

Is *Anti-Oedipus* a May '68 Book?

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Everything begins with Marx, continues on with Lenin, and ends with the refrain, 'Welcome, Mr Brezhnev'. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus

When Gilles met Félix

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari met in the summer of 1969. Deleuze says of their meeting that Guattari was the one who sought him out, that at the time he didn't even know who he was. Evidently their meeting went well because Deleuze suggested they work together.¹ A lot of ink has been spilled speculating about how their collaboration worked in practice, all too often with the nefarious motive of sorting out who wrote what. It seems to me, however, that Deleuze says it all when he says that they each thought that the other had gone further than they had and therefore they could learn from each other. In conversation with Claire Parnet, Deleuze described his way of working with Guattari as a 'pick-up' method, but then qualifies it by saying 'method' is not the right word and suggests 'double-theft' and 'a-parallel evolution' as perhaps better alternatives (D, 18/25).

It started off with letters. And then we began to meet from time to time to listen to what the other had to say. It was great fun. But it could be really tedious too. One of us always talked too much. Often one of us would put forward some notion, and the other just didn't see it, wouldn't be able to make anything of it until months later, in a different context. [...] And then we wrote a lot. Félix sees writing as a schizoid flow drawing in all sorts of things. I'm interested in the way a page of writing flies off in all directions and at the same time closes right up on itself like an egg. And in the reticences, the resonances, the lurches, and all the larvae you can find in a book. Then we really started writing together, it wasn't a problem. We took turns at rewriting things (N, 14/25).

In 1969 Gilles Deleuze was 44 and having just completed his Doctorat D'Etat he was the very epitome of a respectable professor. This was indeed how even his friends regarded him. "Deleuze was a delightful character", Antonio Negri would say later, "but he was a professor, an intellectual!"² Similarly, Guattari informs us that he had hoped his collaboration with Deleuze would mean that Deleuze would get out more and get more involved in political action, yet it seemed to have the opposite effect (CY, 28).³ This should not be taken to mean that Deleuze was inactive or uninvolved politically.⁴ It simply acknowledges that his preference was to conduct politics through his writing by promulgating new forms of thought via the invention of new concepts. Deleuze more or less affirms this himself when he declares that one shouldn't travel around too much because it interferes with one's becoming (N, 138/188). Yet in spite of his aloofness, this extremely scholarly professor clearly exerted a powerful intellectual magnetism in his seminars and in his books. Viewers of *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, a remarkable

eight-hour dialogue (Deleuze explicitly refused to do an interview) between Deleuze and Claire Parent recorded for French television but only screened after his death, can see this clearly.⁵ Prefacing the interview there is a tantalisingly brief glimpse, in grainy, poorly lit black and white footage, of one of Deleuze's seminars at the University of Vincennes in 1980, which shows a relatively small room filled to capacity with evidently spellbound students.⁶ The plain, functional table at which Deleuze is seated is covered with an array of tape recorders and microphones, the desiring-machines of a new generation of students. Richard Pinhas, experimental musician and dedicated Deleuzian, was one of those new kinds of students with a tape recorder. He made recordings of dozens of Deleuze's seminars, which he has now made available on the web at webdeleuze.com. In the process he has inaugurated an incredible, spontaneous collective archival project aimed at making Deleuze's teaching as accessible as possible: the recordings have been transcribed and translated into several languages, thus providing Deleuze scholars with an invaluable resource.⁷

