

AGAINST CONTINUITY

GILLES DELEUZE'S SPECULATIVE REALISM



ARJEN KLEINHERENBRINK

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Preface

This book argues that the beating heart of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy is an ontology of individual and irreducible entities, and of discontinuity between such entities. It is perhaps the first of its kind, as supporters and critics alike take Deleuze to dissolve entities into more fluid fields, forces, or events. This ruling consensus holds that Deleuze regards entities such as rocks, volcanoes, planets, people, horses, festivals, and thoughts as mere aspects of processes that exceed them. Deleuze's concepts are therefore almost invariably seen as tools to help us grasp this reduction of discrete entities into a far more continuous kind of flux.

Yet Deleuze is in fact a thinker of irreducibility and withdrawal. His crucial insight is that entities are never a mere part, representation, effect, moment, or sign of anything else. No entity can ever be reduced to another substance, subject, world, structure, movement, description, perception, content, context, future, past, or any combination of those. Nothing can stand in for anything else, and even the famous 'virtual realm' cherished by many Deleuzians fails to account for all existing things – which is exactly why Deleuze, as we will see, abandons the notion of such a realm quite early in his career. Starting from the thesis that nothing can be reduced to anything else, Deleuze designs and refines an ontology to account for the absolute singularity of entities. This one thesis motivates his resistance to representation in *Difference and Repetition*, to what he calls 'false' depth and height in *The Logic of Sense*, to transcendence in *Anti-Oedipus*, to so-called 'arborescent' thinking in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and to communication in *What is Philosophy?*.

This book aims to show how Deleuze's major concepts are all part of a coherent system that charts the nature and interactions of entities. Instead of positing a separate movement or process

to account for change, it demonstrates that entities themselves are always already excessive over their relations, constituting a surplus that suffices to ground change and novelty. All of Deleuze's famous neologisms will thus be shown to *strengthen* rather than *weaken* the irreducibility of entities.

This is not an attempt to be contrarian for the sake of being contrarian. It is the necessary outcome of reconstructing Deleuze's philosophy from its central insights. In no particular order, these include that 1) everything is a machine, rhizome, or assemblage; 2) Being is univocal; 3) relations are external to terms; 4) a body is first a body without organs; 5) a body is not defined by its predicates, but by its powers; 6) nothing is a representation of anything else; 7) difference is first and foremost internal difference; and 8) machines never touch directly, but only encounter others as translated into partial objects and flows. These theses are part of a systematic ontology in which a tune hummed by a philosopher on his way home is just as real as the Waal river, an electron, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, the city of Nijmegen, a meteor, the Wu-Tang Clan, or a bicycle.

In addition to offering a fresh new reading of Deleuze, there is a second purpose to this book. It aligns his ontology with some notable thinkers associated with speculative realism and – to a lesser degree – new materialism. Deleuze is already a frequently cited source in both genres, but he is again consistently misinterpreted as reducing entities to something decidedly non-ontic. As this book already critiques such readings as they are found in Deleuze exegesis, it would be superfluous to repeat that analysis for his reception in the aforementioned genres. Instead, this book opts for a more constructive approach and compares key elements of Deleuze's ontology to salient points in so-called 'object-oriented' philosophies in these genres, which, too, hold that individual entities are the basic constituents of reality. The aim of these comparisons is twofold. The first is to show that Deleuze is a fellow traveller and a source of valuable insights for philosophers who theorise reality in terms of a radical *discontinuity* between *irreducible* entities, even if current orthodoxy suggests the exact opposite. Second, the comparisons will highlight several problems in contemporary object-oriented philosophies and indicate how these might be remedied.

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| AO | <i>Anti-Oedipus</i> |
| ATP | <i>A Thousand Plateaus</i> |
| BSP | <i>Balance Sheet Program for Desiring Machines</i> |
| B | <i>Bergsonism</i> |
| C ₁ | <i>Cinema 1 – The Movement Image</i> |
| C ₂ | <i>Cinema 2 – The Time Image</i> |
| D | <i>Dialogues</i> |
| DI | <i>Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974</i> |
| DR | <i>Difference and Repetition</i> |
| ECC | <i>Essays – Critical and Clinical</i> |
| EPS | <i>Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza</i> |
| ES | <i>Empiricism and Subjectivity</i> |
| F | <i>Foucault</i> |
| FB | <i>Francis Bacon – The Logic of Sensation</i> |
| FLB | <i>The Fold – Leibniz and the Baroque</i> |
| K | <i>Kafka – Toward a Minor Literature</i> |
| KCP | <i>Kant's Critical Philosophy</i> |
| LAT | <i>Lettres et autres textes</i> |
| LS | <i>The Logic of Sense</i> |
| N | <i>Negotiations</i> |
| NP | <i>Nietzsche and Philosophy</i> |
| PS | <i>Proust and Signs</i> |
| SC | <i>Seminars on Cinema</i> |
| SCS | <i>Seminars on Capitalism and Schizophrenia</i> |
| SK | <i>Seminars on Kant</i> |
| SL | <i>Seminars on Leibniz</i> |
| SPP | <i>Spinoza – Practical Philosophy</i> |
| SS | <i>Seminars on Spinoza</i> |
| SU | <i>Superpositions</i> |
| TRM | <i>Two Regimes of Madness</i> |

| | |
|----|----------------------------|
| WG | <i>What is Grounding?</i> |
| WP | <i>What is Philosophy?</i> |

Introduction: The Machine Thesis

I All Entities are Machines

Consider the following list. A song, novel, bird's nest, fictional character, hallucination, rock, orchid, wound, brain, battle, chemical, painting, love, sickness, toy, movie, person, crowd, house, play, and river. What do philosophers usually do with such diversity? We organise it. More specifically, we tend to theorise that the chaotic multitudes of discrete entities comprising reality do not truly exist in and of themselves, because they are just reflections or expressions of a mere handful of entities or forces said to 'really' make the world what it is. We then proclaim that some entities, laws, agents, perspectives, structures, rules, or domains are more real or fundamental than others. We turn those things into the backbone, source, truth, or rule for all others. A list of famous candidates for these coveted positions would include primordial matter, eternal forms, God, substance, Spirit, subject, vital impetus, consciousness, power relations, discourses, ideology, evolution, culture, human nature, Nature, 'nature and nurture', neurons, and subatomic particles. Whatever the selection, the inevitable result is a dualism that effectively divides reality into two sides. One side will contain one or some of the contestants just listed, and only it or they will truly cause and determine what happens and exists. The other side will consequently contain only appearances, effects, moments, representations, points, or derivatives of that first side. This reductionist tendency is among our most deeply ingrained habits.

