

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Deleuze, Guattari and Anarchy

Daniel Colson

2009

Abstract *With the distance of time, we can better perceive how the numerous but brief and intense revolutionary experiences of the workers' movements of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, escape the Marxist models and representations that have served them for so long as both flag and shroud. What is true of working-class and emancipatory history is also true of Deleuze's thought, of his capacity to repeat and intensify this emancipatory history on the terrain of thought, and thus to manifest the rebirth and the actuality of the libertarian project.*

Daniel Colson
Deleuze, Guattari and Anarchy
2009

journals.openedition.org

theanarchistlibrary.org

First of all, I would like to underline the limits of what I am going to say, and I will therefore be obliged to speak briefly about myself. I am not a philosopher but a sociologist and my research, for a long time, had apparently very little to do with philosophy. My interests were and still are related to the history of labor and industry, which is not unrelated to Deleuze

and Guattari, it is true. I read Deleuze late in life and many passages in his books are still quite enigmatic to me.

One likes or dislikes Deleuze's work, one loves it in a crazy or at least exalted way, or one hates it in an equally crazy and exalted way, even if it is a retreated exaltation. One can also ignore Deleuze, which is nevertheless the case for most people. But this is obviously a pity. As for me, once I started reading him, I couldn't stop. It's a bit like the excerpt from Malamud's novel that Deleuze quotes at the beginning of his little book on Spinoza. Like the man from Kiev discovering Spinoza, when I read Deleuze I didn't understand everything, almost nothing at the beginning it must be admitted, but, indeed, it was as if I was riding a witch's broomstick, or more precisely as if, without understanding, I understood, as if I had the certainty that the precise or detailed understanding would come later, even though everything I was reading was clear and obvious to me, provided I didn't stop, to keep on reading, more and more and more. A movement that never left me, that allowed me to reread what I had read, to understand it a little less badly; but that also explains the dismay that I felt, like many others I imagine, when I learned of Deleuze's death, a dismay that was largely selfish. What overwhelmed me was the certainty that I would never read another book by Deleuze.

By the time I began this reading, I had decided — despite my many prejudices and strong prejudices — to finally read Proudhon. And this second reading, parallel to the first, probably explains, among other things, my enthusiasm for Deleuze, an analogical and equally intuitive enthusiasm. As I was reading Deleuze, I was thinking two things: what I am reading and that I understand so poorly is precisely what I seem to have understood and discovered in the dusty archives of the workers' history of the Saint-Etienne region. I was a little bit in the situation of the cardboard workers that Deleuze speaks about — in the Abécédaire, it seems to me —, and who, without understanding everything far from there, found themselves nevertheless,

the interwar period, in that terrible epoch in which the hopes and the revolutionary potentialities of the workers' movement were to sink away. In this re-evaluation, and from the point of view of the workers' emancipation, communism with its immense theoretical apparatuses is reduced then, at the moment of its birth at least and until the second world conflict, to a kind of simple epiphenomenon that sanctioned and that masked as well as it could, in the name of the future, the terrible and definitive defeat of the workers in front of the reactionary forces and in particular in front of the diverse forms of fascism and authoritarian regimes.

Paradox of the late awareness of a workers' failure sealed for a long time. It is undoubtedly at this price that it becomes possible, not only to re-evaluate the universal and always current range of these past workers' experiences, of their revolutionary and emancipating force, but also, at the same time, to perceive the meaning and the revolutionary range of the thought of Deleuze and Guattari.

more particularly of that immense emancipatory movement that the revolutionary workers' movements were, for almost a century. The bad reason is to believe that these revolutionary workers' movements are part of Marxism, that they make sense within Marxist thought, at the risk of not being able to understand how Deleuze's thought not only echoes these revolutionary movements, but thinks or repeats them on the terrain of thought. At the risk of not understanding how Deleuze's Nietzscheanism, but also the philosophical traditions that he brings to light from Spinoza to Bergson, from Tarde to Whitehead, constitute precisely the background and one of the essential components of the project of anarchism and therefore of worker anarchism.

This blindness to Deleuze's thought, but also to that of Guattari and many others, is due to another blindness that is undoubtedly about to be dispelled, this time in the field of workers' history. Indeed, in the moderate interest that historians — Marxists in their immense majority — have taken in the different workers' movements, it appeared for a long time as obvious that communism and Marxism had logically followed anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism, and this on the deceptive register of time and history, doubly so: in the chronological evidence of the facts, but also within a progressive and providentialist conception of a history that had necessarily to lead to socialism through transitory stages of which anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism would have been brief moments more or less necessary or unavoidable quickly overtaken by the determinism and the sense of history, with its garbage and its diverse survivals.