Intellectually Deleuze defined himself against the generation that came before him - he respected and admired his teachers, but nonetheless rejected their teaching very firmly. "I could not stand Descartes, the dualisms and the Cogito, or Hegel, the triad and the operation of the negation" (D, 14/21). The one exception was Sartre.⁸ In his early student days, he saw Sartre as a breath of fresh air, but did not feel drawn to existentialism or phenomenology (D, 12/18). Novelist Michel Tournier recalled that even then as an undergraduate Deleuze was already a powerful innovator: "We soon came to fear his talent for seizing upon a single one of our words and using it to expose our banality, stupidity, or failure of intelligence. He possessed extraordinary powers of translation and rearrangement: all the tired philosophy of the curriculum passed through him and emerged unrecognisable but rejuvenated, with a fresh, undigested, bitter taste of newness that we weaker, lazier minds found disconcerting and repulsive".⁹ In his own description of his student days, Deleuze said he belonged to a generation, "that was more or less bludgeoned to death with the history of philosophy" (N, 5/14). What Deleuze objected to was the repressive way this history of philosophy was used to wrap thought in the straightjacket of the imperative injunction 'you can't do this until you've read that' which all students are familiar with. His way of escaping this was to think of "the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous" (N, 6/15). His monographs on Hume, Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza, written in the early part of his career, do not put words into the mouths of their

subjects, but are nonetheless able to make them say something quite different to the received view of them. But more importantly, these books enabled Deleuze to think differently; they were his lines of flight, or “witch’s brooms” (D, 15/22) that took him outside and beyond the confines of his situation, giving him the freedom to do philosophy for himself. By his own estimation, he did not really begin to do philosophy for himself until he wrote *Différence and Répétition*, the major thesis for his Doctorat D’Etat. It was this book, according to Deleuze, particularly chapter 3 “The Image of Thought”, which concerns precisely the conditions of possibility for producing radically new thought, that paved the way to his collaborative work with Guattari (D, xvii).

A few years younger than Deleuze, Félix Guattari was only 37 in 1969. At this point in his career he had neither a degree nor a book to his name. Again, Negri provides a vivid portrait highlighting the contrasting personalities of the two future collaborators. Speaking of Deleuze, Negri says: “We talked about many things, but I couldn’t tell him that I was depressed, that I was tired, that I had problems. I couldn’t ask him to do anything for me. It was difficult to explain to him what was happening in Italy. With Félix I could. Very soon we began to come up with ideas together - and not only form the theoretical point of view.”¹⁰ Guattari had a gift for organising people, for bringing them together and engineering a creative spark between them. It was almost as if he was the living embodiment of ‘transversality’, the concept he invented to describe relations between subjects and objects, or subjects and subjects, which is neither unifying nor totalising. Before he met Deleuze, Guattari had already gained notoriety in France as a political activist. He was known in the French press as ‘Mr Anti-’ for his public campaigning on a range of causes from the decolonisation of Algeria, the improved treatment of prisoners in French prisons (he was a member of Michel Foucault’s Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons), the improved treatment of the mentally ill in French insane asylums, the establishment of free radio, to Gay rights and Green politics. In 1973 he outraged national sensibilities by publishing a special issue of the journal *Recherches* edited by Guy Hocquenghem and René Schérer provocatively entitled ‘Three Billion Perverts: An Encyclopaedia of Homosexualities’. French courts banned it and ordered all copies destroyed. Guattari was also fined, but he proudly never paid. More controversially, he collaborated with Negri, who was arrested in 1977 on charges of terrorism for his association with the Red Brigades. Guattari also spoke against the extradition from Germany to France of Klaus Croissant, a German lawyer sympathetic to the Baader-Meinhof Group; and in the late 1950s and early 1960s he carried cash for the Front de libération nationale algérien [Algerian National Liberation Front], the guerrilla army fighting for independence from French rule in Algeria.