The greatness of Gilles Deleuze is his rejection of this habit. He renounces all forms of dualism by systematically endowing all entities with equal reality. Any two entities – for example an orchid and a nation-state – may of course differ tremendously if

one considers their components, their history, the conditions for their survival, their actions, and their relations to other beings. According to Deleuze, however, no amount of such *existential differences* can change the fact that the orchid and the nation-state are *ontological equals*. Neither can be reduced to anything else. Neither can ever be said to be nothing but the expression or representation of something else. Both are first and foremost things in themselves, which is to say forces that create their own difference in the world. This is the case for every entity listed at the beginning of this section, plus for every other being of whatever type that we may want to consider.

Deleuze emphasises this ontological equality of all mental, physical, chemical, fictive, organic, and digital entities by calling each and every one of them a ‘machine’: ‘everything is a machine’ (AO 12). It will take this entire book to explain the full meaning of that deceptively simple statement, but at this point it simply means that nothing can be reduced to anything else. Every entity is a machine in that it has its own operations in reality. No love can be reduced to biological drives or hormonal activity, no disease can be reduced to the will of some divinity, no word can be reduced to a language, and no hurricane can be reduced to an expression of an overarching Nature. Instead, every love, sickness, utterance, and storm is itself a force unleashed in the world. The idea that everything is such a machine is not just a manner of speaking. For Deleuze, it should be taken completely literally: ‘everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections’ (AO 11). We will call this Deleuze’s ‘machine thesis’. The thesis implies what Deleuze calls a ‘hyper-realism’ (K 70), because it places volcanoes on the same ontological footing as fleeting thoughts, Genghis Kahn, neutrons, and office chairs. In contrast to almost all major philosophers since Kant, Deleuze holds 1) that an astonishing variety of discrete and irreducible entities comprise the fundamental texture of reality, and 2) that thought is capable of adequately discerning the ontological structure with which each such entity is endowed. He has perhaps created the first univocal ontology of individual entities without any recourse to some ‘machine of all machines’, however conceived. The core of his philosophy is a systematic defence and elaboration of this hyper-realism or ‘universal machinism’ (ATP 256). In order to

better grasp the full scope of his machine thesis, let us first exclude some possible misinterpretations.

First and again, ‘we are not using a metaphor [...] when we speak of machines’ (BSP 118; cf. AO 12, 50, 56; ATP 69; BSP 131; DR 190; K 22). Deleuze does not claim that everything is like lawnmowers or chainsaws. Machines ‘have nothing to do with gadgets, or little homemade inventions’ (BSP 117). They are ‘neither imaginary projections in the form of phantasies, nor real projections in the form of tools’ (BSP 119). Instead of the weak thesis that everything is *like* machines, Deleuze advocates the strong thesis that everything *is* machines. No serious understanding can be attained by watering down the machine thesis in advance and pretending that we are merely speaking ‘as if’.

Second, machine being is not a state. Someone could think that entities are sometimes machines and sometimes something else. After all, does Deleuze himself not also write that everything is a rhizome, an assemblage, and a multiplicity? Yet an entity is never a machine today and a rhizome tomorrow. These concepts are synonyms, not modalities. Deleuze writes that “‘rhizome’ is the best term to designate multiplicities’ (TRM 362), that all multiplicities are assemblages and that assemblages are machines (D 69, 71, 132), that a rhizome ‘is a multiplicity and an assemblage’ (K 37), and that a machine is a multiplicity and an assemblage (ATP 34). When writing that the assemblage is ‘the minimum real unit’ (D 51), or that ‘multiplicities are reality itself’ (TRM 310; cf. 305), Deleuze therefore simply repeats the machine thesis. The variation in terminology serves to emphasise various aspects of machines which will be explained later. The same holds for concepts such as ‘social machine’, ‘technical machine’, and ‘desiring-machine’. These are but different aspects of how all machines function: *‘they are the same machines, but it is not the same regime’* (BSP 130).

Third, ‘everything is a machine’ does not designate a privileged group of beings. Socrates may deny that eternal forms exist for ‘worthless things’ like mud, hair, and dirt (Plato 1997: 364/130d). Deleuze, however, affirms that ‘hair *is* a thing in its own right’ and that even the sunbeams hallucinated by the schizophrenic Judge Schreber are machines (AO 211, 12). Consider also the variety of what are called machines, assemblages, rhizomes, and multiplicities in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. It includes ships, knife rests, hotels, circuses, books, castles, courts, music, hallucinations, writers, plants, animals, orchids, wasps,

rocks, rivers, societies, Glenn Gould's music, packs of rats, couch grass, bureaucracies, brains, clocks, ants, Amsterdam, potatoes, children, and toys. It also includes clerks and office equipment (labour machine), mounted archers (man-horse-bow machine), phalanxes (hoplites-lances-shields machine), and dancing (dance-floor-dancer machine) (BSP 118). Deleuze even grants 'a day', 'a spring', and 'a five o'clock' the irreducibility of machines (SCS 150277). Note that these are entities from many domains, including biology, chemistry, fantasy, geology, politics, language, astronomy, and myth. Deleuze is not constructing a bizarre Borgesian taxonomy for obscure poetic reasons. He is simply asserting time and again that everything is a machine, whether 'real, contrived, or imaginary' (TRM 17). He insists that machines are neither the set of objects emerging from the hands of a maker (BSP 118), nor the set of objects used as extensions by organisms (AO 324). Multiplicities do not merely concern the unconscious, or nature, or our bodies (TRM 310). The machinic is neither a mechanical domain opposed to a non-mechanical one, nor an organic domain opposed to a non-organic one (D 104). Where machines are concerned, 'Nature = Industry, Nature = History' (ATP 37), which refuses all distinctions between the artificial and the natural or a primitive past and an evolved present (ATP 69). The machine thesis is univocal, and hence 'there is no biosphere or noosphere, but everywhere the same Mechanosphere' (ATP 69).