But the collapse of communism, the disappearance of the working classes that corresponded to it, and the provisionally brilliant victory of capitalism in its most liberal form, allow us to appreciate in a different way what the experiences of the different workers' movements with a revolutionary character were, and more particularly to understand what happened in

intimately one could say, in the baroque folds and the Leibnizian monads. But this affinity or intimacy between Deleuze's books and the furious stories of strikes and inter-worker confrontations, I also found in a way that was always obscure but much more explicit in the reading of Proudhon, or more precisely in the reading of Deleuze in the light of Proudhon. When I read the beginning of *Difference and Repetition*, for example, the beginning of *The Anti-Oedipus* or *A Thousand Plateaus*, or the last chapter of Spinoza's *Practical Philosophy*, I kept saying to myself, "But that's precisely what Proudhon is saying or trying to say! Between Deleuze and Proudhon, and all things considered, it seemed to me to discover an encounter comparable to that which Nietzsche experiences when reading Leibniz. And from Proudhon to Deleuze, or from Deleuze to Proudhon, I suddenly discovered how workers' anarchism was part of, or found its answer in, a very long philosophical tradition — a thousand streams of thought —, from Spinoza to Whitehead, passing through Leibniz and Nietzsche, but also Gabriel Tarde, Gilbert Simondon and many others.

Deleuze himself, of course, but also his library, this library that Deleuze both inhabits and brings into existence, became for me a world analogous, on the ground of thought, to the different worlds that working-class anarchism had tried to bring into existence, often very briefly, during half a century, a world analogous to those that authors such as Proudhon, Bakunin, Coeuderoy or Déjacques had also invented and thought a few decades earlier.

It is therefore of this encounter — for me — between Deleuze and anarchism that I would now like to say a few words, and this through two problems:

The first problem is the one that was first of all announced a little unwisely in the title of my communication: the question of space and territory.

The second problem can be related to a kind of quarrel between heirs, legitimate children or bastard children, I

don't know. For many Deleuzian readers — most of them, no doubt — it is quite obvious that Deleuze has a lot to do with Marx, that he is part of the imposing Marxist tradition, in his own way, of course, and in an original way. The association between Deleuze and Guattari, the explicit politicization of Deleuze from 1968 onwards, *The Anti-Oedipus*, the hegemony of Marxism among the intellectuals of that time and many other things, explain the evidence that Deleuze's thought has to do with Marxism, that Deleuze was planning to write a book on Marx anyway, and that even if this book was never written or published, this absence does not invalidate such proximity. For the reader of Deleuze that I am, convinced of a great proximity between Deleuze and anarchism, this Marxist or Marxian interpretation of his thought has always seemed surprising. And it constitutes for me a real difficulty insofar as it does not seem to me that one can find the least possible accommodation, on the substance of course, between anarchism and Marxism. So this is the second problem I would like to address. But first I will come back to the first question, to the question of space and territory, a question which is obviously not unrelated to the second.

Better specialists of Deleuze's thought will undoubtedly be able, better than I, to explain the way in which Deleuze chooses geography against history, to undo the presuppositions and illusions of providential, imperial and imperious history, which had been imposed on our societies with modernity, from the triumphant bourgeoisie to the Marxist dogmas of historical materialism, passing through the certainty, common to all, of progress that is at the same time inescapable and liberating. I would be satisfied here to recall how, among many other ways, Deleuze poses the primacy not of space over time, but of the multiplicity and the diversity of the beings that the time of the history pretends to disqualify and to reduce to the unity of only one becoming, to the universal history, to the "court

cally different as that of the tick, of the woodcutter or of Little Red Riding Hood crossing the same forest?

It is true that Félix Guattari came from communism and Marxism, from an increasingly heterodox Marxism and communism, like many other thinkers before him, especially in the interwar period: Benjamin precisely, but also Marcuse, Scholem, Reich for example, authors to whom the anarchists feel close, but of whom we can also show, with Michael Löwy, in what they are indeed infinitely closer to anarchism and to workers' anarchism than to communism, beyond a Marxist dressing and questioning that can be explained by the prestige of a thought that flourished at the time in the shadow of the illusions and the lies of the Russian revolution.

That one can, historically, through his becoming, bring Guattari closer to Marxism can therefore possibly be understood, but Deleuze himself is, in my opinion, much more difficult. How could Deleuze's Nietzsche be compatible with Marx? How can one continue to be a Marxist without bringing the Hegelian dialectic into play? I do not want to multiply questions or objections that would obviously require time to answer. I would content myself, in another way, and this will be my conclusion, with putting forward a hypothesis, not only to explain the stubbornness to want to place Deleuze on the side of Marxist thought, but also the blinding and misleading appearances of the Marxism of Guattari and before him of Benjamin and many others. This hypothesis I draw from my field of competence, labor history, the history of this adventure of almost a century that was called the history of the labor movement.