Guattari's activism was informed by his clinical practice as a psychotherapist in the private psychiatric clinic La Borde founded in 1953 by Jean Oury, with the aim of providing a radically new form of care which 'de-institutionalised the institution'. At La Borde all staff, including cooks and cleaners, participated in providing therapy for the patients, many of whom were psychotic, and all staff, including doctors and nurses, participated in the maintenance of the hospital. "What we're trying to do", Guattari explain in a note to Deleuze, is "upset the caste imaginary that marks these patients, nurses and doctors (not to mention all the numerous subcastes!)" (AOP, 144). Guattari was enlisted by Oury because of his ability to organise collective action and thus help break down the barriers between staff and patients. Guattari received formal training in psychoanalysis from France's most important interpreter of Freud, Jacques Lacan, achieving the status of *analyste membre* in 1969. Although he remained a member of Lacan's school, the *Ecole freudienne de Paris*, until its dissolution in 1980 shortly before the master's death, Guattari's relationship to Lacan and Lacanian psychoanalysis was at best ambivalent. The publication of Guattari's notebooks, *The Anti-Oedipus Papers* has made it clear just how strained relations were between them, especially after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* (even though that work was in the words of its authors designed to save Lacan from the Lacanians). Indeed, even before it was published Lacan was distressed by its possible contents and according to Guattari's journal put pressure on him to give him a copy of the manuscript. Guattari had to refuse because Deleuze, whose relation with Lacan wasn't as personal, only wanted to show Lacan the text when it was finished.¹¹ Deleuze and Lacan clearly regarded each other as rivals, as is evident in the fact that they deliberately scheduled their seminars at the same time compelling students to choose between them. That Deleuze saw himself as the clear winner in their struggles can be seen in his tart remark that in writing *Anti-Oedipus* they'd tried to give Lacan some 'schizophrenic help', By which he means eliminating Lacan's signature conceptual innovations, his notions of structure, the symbolic order, the signifier, and so on, which in Deleuze's unequivocal phrase are "thoroughly misguided" (N, 14/??).

The collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari is often described as a meeting of opposites, the love story between a wasp and an orchid as one writer has put it.¹² But despite superficialities, this is clearly false inasmuch as it implies the one completes or complements the other. Moreover this myth, for that is clearly what it is, has had a rather pernicious effect. Guattari is variously treated as the junior partner and his contribution either downplayed or ignored altogether (and almost all commentators on Deleuze, myself included,

have been guilty at one time or another of writing 'Deleuze' when really they meant 'Deleuze and Guattari'), or worse, the corruptor of Deleuze, and condemned to take the fall for all that is strange, disturbing or simply incomprehensible in their writings. I can but agree with Gary Genosko that something must be done to address the confiscation of Guattari's contribution, though I confess I'm at a loss as to what that might be.¹³

May '68

It is often said, on the authority of the authors' own words, that *Anti-Oedipus* is a May '68 book. but what does that mean? As Kristin Ross argues in her history of the events of May and its influence on French intellectual life, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, the meaning of May '68, one of the largest mass movements in history, was never straightforward or obvious, even to its participants, who were in any case very far from being uniform in their backgrounds, opinions, politics and motives.¹⁴ Neither Deleuze nor Guattari are included in Ross's pantheon of thinkers, activists and writers whose "intellectual and political trajectories" can be traced back to May '68.¹⁵ At first glance, this might seem an injustice because after all it is not as though Deleuze and Guattari did not involve themselves in the events of May, particularly Guattari who took part in the infamous occupation of the Théâtre de l'Odéon. However, there is more than a grain of truth in Ross's verdict. By their own admission, Deleuze and Guattari were blindsided by May '68; it took them both by surprise and left them floundering for a response.¹⁶ But, having said that, I see no reason to go along with Ross in thinking that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of desire and becoming cannot be used to account for what happened that May.¹⁷ The difficulty they had in forming a response can be seen in the very texture of the work they produced together, especially its frequently bemoaned complexity. They were as troubled by the actualities of May '68 as they were excited by its possibilities and this ambivalence clearly shapes their theory of desire which tries to account for the contradictory currents of political thought and action that events like May '68 bring into stark relief. Deleuze and Guattari were stirred by the possibility for change May '68 seemed to betoken, namely the liberation of desire itself, but they were also highly sceptical of the doctrinal turn that accompanied it, which seemed to them to promise the incarceration of desire all over again. They were particularly opposed to the Left Bank Maoism that blossomed that spring like the proverbial hundred flowers. They rejected the idea that May '68 constituted a first or preliminary stage in a longer struggle that would culminate in the installation of a new state apparatus.¹⁸ "It would be strange", Guattari

remarked, “to rely on a party or state apparatus for the liberation of desire” (CY, 62).