The machine thesis obviously raises two series of questions. First, what does it mean to define entities as machines? What are their features? How do they work? Second, why would it be necessary to define entities as machines? To which problem does the machine thesis respond? The nine chapters following this introduction answer both questions in detail, but we briefly foreshadow those answers here. We start with the second question, because it allows us to introduce the one principle from which Deleuze's entire ontology is progressively deduced.

The principle is that relations are external to terms (ES 66). This 'externality thesis' is absolutely central to Deleuze's thought. Much like the *cogito* for Descartes, the externality thesis is 'a thunderclap in philosophy' for Deleuze.¹ No element of his philosophy is so important yet simultaneously so frequently disregarded. The externality thesis launches Deleuze into the creation of one of the great systematic philosophies of the twentieth century. The entire second chapter of this book is dedicated to this thesis, but its main

features can be previewed here. A term can be anything: a tornado, a truck, a game of tennis, a pang of fear, or a tomato. It does not need to be human or even alive. Relations include but are not limited to touching, seeing, colliding, pulling, having, knowing, crushing, seducing, rubbing, placing, containing, destroying, and creating. Externality means that an entity in itself is never present in its relations. It posits a difference in kind between an entity itself and its manifestations, which makes direct contact between entities impossible (as an entity can only ever encounter other manifestations, not other entities as such). It implies that each entity has properties constituting an excess over and above its current, past, future, and even possible relations. This is the case even if it exists for a mere second, during which it is at the complete mercy of other forces. Even in the most smooth-running machine imaginable, all parts will thus remain ontologically irreducible to that machine as well as to each other (K 37). There are such machines all the way to infinity: 'each segment is a machine or a piece of the machine, but the machine cannot be dismantled without each of its contiguous pieces forming a machine in turn, taking up more and more place' (K 56; cf. FLB 8). In short, externality means that nothing is reducible to anything else, even if 'anything else' is everything else.² It follows that relations, lying at the surface of things, are not reducible to their machines either (LS 19, 132). Nevertheless, entities are not self-caused or uncreated. As we will see, externality also does not lead to an old-fashioned dualism that divides reality into 'relational stuff' and 'term stuff'. Externality merely states that entities are not exhausted by their relations, whether they be atoms in a molecule or notes in a symphony. Every entity is always itself a force to be reckoned with. This view of entities as forces is what Deleuze means by his notion of 'non-organic' or 'anorganic' life (ATP 503):

From this point of view natural substances and artificial creations, candelabras and trees, turbine and sun are no longer any different. A wall which is alive is dreadful; but utensils, furniture, houses and their roofs also lean, crowd around, lie in wait, or pounce. (CI 51)

What can we say about a reality in which externality holds? Most importantly, it cannot have an ultimate ground or even privileged points. Everything must happen between entities themselves. After all, a universal ground by definition concerns direct relations with

the interior of entities. Yet nothing will be reducible or essentially related to a specific God, Spirit, substance, material, part, whole, or pattern. Not a single emotion is reducible to a brain or to a combination of a brain, a genome, and a culture. Not a single rock is reducible to its atoms and the events that shape it. All internalism, no matter how subtle, will be forbidden by externality:

[R]elations are external to terms. Such a thesis can be understood only in opposition to the tireless efforts by rationalist philosophers to resolve the paradox of relations: either a means is found to make the relation internal to the term, or a more profound and inclusive term is discovered to which the relation is already internal. (DI 163)

Externality is the main problem animating Deleuze's thought: how can reality be what it is if direct contact between entities is impossible? The pursuit of this question culminates in an ontology 'where terms exist like veritable atoms, and relations like veritable external bridges, [. . .] a Harlequin world of colored patterns and non-totalizable fragments, where one communicates via external relations' (DI 163; cf. D 55).

As for the first question, Deleuze will argue that, ontologically, each entity is a fourfold. Or as he puts it, every machine or assemblage is 'tetravalent' (ATP 89). As we will see in the chapters to follow, the externality thesis allows Deleuze to progressively deduce that each entity must necessarily possess four basic features which comprise its ontological structure. As early as *Difference and Repetition*, he is already quite explicit about this fourfold nature of beings, writing that 'everything has two odd, dissymmetrical and dissimilar "halves", [. . .] each dividing itself in two' (DR 279–80). It is easy to see why every entity would have at least two different aspects. If externality holds, then each being is split between what it is in itself and how it manifests to other entities, and those two aspects must differ in kind. Understanding why each of these aspects must then be a further twofold requires more effort to explain, so this will have to wait until later chapters. Note, however, that if reality is comprised of discrete and irreducible beings, Deleuze must do more than simply describe the nature of such entities. In the absence of an overarching order or principle to determine which entities actually exist and what happens between them, he also needs to explain how entities among themselves produce, alter, and destroy each other. This is why in addition to

the fourfold structure of machines, Deleuze's ontology also outlines three types of synthesis between entities, which account for their genesis, endurance, alteration, and termination.