In my opinion, there are two reasons for wanting to draw Deleuze to the side of Marx and Marxism, one good and one bad. The good reason has to do with the undeniably revolutionary, radically revolutionary dimension of Deleuze's thought, and with the concern to give an account of it. Deleuze is on the side of every emancipatory project and movement, and

those who litter the ground. The worker anarchism does not say the history with its stages and its periods, its retreats and its advances but always tended towards its final completion, at the end of the times, in the green paradises and the mausoleums of the communism finally accomplished. Workers' anarchism does not tell History with a capital H, it tells stories, sometimes very small stories, sometimes romanticized stories as in Valtin's book, very often stories of the defeated as the beautiful title of Michel Ragon's book reminds us, the stories of those who litter the ground – just about everywhere -, who have been crushed by the wheels of History of which Benjamin speaks. Anarchism tells stories and in these stories, heteroclitite, scattered in the four corners of the world, suddenly appear worlds each time different and strange. On the terrain of war, for example, with the insurrectionary army of the makhnovists running in all directions and at full speed across the immense plains of the south of the Ukraine, as described by Hélène Chatelain; the resistant sailors of Kronstadt in their snow-covered casemates, the Spanish militiamen in the cellars of the student housing estate in Madrid, or the desperate battle of what remains of the workers' movement, in the shadow of the red and brown fascisms that Valtin describes in *Sans patries ni frontières*.

We can now come to the second problem that I had announced to you, but in fact it has been the only one discussed since the beginning. I continue to pose it from my own position: how can we explain that in the Deleuzian tradition we can so obviously presuppose a proximity between Deleuze's thought and that of Marx? How can this rapprochement be compatible with a proximity, much more obvious in my opinion, between Deleuze and anarchism, and even though anarchists and communists, libertarian thought and Marxism may have rubbed shoulders and even sometimes fought side by side, they can be considered as two perceptions of the world as radi-

of the world" of which speaks Hegel, to this "absolute" where comes to abolish itself all difference and all singularity.

I would like to read you two brief quotations, among many others, which show how an anarchist eye can recognize itself in Deleuze. They are taken from the little book on Spinoza, and more precisely from the last chapter, the so called "Spinoza and us". Deleuze writes this:

One Nature for all bodies, one Nature for all individuals, a Nature that is itself an individual varying in an infinite number of ways. It is no longer the affirmation of a unique substance, it is the spreading of a common plane of immanence where all bodies, all souls, all individuals are (p. 164).

The second quotation completes the first one, it always relates to the nature:

Nature, the plane of immanence or consistency, always variable, and which does not cease to be reshaped, composed, recomposed, by individuals and communities (p. 171).

To these two quotations I would like to join a third one even shorter, a quotation taken from *Mille Plateaux* this time where Deleuze and Guattari give probably the most luminous definition of the anarchy: "the anarchy", they say, "this strange unity which says itself only of the multiple" (p.196)

One will say to me – I try to put a little polemic in the discussion -, that my quotation is incomplete, that it should especially be indicated that it is the resumption of a passage of *Heliogabalus*, a book of Antonin Artaud and that this last, in this text, is very far from renouncing to the magic virtues of the history and of the dialectic. But we can give the complete

quotation of Deleuze and Guattari who say this: “the anarchy and the unity are one and the same thing, not the unity of the One, but a stranger unity which is said only of the multiple”. And it is then that Deleuze and Guattari open a note where we find the way Deleuze’s library works that we spoke about above. I read you this note: “It is true that Artaud still presents the Identity of the One and the Multiple as a dialectical unity [...]. He makes of Heliogabalus a kind of hegelian. But it is a way of speaking, because the multiplicity exceeds from the beginning any opposition, and destitutes the dialectic movement” (ibid.).

