantly, the Saussurean notion of the sign. Hence limiting the value of the attendant signifier. This is to state that the attendant position of the signifier is reduced when the sign is rebuked and accorded a lower meaning and value. Thus, as opposed to the structuralist linguists of his time, Deleuze rejected all significant-related linguistic models that dominated French linguistics and, of course, the critical work of Ferdinand de Saussure. This would eventually lead Deleuze to decisively reject Lacanism, NeoMarxism, and their obtuse Hegelian roots.

## Desert islands, stratigraphy, and schizoanalysis

David Lapoujade edited and Michael Taormina translated Deleuze’s major works into a collection titled *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*.<sup>1</sup> They make use of the metaphor of continental drift to some effect but are relatively affected. The editor assumes that Deleuze’s philosophy is a dependent geographical variable, in which the independent variables such as time, land, and sea (or the ocean) remain unpredictable and unknown, as with continental drift and oceanic islands.

Stratigraphy and schizoanalysis are not the same things. Some junior scholars and even senior ones tend to mix them up when they are indeed two separate and uniquely different entities. Stratigraphy, as it sounds, is a geographically tinged concept. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of stratigraphy makes it possible to interrogate the limits and ends of the Anthropocene’s horizons. What would otherwise be at odds with the history of man and the proto-history of women would enable us to regard and encourage us toward the way we might think, and to think with a difference rather than simply thinking differently. Therefore, to think ambivalently, to think with ambivalence, is to allow for the rise of the Anthropocene, the rise of (understanding) man.

On the contrary, schizoanalysis is something different and has no reference to geography or geographic horizons but, in fact, only those that enclose the four corners of the mind in the sense of libidinalism and libidinal theory that is more often associated with the works of Jean-François Lyotard. If his name seems familiar to you, it could be because Lyotard is often said to be the founder of post-modernism, which he was not. He only wrote a highly influential work that was published in 1979 and titled *The Postmodern Condition*.

To support their arguments for “schizoanalysis,” Deleuze and Guattari develop four sub-theses as follows:

- (i) Each unconscious libidinal investment impacts the wider socio-historical environment
- (ii) Each unconscious libidinal investment is uniquely separate and different from any other classes (Marxist and non-Marxist)
- (iii) The family is the basic libidinal unit
- (iv) All unconscious libidinal investments carry with them multiple poles as follows: paranoia, reactionary, authoritarian, and schizoid

Unlike Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung’s work on psychoanalysis and analytical psychology, respectively, Deleuze and Guattari’s “schizoanalysis” does not require going through any form of de-sexualization or inert

<sup>1</sup> David Lapoujade (ed.) and Michael Taormina (trans.), 2004, *Desert islands and other texts, 1953–1974*. California: Semiotext(e).

sublimation. However, as a form of mild criticism, neither Freud, Jung, Deleuze, nor Guattari clearly explains how a collective consciousness can be attained, and this relegates it to the theoretical backburner, as is the case with the collective consciousness of the *lumpenproletariat*.

## Impact on women's studies and feminism

There are many feminists, both male and female, who have been influenced by the works of Deleuze and Guattari. For example, (4) published her work on Western feminist discourse and deterritorializations in *Cultural Critique*, which attracted around 700 citations and led to transnational feminist cultural studies or transnational feminism. This has been happening for decades, since the 1980s, as seen in the criticism of Baym (5) and Gorelick (6), for example. Women build on men rather than giving voice to or vocalizing other women, women of color in particular. Indeed, some women of color who make it "big" tend to adopt white values and move into white neighborhoods while forgetting their own racialized past. This is a world apart from materially successful Black men like O.J. Simpson and Tiger Woods who marry trophy wives, all of whom are young, tall, beautiful, buxom, and statuesque blondes. Do successful women of color marry wealthy white men because of their own choices or because they look down on their African American brothers? No one knows because of the depth of political "correctness" in America. This itself represents the ideology of race-based class dysfunctionality.

Despite political correctness and ideological dysfunctionality, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari has nevertheless influenced academics in literary theory, linguistics, musicology, town-planning, and the genesis of form in the works of Baym, Buchanan, De Landa, Gorelick, Grisham, Nail, Hillier, and many others. Sadly, many feminist scholars, especially the newer ones, have reported the difficulties with which it is to break into the established core of publishers and big-name theorists such as Judith Butler and her partner Wendy Brown in political science; or in literature, the award-winning writer Toni Morrison and the great French writer Hélène Cixous, simply because there is no scholarly space and the intellectual programs that revolve around the famous feminists are highly territorialized and demarcated. This is totally against the works of Deleuze and Guattari, which encouraged the rapid deterritorialization of spaces and contravenes their

political philosophy. It thus remains ironic that the women who made their names in the light of these two men's works now prevent others from publishing with them for fear of diluting their academic works.

## Conclusion

One might ask, who was more famous or popular—Deleuze or Guattari? On one hand, Deleuze (January 18, 1925–November 4, 1995) was so influential in France that he was cited as one of the top philosophers of the 20th century. Guattari was so lacking in popularity that he is hardly mentioned by many social scientists. Yet, the politically correct answer is that they were both highly cited scholars in their own disciplines and in their own right. Together as a team, they became even more famous and popular as they built on one another's achievements. However, there are always preferences among scholars, and Deleuze appears to be the more popular one of the two. But that is only my view, and my views are not often the most popular.

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