As said, an adequate explanation of the full meaning and scope of the machine thesis requires the entire length of this book. These introductory citations and remarks, however, should provide an initial grasp of why Deleuze opts for the term 'machine' to describe any entity whatsoever. First, if reality would be animated by a single entity, principle, or structure (or a limited set thereof), then it (or they) would be the 'motor', 'factory', or 'machine' that produces everything that exists, drives all that transpires, and accounts for every detail of reality. In denying the existence of such an overarching 'Machine', Deleuze will instead argue that every entity is *itself* a machine, in the sense of being a causally effective agent that makes its own difference in the world. Second, Deleuze means to signal that each entity has complex inner workings, which our elaboration of the fourfold structure of machines will uncover over the course of this book.

2 A Speculative Philosophy

This book reconstructs Deleuze's ontology of fourfold entities and the three syntheses that characterise their interactions. Quite surprisingly, it is the first work to do so. Despite Deleuze's explicit insistence on the externality thesis, the machine thesis, and the fourfold nature of entities (the passages cited in the previous section are but a few among many more that we will encounter later), Deleuze's readers interpret him as anything but a thinker of irreducible entities. For example, the recently published *Deleuze and Metaphysics* contains neither a single reference to how Deleuze accords all entities equal ontological dignity by virtue of being machines, nor a single trace of the fourfold nature of such machines.³

In fact, many interpretations of Deleuze's philosophy can broadly be grouped into three categories, each of which is incommensurable with the machine ontology to which he adheres (as we will see). First, there are those who claim that Deleuze is a philosopher without a system. They read Deleuze as proposing that philosophers can never do better than design individual concepts which are neither part of nor derived from a rigorous and coherent theory of what comprises reality. Such concepts are then but

isolated tools whose meaning one can tailor to whatever political or aesthetic project is at hand. Second, there are interpretations of Deleuze as a metaphysician who reduces entities to something decidedly non-ontic: a chaotic and pulsating flux of quasi pre-Socratic processes or an ephemeral multitude of events. Third and finally, there are those who read Deleuze's philosophy as a sustained assault on metaphysics. These treat Deleuze as deconstructing the very possibility of ontology, and as agreeing that phenomenology and hermeneutics are all that remains after the death of metaphysics.

Much of this is explained by the context in which Deleuze's works were written and subsequently read. The major currents of twentieth-century continental philosophy are arguably phenomenology, Marxism, critical theory, and their various hybrids. In each of these, to consider an entity as an autonomous force in reality, as a thing in itself that affects other things *qua this thing*, amounts to an astonishing display of naivety. 'True' philosophy should always consist in showing that what we initially think of as real beings are in fact the signs of something entirely different: ideologies, economic structures, power relations, language, cultural context, or the structure of human consciousness and perception. The assumption is that thinking about the being of beings themselves can never amount to anything but a deluded scientism, according to which we know the exact properties of entities without any distortion caused by the finitude and particularity of their observers. Quentin Meillassoux has neatly summarised this axiom of continental philosophy as 'correlationism': the belief that we can only ever think about the correlation between thinking and whatever we think about, and never just about *those things* (2011: 5). If correlationism is true, then of course, 'everything is a machine' cannot possibly be a thesis about the actual being of entities themselves. It can then merely be a thesis about *human* interaction with the world as we experience it.

Yet the fact that the interpretations of Deleuze just mentioned are understandable given their historical context does not make them correct. The first chapter of this book shows that no interpretation of Deleuze as anything but a thinker of irreducible entities comprising the very texture of reality can stand up to scrutiny. Spending an entire chapter on this may seem slightly excessive, but the notion that Deleuze is anything but a thinker of irreducible entities is sufficiently widespread to warrant such attention.

That being said, we now move on to note that our presentation of Deleuze's ontology will show that he is both a forerunner and a high point of what is called *speculative realism*, and more specifically of its 'object-oriented' branch.

It is reasonable to assume that readers of this book are somewhat familiar with the basic tenets of speculative realism, so that a brief overview will suffice here.⁴ Speculative realists seek to do away with or move beyond correlationism. In different ways and for varying reasons, they aim to theorise reality independently of however human beings may experience it. 'Realism' therefore signifies (at the very least) a commitment to the existence of a reality beyond the world of human experience. The adjective 'speculative' signals that thought *qua thought* can conceive of this reality.⁵ A speculative realist can of course hold (as some do) that the natural sciences or mathematics give us access to reality as it is in itself, but the idea that this is the case is not based on a scientific or mathematical datum: it is rooted in thought itself.

Speculative realism takes its name from an eponymous 2007 conference hosted at the University of London's Goldsmiths College. It brought together the work of Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Quentin Meillassoux. Each of these four seeks to break with the correlationist dogma that holds (continental) philosophy in thrall, but their positions differ significantly. This is not the place to provide a detailed description of how they arrive at those positions, but recalling some of their basic features is nonetheless useful to get a better sense of some of the ways in which speculative realists characterise reality as it exists independently from human experience.

For Meillassoux, reality as such is (characterised by) a hyper-contingency or 'hyper-Chaos' (2011: 64). When we peer beyond our relatively stable and predictable world of experience, what there ultimately is turns out to be 'a rather menacing power' by which anything can change into anything else at any moment, without needing any real reason to do so. Rather than a somewhat sensible and logical order that neatly dictates what transpires, the Real is the absence of any form of universal order whatsoever. This absence makes for hyper-contingency: anything can become anything at any moment. As Meillassoux writes, by this power anything can be instantly destroyed, monstrous absurdities can emerge, every dream and every nightmare can be realised, or the entire universe could just freeze into a motionless lump of

inactivity three seconds from now.⁶ He also holds that mathematics is able to adequately deal with this infinite mutability of reality, so that despite our inability to rely on anything solid and durable 'out there', humanity still has at least one tool with which to orient itself.