It seems to me that the most knowledgeable commentators of Deleuze do not sufficiently notice how this definition of anarchy – which Deleuze and Guattari borrow from Artaud – is not anecdotal or marginal. It is at the heart of Deleuze’s thought, close to concepts as important to him as being univocal or will to power, for example. Indeed, in the evaluation of the intimate and determining relationship that Deleuze has with anarchism, as a thought and as a political project, the univocal being, the will to power and anarchy are very precisely homologous and, very logically (with regard to what they say), three singular and different ways to say precisely the same thing. They belong to one and the same definition: the univocal being, because it says itself “in one and the same sense, of all its differences and intrinsic modalities” (*Difference and Repetition*, p. 53), because its univocity “says itself only of the multiple”, as Zourabichvili reminds us;¹ the will to power because its “unity is the one of the multiple and says itself only of the multiple” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 97); and anarchy of course, as we have just seen, because “anarchy and unity are one and the same thing, not the unity of the One, but a stranger unity that is said only of the multiple.”²

¹ F. Zourabichvili, *Le Vocabulaire de Deleuze*, Ellipses, 2003, p. 82.

² Ce rapport très particulier de l’Un et du multiple que Deleuze rapporte à l’anarchie et à l’être univoque peut être rapproché de ce que dit

gods able to take out the people of its lethargy and its stupefaction, to liberate the forces and the revolutionary possibilities of which it is bearer?⁵ I will not develop this second clue further, certainly the most convincing in the close affinity that worker anarchism has with Deleuze’s thought. Or vice versa.

I would be quicker on the third and final clue. It is based on an apparent paradox. Dispersed in the four corners of the world, keen on geography, natural sciences or geology, as the workers’ libraries of the time show, the different anarchist workers’ movements, if they have only very few theoretical works – with the exception of Proudhon and Bakunin, it is true -, use and produce, on the other hand, a great number of history books, of historical accounts. The history of the First International by James Guillaume for example, the history of the makhnovist movement by Archinov or, later, *The Unknown Revolution*, by Voline, on the Russian revolution, or *Without Fatherland nor Frontiers* by Ian Valtin which describes the life of the workers’ movements in Europe during the tragic events of the interwar period. This contradiction between, on the one hand, movements that think and perceive themselves first of all in space, through the discontinuous dispersion of radically singular collective entities, and, on the other hand, the way of giving an account of them, not theoretically, but on the continuous register of history, is however only an apparent contradiction. In the manner of *L’Histoire d’un ruisseau*, or *L’Histoire d’une montagne* by Élisée Reclus, the use of narrative by militant anarchist literature does not refer to academic or revolutionary history. In these historical writings of the various libertarian workers’ movements, it is neither the history of humanity, nor the history of the proletariat, nor the history of the revolution, this monumental history that Nietzsche denounces, this history that Walter Benjamin describes as a “great triumphal procession that passes over

⁵ E. Carvalho, dans le journal *Asgarda*, n° 1, du 18 mars 1902.

First International, with its watchmaking mono-industry, its Swiss and Protestant traditions, its home work, its tariffs, its numerous technical associations, and on the other hand, but at the same time, the unions of southern Spain and their Islamic-Judeo-Catholic agricultural workers, illiterate, millenarian, and most often unemployed and destitute ? How to explain the diversity of forms of a movement claiming the same project, referring to the same texts, and yet as different as the itinerant actions of the I. W. W. of the United States, the cultural and revolutionary associations of the Jewish East End of London, the Ukrainian workers and peasants and their insurrectional army, the French labor exchanges, or the Tatar, Russian, Armenian, Jewish anarchist groups,³ each drawing from their own languages and traditions a profusion of images and notions capable of expressing in an ever new way their anger and their hopes, all the nuances of oppression and emancipatory possibilities?⁴ How can we explain that two workers' centers as close as Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo could, at the same time (at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries), both claim to be anarchist, and animate with the same energy vast and harsh social conflicts? One (Sao Paulo) recognizes itself in the libertarian communist conceptions and organizational model of Malatesta, while the other (Rio de Janeiro), equally active and powerful, is largely derived from the individualism of Nietzsche, of Stirner, and doesn't hesitate to invite the militants of the unions of trade, of the societies of mutual aid, of the cooperatives of consumption and production, of the commissions of factory, of the leagues of district, of the delegates and other coordinations or technical commissions, to identify themselves to Zarathustra, to promote the appearance of supermen, men-

³ « Idéologie et sémantique : le vocabulaire politique des anarchistes russes », *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, XXX (3-4), juil.-déc. 1989.

⁴ Sur ce renouvellement incessant du vocabulaire anarchiste, en particulier au regard du caractère stéréotypé du discours bolchevique et social démocrate, *ibid.*, p. 259.

You must obviously take my word for it, if I tell you that the whole of Proudhon's thought is built around this idea of a plan of Nature where everything is given, without remainder, without past nor future, and where however nothing is ever the same because taken in an incessant movement of composition, decomposition and recomposition of the beings, beings that are always at the same time collectives and individuals, composed and unstable beings living and existing only from the infinite multitude of relations and contradictions of a world where everything is given, where everything is possible, a world where the contradictions are never resolved, on the contrary they are maintained, require unceasingly the presence of the others, in a movement of association and disassociation where, as Deleuze writes about Spinoza, it is a question of constructing the plane of immanence where one lives, through the good meetings, the good associations, what Proudhon calls the positive anarchy.