If it is legitimate to say *Anti-Oedipus* is a May '68 book however, then it is because it was in a spirit of mutual ambivalence and uncertainty about May '68 that the two thinkers first came together in 1969. “[I]t was as less a question of pooling knowledge than the accumulation of our uncertainties and, even a certain distress in the face of the turn of events after May '68” (CY, 93). In other words, it is legitimate to say *Anti-Oedipus* is a May '68 book providing it is understood that Deleuze and Guattari were not ‘soixante-huitards’ or May 68ers and that their view of those events was quite different from the students and workers who put up barricades in the streets and tore up pavers in search of the beach underneath. Their reticence regarding May '68 can partially be explained in generational terms inasmuch that Deleuze and Guattari saw themselves as belonging to the generation prior to the actual 68ers (if by that one means the students at the Sorbonne who provided the initial spark of protest that set the politically-seismic events in motion). Their intellectual and political formation took shape during World War Two and its aftermath and wears the scars of the defeat, occupation and liberation of France in its scepticism towards all forms of organised politics. As Guattari explained in an interview following the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* in France in 1972: “We are part of a generation whose political consciousness was born in the enthusiasm and naivety of the Liberation, with its conspirational mythology of fascism”. He further qualified this remark by adding that the “questions left hanging by the other failed revolution that was May '68 were developed for us based on a counterpoint that was all the more troubling because, like many others, we were worried about the future being readied for us, one that could make you miss the fascism of yore” (CY, 94). In other words, Deleuze and Guattari were distrustful of the immodest and frequently hubristic claims that were made about what May '68 really meant, i.e., that it had somehow changed everything, but not opposed to it in principle as many of their generation in fact were.¹⁹ Ten years later, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they would lash out at the May '68 naysayers, like Raymond Aron as follows:

[T]hose who evaluated things in macropolitical terms understood nothing of the event because something unaccountable was escaping. The politicians, the parties, the unions, many leftists, were utterly vexed; they kept repeating over and again that ‘conditions’ were not ripe. It was as though they had been temporarily deprived of the entire dualism machine that made them valid spokespeople (ATP, 238).

As is obvious from the stridently anti-capitalist tone of *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari were highly sympathetic to the utopian (i.e. world-transformative) dimension of the May '68 struggles, but they weren't ready to accept that the solution was an immediate transition to communism. "Liberated desire means desire that escapes the impasse of private fantasy: it is not a question of adapting it, socialising it, disciplining it, but of plugging it in such a way that its process not be interrupted in the social body, and that its expression be collective. What counts is not the authoritarian unification, but rather a sort of infinite spreading: desire in the schools, the factories, the neighbourhoods, the nursery schools, the prisons, etc. It is not a question of directing, of totalising, but of plugging into the same plan of oscillation. As long as one alternates between the impotent spontaneity of anarchy and the bureaucratic and hieratic coding of a party organisation, there is no liberation of desire" (CY, 62). There can be no denying that *Anti-Oedipus* is conceived as a revolutionary book, i.e., a book that wants to open our eyes to the potential for revolution in the realm of everyday life. But as the passage just cited makes clear, its definition of revolution doesn't include taking power.²⁰ It doesn't mean overturning one regime and then installing another regime and reforming government from top to bottom as the Maoists and Leninists demand. It wants no part of such programs. Revolution for Deleuze and Guattari means schizophrenising the existing power structure, making it vibrate to a new rhythm, making it change from within, without at the same time becoming a schizophrenic. But they don't offer a model for a new society, save that it won't replicate the old repressions. Their argument is that we'll never get to that new society the militants of every persuasion claim their doctrine is leading us towards if we don't first of all shed our old habits, our old love of power, our manifold addictions to the exercise of force, our customary obsequiousness in the face of power, and so on. "Schizoanalysis as such does not raise the problem of the nature of the socius to come out of the revolution; it does not claim to be identical with the revolution itself" (AO, 415/??). Its only question is, 'Where will the revolution come from?' From start to finish, *Anti-Oedipus* is dominated by this single question:

Will it come in the person of a Castro, an Arab, a Black Panther, or a Chinaman on the horizon? A May '68, a home-grown Maoist planted like an anchorite on a factory smoke-stack? Always the addition of an axiom to seal off a breach that has been discovered; fascist colonels start reading Mao, we won't be fooled again; Castro has become impossible, even in relation to himself; vacuoles are isolated, ghettos created; unions are appealed to for help; the most sinister forms of 'dissuasion' are invented; the repression of interest is reinforced - but where will the new irruption of desire come from? (AO, 413/??).

Deleuze and Guattari's answer to this question is that the new irruption of desire must always come from within desire itself. Desire is revolutionary in itself, Deleuze and Guattari argue, but it is constantly being shackled to, or worse converted into interest, and as interest it is susceptible to capture, domestication and pacification. Their conviction, reiterated throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, is that "capitalist society can endure many manifestations of interest, but not one manifestation of desire, which would be enough to make its fundamental structures explode, even at the kindergarten level" (AO, 414/??). But pure manifestations of desire are rare, even in actual revolutionary situations. "One cannot account for a revolutionary situation by a simple analysis of the interests of the time. In 1903 the Russian Social Democratic Party debated the alliances and organisation of the proletariat, and the role of the avant-grade. While pretending to prepare for the revolution, it was suddenly shaken up by the events of 1905 and had to jump on board a moving train. There was a crystallisation of desire on a wide social scale created by a yet incomprehensible situation. Same thing in 1917" (CY, 65). By the same token, there are always groups in place to capitalise on the disruption to the social order revolution causes. "Daniel Guérin has said some profound things about the revolution of 1789. The bourgeoisie never had any illusions about who its real enemy was. Its real enemy was not the previous system, but what escaped the previous system's control, and what the bourgeoisie strove to master in its turn. It too owed its power to the ruin of the old system, but this power could only be exercised insofar as it opposed everything else that was in rebellion against the old system. The bourgeoisie has never been revolutionary. It simply made sure others pulled off the revolution for it. It manipulated, channelled, and repressed an enormous popular desire" (CY, 65). The point not to be missed here is that one cannot use interest as a way of determining where the revolution will come from, but one must take interest into account when one considers the parallel problem of 'Who will betray the revolution?' And for Deleuze and Guattari, these two questions, 'Where will the revolution come from?' 'How will it be betrayed?', are ultimately different sides of the same coin.

Algeria, Vietnam, Italy...

Apprehending *Anti-Oedipus* as a May '68 book is useful way of focusing the multiple and multivalent impulses that went into writing it, but the limitations of this framing device are obvious.²¹ It risks making it seem that *Anti-Oedipus* was a purely local affair, a single-shot response to a single-shot event that took place in Paris three decades ago. It is true to say many of the debates *Anti-Oedipus* weighs into are patently Parisian in nature. Indeed, it

spars more or less overtly with practically every leading light of the intellectual scene in Paris at that time, particularly Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss. But having said that, it is also true to say that the debates inspired by the work of Althusser, Lacan, and Lévi-Strauss, not to mention the theoretical upheavals provoked by Jean Baudrillard, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Jean-François Lyotard, reverberated around the world, albeit in the hermetic confines of university English and French departments. Students from all over the world flocked to Paris in the late 1960s and early 1970s to sit at the feet of these master thinkers who in their unwillingness to accept at face value the received wisdom of the past, in any of the disciplines, appeared to offer not only a new way of thinking, but verily a whole new worldview. In the history of theoretical discourse, *Anti-Oedipus* appeared at the dawn of a decade that was, as Fredric Jameson has put it, “essentially French”.²² However the fact that theory had become or was becoming global in its distribution at this point does not prove that its production was anything other than a purely local affair. For that reason it is worth looking at May '68 itself and asking whether or not it was the purely local affair it appears to be to the untutored eye. Anticipating the discussion to follow, I want to propose the following corollary to my initial claim that it is legitimate to treat *Anti-Oedipus* as May '68 book: It is legitimate to treat *Anti-Oedipus* as May '68 book to the extent that May '68 itself is treated as a complex, multiply determined event whose place in history is far from settled.