Based on the writings of Schelling, Grant argues that underlying the vast scores of entities that we may discern is a universe that we should understand as being pure productive power. Before anything particular that may exist, there is always the inexhaustible productivity of nature as such.⁷ This productivity should not be thought of as yet another 'thing' underlying all other existing things, but rather as a pure dynamism that cannot be captured in ontic or substantial terms. We are certainly able to think its existence, but it is impossible to then take the further step of accurately representing it in thought.

Brassier's position offers a somewhat bleak view of reality. Taking his cue from nihilism, eliminativist philosophy, physics, and neurology, he argues that reality beyond human experience is a cold, indifferent, and above all *dying* domain. The combined efforts of human reason and scientific investigation force us to acknowledge that reality, once we successfully purge it from our human (all too human) projections, simply mocks our hopes and dreams. It is not just the case that there exists a reality beyond human experience; it also turns out that this reality is largely antithetical to our aspirations, and in particular to our (vain) efforts to ascribe meaning to the world. The world is not attuned to our needs, and the only thing humanity has to look forward to is the death of our sun and the ultimate extinction of the universe. Philosophy's task is therefore to replace all anthropocentric views of reality with the disenchanted, traumatic realisation that extinction is the ultimate horizon of existence. As Brassier writes at the end of *Nihil Unbound*, the subject of philosophy must simply realise that he or she is already dead.⁸

Finally, Harman has an ontology according to which objects harbour a withdrawn reality warded off from all human access (and also from access by other non-human objects, it should be added).⁹ Atoms, chairs, centaurs, poodles, wars, and circus tents all have a private, interior aspect that constitutes their fundamental reality, as opposed to how they manifest or function in their being experienced by others. This leads to a view of reality as a vast carpentry of different types of entities that engage in

constant negotiations and translations of each other's features, all the while withdrawing their interior being from their engagements with others.

These positions are quite divergent, and then there are some additional factors that make it difficult to determine who (and what) does (or does not) belong to speculative realism. Ray Brassier, for example, has been trying to disassociate himself from the label. Quentin Meillassoux actually refers to his position as 'speculative materialism', and is also counted among a second group of thinkers seeking to break the correlationist circle. In addition to Meillassoux, these *new materialists* also include thinkers such as Manuel DeLanda and Karen Barad. Moreover, during the past decade or so, a variety of other thinkers have also come to be associated with either or both labels (for varying reasons, at various times, in some cases perhaps against their wishes, et cetera), including but not limited to Levi Bryant, Tristan Garcia, Bruno Latour, Markus Gabriel, Maurizio Ferraris, Jane Bennett, and Elizabeth Grosz.

The fact that none of these thinkers fully agrees with any of the others is somewhat confusing, but let's be pragmatic and simply state that each of them is a speculative realist in the *minimal* sense of holding that thought can arrive at meaningful statements about reality as it is beyond direct experience. Each of them is in some way involved in drawing new attention to reality itself and in the construction of some new form of metaphysics after the long night of correlationism. After the previous section, it should be clear that Deleuze ought to rank among these speculative realists (and the remainder of the book will demonstrate this in detail). His machine ontology is clearly realist in the sense that entities are machines *qua themselves*, and not 'for us'. And it is speculative in the sense that the ontological structure of these machines is progressively deduced from the externality thesis, instead of being empirically observed.

The question, however, is *where* among speculative realists Deleuze's machine ontology should be ranked. An interesting way of categorising speculative realists is to ask whether their philosophy is 'object-oriented'. This is the case if it holds that individual entities are the most fundamental constituents of reality. For example, Grant's philosophy is emphatically not object-oriented, as he considers individual entities to be the expressions of a more fundamental productive and dynamic power. Conversely,

Harman's ontology is a textbook case of object-oriented ontology, as he holds that there is nothing to be found beyond objects. Rather, the 'deeper' reality lying beyond how entities are encountered by others is simply a feature of objects themselves.

In addition to Harman, six other thinkers among those just mentioned classify as object-oriented thinkers, as they hold that microbes, shoes, pieces of slate, unicorns, human societies, sequoias and countless other entities *are* reality. These six are Bruno Latour, Maurizio Ferraris, Tristan Garcia, Markus Gabriel, Manuel DeLanda, and Levi Bryant. The others would argue that such beings are distorted representations, fragments, derivatives, or expressions of something more fundamental and decidedly non-ontic, for example a hyper-contingency, chaos, intensities, materiality, processes, interactivity, and so on. This book will argue that object-oriented thinkers are the speculative realists to whom Deleuze is closest. As the previous section has indicated, his ontology accords equal reality to entities from any domain whatsoever, and holds that rocks, rivers, cities, songs, and brains are basic constituents of reality, without requiring any support from some more fundamental force, process, or substance. The interesting part, however, is not just that Deleuze should be counted as an object-oriented thinker *avant la lettre*. His position is also *unique* among object-oriented philosophers. And as we will see throughout the book, his ontology of fourfold machines and the three syntheses arguably avoids some of the weaker points and inconsistencies that haunt the ontologies of other object-oriented thinkers.

Yet even though we will identify some of the more interesting similarities and differences between Deleuze's machine ontology and the object-oriented thinkers, this book is nonetheless primarily an investigation and reconstruction of Deleuze's machine ontology *as such*. Since it claims to offer an entirely new account of Deleuze's hitherto overlooked machine ontology, it would not do to muddle the analysis with a constant back and forth between Deleuze and other philosophers. That would merely distract the reader from the deductive rigour of Deleuze's argument. Even worse, it could engender the suspicion that Deleuze's machine ontology is not truly there in the source material, but rather a projection from object-oriented ontology on to his works. Our exegesis will therefore be interspersed with seven brief intermezzos, each offering a comparison between Deleuze and another object-oriented thinker. These seven intermezzos will not present

the positions of those thinkers in full detail. Rather, they will focus on key points of (positive and negative) resonance that will hopefully lay some of the groundwork for more extensive future comparisons.