Not being able to demand that you read Proudhon – in such a short time –, I would content myself with indicating three clues of this proximity of Deleuze and anarchism, on the ground of space, of dispersion and of the multitude of beings in space, of this relationship between history and time where, as Elisée Reclus says, geography imposes itself on history, imposes space in history and forces the latter discipline to be, in the end, only a particular dimension of the geographical approach: a “geography in time” says Élisée Reclus.

The first clue is the most visible, if not the most significant. It can be found precisely in the importance of geography among the rare intellectuals of the anarchist movement. Élisée Reclus is a geographer, and his immense work, long forgotten, and that we have just rediscovered, testifies well through his encyclopedic description of the different human societies, of

Bakounine non sur l'unité mais sur la façon dont cette unité passe par le « commun » : « une nature commune, un caractère commun n'existe pas en lui-même, par lui-même, en dehors des choses ou des corps distincts et réels auxquels il se trouve attaché » (*Œuvres*, Stock, tome 1, 1908, p. 31).

this strange unity which is only said of the multiple of which Deleuze and Guattari speak to define anarchy, this unity of the multiple that we find in the title of one of the major works of Élisée Reclus — *L'Homme et la Terre* (Man and the Earth) -, or again in the exergue of the six big volumes of this work: “Man is nature becoming aware of itself”. This awareness, for Reclus, operates through the infinite multitude not of societies, which one could always pretend to count, but of human experiences, properly speaking innumerable, and of which Élisée Reclus has tirelessly tried to describe the singularities. Alongside Élisée Reclus we can join Pierre Kropotkine, a Russian geographer, even more involved in the activities of the international anarchist movement, a geographer who could also be described as an ethologist and whose work testifies in turn to the strange unity that, in anarchy, is attached to the multiple, not only the infinite multitude of human experiences, but this other multitude even more infinite could one say of the experiences or the beings pertaining to the animality, of the life of the plants and the stones, of the brooks and the mountains of which Élisée Reclus had told besides the history, not the history of the brooks and the mountains, but *The History of a brook*, *The History of a mountain*, among the infinite multitude of the possible brooks and mountains.

The second clue of the proximity between Deleuze and anarchism, seen from the side of anarchism, is found in the way the latter deployed itself during its brief working-class history. We know the mode of organization of the socialist movement then communist, with Marxist dimension: a center and the concentrated summit of a pyramid, a periphery and a base where the impulses and directives of the center and the summit act, where the different local conditions that the march of history entails, the knowledge of the scholars capable of deciphering the logic of it, and the organizational apparatus or tool, state or party (but it is the same thing), capable of transmitting and applying the orders and instructions, are modelled and put in

order of battle. Workers' anarchism obeys a completely different logic that has forced it to constantly fight the pretensions of Marxist socialism, to refuse the different Romes of revolutionary struggle, London, Berlin and then Moscow and Peking. In workers' anarchism there is neither center nor summit, but a purely fortuitous succession or concomitance of collective and revolutionary experiences or outbursts, often very brief and each time singular. During an international anarchist meeting, in Geneva in August 1882, an anonymous worker delegate from the city of Sète, in France, cried out under the enthusiastic applause of the participants, “We are united because we are divided! A strange sentence, but one that simply repeats Deleuze and Guattari's definition of anarchy. By this sentence understood immediately by all the present militants, the delegate of Sète wanted to say indeed: “we are united because we are different, because we are the delegates of a great number of different collective experiences”, of collective beings would say Proudhon, dispersed in the four corners of the world, actual expression of a multitude of other virtual collective beings that only ask to appear a little everywhere on all the continents, each one with its own forms, through a constantly repeated singularity, from the smallest to the biggest, a singularity and a dispersion where anarchism finds precisely its unity, its common existence, this strange unity which is said only of the multiple. Indeed, as the too few works that are interested in it show, the anarchism of the libertarian workers' movements — from the most immediate interaction to its compositions and its widest figures -, diffracts and disperses itself in a multitude of differences, but all of them able to express the others, to echo them, to use each time in a singular way references, symbols and texts certainly common but quite as heteroclitic, dishevelled and disordered as the movements that use them and reuse them in contexts and arrangements always new.

What is there in common, in fact, between, on the one hand, the very serious and cultured *Fédération Jurassienne* of the