At this point, however, anyone vaguely familiar with speculative realism might already wonder about Deleuze's relation to both Harman and Bryant. After all, Harman, too, claims that entities are irreducible fourfolds, and Bryant's *Onto-Cartography* (2014) also defends an ontology in which all entities are defined as machines. If both fourfolds and machines are already well-established notions in speculative realism, one can wonder what Deleuze's machine ontology can possibly have to add. As we will see, however, there are significant differences between Deleuze's machine ontology and Harman's or Bryant's ontology. Harman and Deleuze both hold that entities are fourfolds, but they have a radically different account of how entities change. As we will see, Harman holds that objects can only ever change on a very limited number of occasions, whereas Deleuze thinks that change is far more continuous and incremental than Harman would ever accept. As for Bryant, even though he also calls entities 'machines' and draws heavily on Deleuze's work, Bryant's machines are twofolds and not fourfolds. This might seem like an insignificant difference, but we will see that it is actually crucial. Whereas Deleuze's fourfolds lead to a pluralist ontology in which each entity is irreducible because of absolute *discontinuity* existing between entities, Bryant's own machine ontology leads to a monism in which reality is characterised by *continuity*, and machines are merely local points in a single dynamic field.

All in all, there are two aspirations to this book: first and foremost, to present the first rigorous reconstruction of Deleuze's ontology of irreducible machines, presenting readers with an entirely fresh and unexpected perspective on Deleuze's philosophy; second, to align Deleuze with contemporary speculative realism by comparing his ontology to some of the more salient features of other object-oriented thinkers.

3 Method and Structure

Except for the seven intermezzos, this is a book on Deleuze *qua* Deleuze. It does not compare his concepts and arguments to their roots in other philosophies, scientific theories, or works of art,

except when necessary to understand a specific aspect of machine ontology. Someone may object that Deleuze writes that ‘philosophy cannot be undertaken independently of science or art’ (DR xvi). This, however, refers to the construction of a philosophy. Once finished, it can be reconstructed without paying too much attention to the scaffolding used in its assembly. Given our focus on ontology, this book also offers little in terms of the political, aesthetic, and other more practical aspects of Deleuze’s thought.

Second, given the sheer scale of Deleuze’s work, we must avoid straying from the core of his thought. We therefore focus on *Difference and Repetition*, *The Logic of Sense*, and *Anti-Oedipus*, which contain the most explicit elaborations of the fourfold and the syntheses.¹⁰ These works use wildly different vocabularies, so in the interest of clarity we give a slight preference to the terminology of *Anti-Oedipus*. The other two books use jargon weighed down by decades or centuries of accrued meaning, but the machinic terminology is barely burdened by such distractions.¹¹ Moreover, as Deleuze explicitly chose this terminology to minimise undue associations with other philosophies (DI 220), it is only reasonable to follow suit. Focusing on three core works also solves the problem of ‘who is talking here?’ that haunts Deleuze’s books about others. For example, it is difficult to determine if *Bergsonism* is an account of Bergson’s philosophy, Deleuze’s, or a Bergson–Deleuze hybrid. We circumvent this issue by referring to such works only where they prefigure or repeat theses and arguments from the core works just mentioned. Despite these measures, many neologisms and obscure formulations still remain to be dealt with. Quotations in earlier chapters will therefore sometimes contain terms which cannot be explained until much later (‘desire’ is one of those). The book may also contain more citations than readers are used to, but the excess of reference will emphasise the parsimony and constant recurrence of the model that consistently underlies Deleuze’s writings. Also, we do not presume that the reader is already familiar with Deleuze’s jargon. The many citations and their corresponding explanations will serve to slowly give readers a good grasp of Deleuze’s conceptual apparatus, so that in later chapters of the book, sentences in High Deleuzian will actually be intelligible.

Third, not all of *Difference and Repetition* is useful in elaborating Deleuze’s machine ontology. In that first work where Deleuze tried to ‘do philosophy’ rather than write historical commentar-

ies (DR xv), he still largely adheres to a somewhat pre-Socratic metaphysics according to which entities are merely the expressions of more fundamental ‘intensities’. Fortunately, Deleuze explicitly repudiated this early infatuation, so that we are now able to retain whatever is useful to machine ontology in *Difference and Repetition*, and discard the rest (TRM 65). Section 2 in Chapter 1 addresses this issue in more detail.

Fourth, reconstructing Deleuze’s ontology necessitates that we carefully separate the wheat from the chaff. As his readers know, Deleuze rarely writes about one thing at a time. To extract his ontology, many other things about which he writes must go, including his reflections on politics, aesthetics, subjectivity, and language. This will help focus on the very ontology in which his resistance to reductionism in all those domains is grounded. We are questing for nothing less than his ‘cry’: ‘When a philosopher is great, although he writes very abstract pages, these are abstract only because you did not know how to locate the moment in which he cries. There is a cry underneath, a cry that is horrible’ (SL 060580). Finding this cry necessitates our eliminative method. As Deleuze says of a philosopher’s central problem: ‘sometimes the philosopher states it explicitly, sometimes he does not state it’ (SL 060580), and he himself falls squarely in the latter category. He even calls *Difference and Repetition* a book ‘like a soup’ where everything good was located at the bottom, making it the hardest to discern.¹² Uncovering a central problem and organising a philosophy’s concepts around it is also exactly what Deleuze proposes as a method to read philosophers:

[I]t’s not a matter of asking oneself what a concept represents. It’s necessary to ask oneself what its place is in a set of other concepts. In the majority of great philosophers, the concepts they create are inseparable, and are taken in veritable sequences. And if you don’t understand the sequence of which a concept is part, you cannot understand the concept. (SS 251180)

Fifth, there is Félix Guattari. This book refers to their collaborative works as ‘Deleuze’, not ‘Deleuze and Guattari’. As Deleuze writes, their collaborations can be read as containing Deleuze’s philosophy and as containing Guattari’s, as long one does not designate them as ‘exclusively Deleuze’ or ‘exclusively Guattari’.¹³ We will refer to them by ‘Deleuze’, because Deleuze’s ontology

is not necessarily Guattari's. As Deleuze says in *L'Abécédaire*, they did not interpret their collaborative work in the same way. For example, their correspondence shows that Guattari coins the notion 'machine', but Deleuze determines what this concept will mean and how it will be positioned in a system (LAT 40–1). According to Deleuze, a more Guattarian reading of machines would not rely on irreducibility, but on 'structure, signifiers, the phallus, and so on' (N 14). It is therefore unsurprising that Guattari did not recognise himself in the system elaborated in *Anti-Oedipus*:

I still have no control over this other world of systematic academic work [. . .] Keep my penmanship, my style. But I don't really recognize myself in the A.O.. I need to stop running behind the image of Gilles and the polishedness, the perfection that he brought to the most unlikely book. (Guattari 2006: 404)

We must therefore emphasise that we investigate *Deleuze's* ontology, postponing the analysis of possible differences with Guattari's views and how these differences manifest in their collaborations on future projects.

Sixth and finally, references will be to English translations of Deleuze's work whenever possible. Translations are sometimes modified to correct errors and inconsistencies. One example of a (grave) error is that the English edition of *Kafka* consistently mistranslates *transcendante* as 'transcendental' instead of 'transcendent'. References to untranslated works are accompanied by notes with the original French text. Within the notes themselves, references to non-English sources will remain untranslated. With these provisos in mind, we can now discuss the structure of the book.

Chapter 1 is largely dedicated to a comparison between machine ontology and other, more orthodox interpretations of Deleuze that are incommensurable with this ontology. Readers uninterested in a skirmish with existing Deleuze interpretations can skip the first two sections of this chapter. After showing why these interpretations are not consistent with the source material, we also take a first look at Deleuze's fourfold structure of individual beings and the three syntheses that connect them.

Chapter 2 starts the analysis proper by describing the centrality, necessity, and initial scope of the externality thesis. Its first section

demonstrates how externality is a key notion in both Deleuze's own systematic works and in his exegetic work on others. Two other sections reconstruct Deleuze's arguments for externality. Three of these arguments are drawn from everyday experience, whereas another three rely on more purely conceptual concerns. Externality forces us to consider into how many aspects an entity's being is partitioned. By comparing Bryant's machine ontology to Deleuze's, we show why *two* such aspects are not sufficient for a coherent result, so that four aspects are required.

Chapter 3 shows how the externality thesis (and *only* the externality thesis) motivates Deleuze's well-known rejection of several other modes of thinking. In each of those cases full comparisons would require a separate monograph, but we have sufficient space to show how Deleuze takes his opponents to violate externality. This always revolves around demonstrating that a certain mode of thinking cannot accommodate the internal difference in kind between an entity's relational presence and its private interior which the externality thesis demands. The chapter also includes a section on why Deleuze takes these other philosophies all to belong to the same 'image of thought'. This image of thought is characterised by 'common sense' or the idea that an entity can be identified with one or several of its relational manifestations, as well as by 'good sense' or the idea that an entity can be reduced to and fully explained from a previous state or point of origin.

Chapter 4 then starts the deduction of the features that entities must possess if externality holds. It starts by explicating the first aspect of fourfold machines: its 'body' or 'body without organs' in its withdrawal from all possible relations. The body of a machine is its unity outside of all its engagements. The second section of the chapter explains how such non-relational bodies lead Deleuze to define reality as being fundamentally 'schizophrenic' or 'problematic'. Here, the central idea is that if each entity has a non-relational body, then no entity can ever be fully integrated in any of its engagements. Hence contingent work and effort are always required to make things function, to keep them where they are, or to remove them from their current situations. The problematic nature of machinic bodies will also allow us to draw some comparisons between Deleuze's position and Maurizio Ferraris's 'new realism', as the 'unamendability' of objects is central to the latter's position.

Chapter 5 deals with the question of what machines relate to if not the non-relational bodies of others. Its three sections explain

how there are two actual, relational aspects of machines: extension and qualities. We will see how the first, connective synthesis accounts for this contact between a withdrawn entity and the actual, relational manifestation of another machine. A good part of this chapter concerns Deleuze's theory of what he calls 'sense' or 'sense-events', as these are precisely machines as encountered by others (rather than as they are in themselves). We will also contrast Deleuze's theory of sense to Markus Gabriel's ontology of 'fields of sense'.

Chapter 6 elaborates how machines manage such asymmetrical connections between virtual bodies on the one hand and actual manifestations on the other. Such relations cannot be accounted for by the actual aspect of machines, as these twofolds are precisely what must be grounded. Moreover, the body without organs in and of itself can also not account for the diversity of relations, let alone for their content. The body is the bare fact of non-relational unity for a machine, and as all machines are strictly equal in this regard, the differences between them cannot be explained through bodies alone. Hence Deleuze must posit a second aspect to the virtual side of machines. This is what he calls its 'powers', 'desire', 'Idea', '*puissance*', 'code', or 'singularities'. As such desire is that which characterises a machine while simultaneously being non-relational and unextended, Deleuze also refers to this as a machine's 'intensive matter'. We will see that the two virtual aspects of body and singularities constitute the essence of a machine, though one without permanence or simplicity. A machine's desire constitutes what it can do. A machine only ever encounters other entities in terms of its own desire. Hence desire is the ground for its relations. The chapter also contains a comparison between Deleuze's position and Manuel DeLanda's, as the latter holds that 'assemblages' can exist and function *without* having any essence whatsoever.

Chapter 7 then brings us to the notion of disjunctive synthesis. Each connection is forged based on a disjunction, which is to say grounded in a machine's desire, the latter differing in kind from its actual manifestations. The upshot of this is that a machine's desire is always already excessive over its relations, making disjunctions inclusive rather than exclusive. Simultaneously, desire is that which a machine's relations 'inscribe', 'register', or 'record' in a machine's virtuality. This is what Deleuze calls 'becoming'. Hence each relation is forged based on the traces left by other relations, the result not resembling its production due to the difference

in kind between virtuality and actuality. Such becoming is neither constant nor always even significant, as it depends purely on the contingent content and intensity of encounters that characterise a machine's existence. As this chapter contains Deleuze's account of how machines can change, we here compare Deleuze's machine ontology to Harman's object-oriented ontology. This is because whereas Deleuze argues that real alterations of the being of entities are somewhat continuous and incremental, Harman holds that they are highly exceptional.

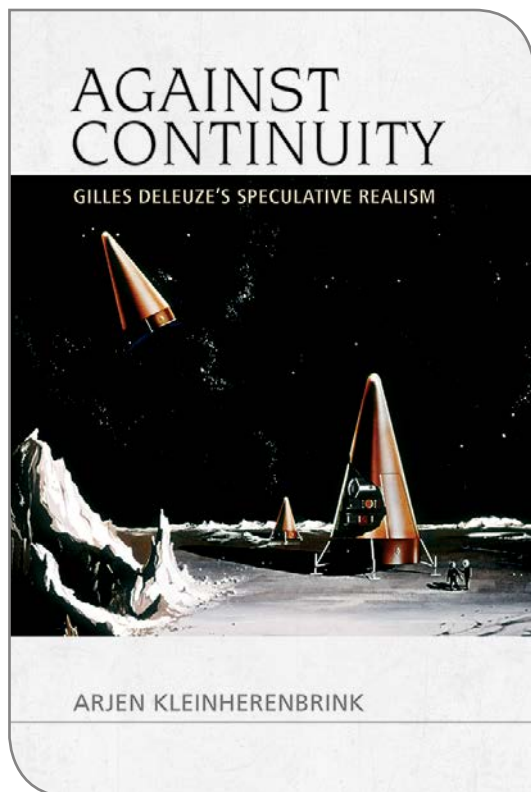
Chapter 8 details the third, conjunctive synthesis to account for how new machines can be made, and how machines themselves function as the medium through which two or more other machines can interact. As Deleuze argues, each newly forged relation is itself immediately an irreducible machine, which incidentally allows him to avoid relapsing into a dualism between relations and machines. To refer to this immediate irreducibility of machines from the moment of their inception, Deleuze uses the term 'celibate machines'. The third and final synthesis completes our reconstruction of Deleuze's ontology. This chapter also contrasts Deleuze's machine ontology with Tristan Garcia's position, as 'celibate machines' allow for close comparison with Garcia's formal ontology of things.

Chapter 9 explores some of machine ontology's implications, first by defining several standard philosophical notions (such as self, time, space, and world) from the perspective of machine ontology. This is followed by a section on what Deleuze in a Kantian vein calls the 'paralogisms' of thought. These errors of thinking explain why we do not 'naturally' think according to machine ontology, but instead tend towards internalist thinking. The last section of the chapter provides an account of what Deleuze calls 'transcendental empiricism', which can be regarded as a general method for philosophy based on machine ontology's central insights. The chapter also contains the seventh and final intermezzo, in which we discuss some of the similarities and differences between Deleuze's position and that of Bruno Latour.

Notes

1. 'cette proposition est absolument pour moi comme un coup de tonnerre dans la philosophie! [. . .] Les relations sont extérieures à leurs termes' (SC 141282).

2. Note that Deleuze calls himself an empiricist and a pluralist, and defines both as studying multiplicities in their irreducibility (D vii; TRM 304).
3. Beaulieu et al. (2014).
4. Bryant et al. (2011) and Shavero (2014) are good introductions.
5. As we will find, ‘conceive of’ does not necessarily mean something like ‘lay bare for all to see’. Also note that ‘speculative’ can also be taken simply to mean something like ‘adventurous’ or ‘daring’.
6. Meillassoux (2011: 64).
7. Grant (2006: 137).
8. Brassier (2007: 239).
9. Harman (2011a).
10. As for continuity between these works, note that the concept of the machine is already present in works pre-dating *Anti-Oedipus* (DR 78; LS 72), that the theory of sense from *The Logic of Sense* is found in *Difference and Repetition* in condensed form (DR 153–67), and that Being is already called delirious and schizophrenic before the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* (DR 58, 227; LS 84). Also there is Deleuze’s statement that ‘*Difference and Repetition* was the first book in which I tried to “do philosophy”. All that I have done since is connected to this book, including what I wrote with Guattari’ (DR xv), and that it ‘serves to introduce subsequent books up to and including the research undertaken with Guattari’ (DR xvii; cf. TRM 308).
11. Deleuze partly borrows it from Michel Carrouges (1976). Incidentally, Deleuze explicitly expressed his hope that *Anti-Oedipus* would be rediscovered after its many misreadings (*L’Abécédaire*, ‘desire’).
12. ‘Ah ma thèse, c’est une soupe où tout nage (le meilleur doit être dans le fond, mais c’est ce qui se voit moins)’ (LAT 28).
13. Cf. ‘[V]ous faites abstraction de Félix. Votre point de vue reste juste, et l’on peut parler de moi sans Félix. Reste que *L’Anti-Oedipe* et *Mille plateaux* sont entièrement de lui comme entièrement de moi, suivant deux points de vue possible. D’où la nécessité, si vous voulez bien, de marquer que si vous vous en tenez à moi, c’est en vertu de votre entreprise même, et non pas du tout d’un caractère secondaire ou “occasionnel” de Félix’ (LAT 82).



Against Continuity
Gilles Deleuze's Speculative Realism

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