Bernardo Bertolucci's highly stylised film about May '68, *The Dreamers* (2003), is a vivid illustration of the narrow, exclusively Parisian image of the events that has to be overturned if we are to see things in their proper historical light. Bertolucci depicts May '68 as a student protest, which is how it began, but its significance to history derives from the fact that it soon became a nationwide protest involving more than 9 million striking workers. The effects of the strikes are made apparent to us in the film in the form of mounds of uncollected garbage mouldering in stairwells and on street corners, but the striking workers themselves are never shown. Moreover, Bertolucci makes it seem the student protests began in the privileged cloisters of the Latin Quarter, and not, as was actually the case, in the functionalist towers of the new universities in the outlying immigrant slum areas of Nanterre and Vincennes, where students were provided “with a direct ‘lived’ lesson in uneven development”.²³ According to the great Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, it was this daily ‘experience’ of the callousness of the state that radicalised the students and provided the catalyst for their connection to worker’s movements.²⁴ Secondly, through the vehicle of its twin brother and

sister protagonists Isabelle (Eva Green) and Theo (Louis Garrel), both in their late teens or early twenties and still living at home with their relatively well to do parents, it depicts the students who took part in May '68 as naïve, self-absorbed, and perverted. Cocooned in their own fantasy world concocted from fragments of movies and books, Isabelle and Theo are a postmodern version of Ulrich and Agathe. They meet an American exchange student, Matthew (Michael Pitt), and invite him to join them. When their parents go away, they are able to indulge their whims uninhibitedly and the scene is set for a clichéd romp through the three staples of 1960s counterculture, namely sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. They take bubble baths together and get stoned on hash; Matthew and Isabelle make love on the kitchen floor while Theo fries an egg and looks on with Brechtian disinterest; they drink papa's fine wine straight from the bottle and debate movies and politics long into the night as though nothing else mattered. They ignore the world outside.

Matthew soon upsets their idyllic universe by accusing them both of being unworldly: Isabelle because she's never been out on a real 'date' and Theo because of his staryeyed romanticisation of the Chinese Red Guards. It all begins when Isabelle demands that he shave his pubic hair as a sign of love. He refuses because it is a silly game, but also because it is infantilising. He tells them both 'there's something going on out there, I can feel it', but neither Isabelle nor Theo seem to care. Their political awakening comes soon enough though in the form of a brick thrown through their apartment window. The brick literally shatters their world, but also saves their lives too. Awakening after another of their orgiastic episodes, Isabelle finds a cheque written by her parents and realises that they must have been in the apartment and therefore witnessed their dishabille state and perhaps guessed at their decadent behaviour - the three of them are naked, sleeping side by side in a tent Isabelle erected in the living room. Mortally ashamed, Isabelle decides to kill herself and Theo and Matthew as well, so she switches on the gas and lies down between the two boys and readies herself for death. It is at this point that the window is broken. The intrusion of the street into their self-enclosed fantasy world is thus presented as a life-saving event. The brick breaks the spell of self-indulgence they've all been under and suddenly both Isabelle and Theo realise something is going on outside and that it does concern them, does interest them, and is more important than their fantasy world. The three of them rush first to the balcony to witness the events below and then to the street to join in. But here the happy trio split up because only Isabelle and Theo are willing to take part. Matthew, a self-proclaimed pacifist, turns his back on them. Having urged them both to take note of what is going on outside, Matthew recoils in horror when he sees Theo with a Molotov cocktail

in his hands and refuses to join them when they rush hand in hand towards the fray. Bertolucci's last act then is to make May '68 an exclusively French affair, but also wrongheaded and needlessly violent.

Kristin Ross's account of May '68 takes us in precisely the opposite direction to Bertolucci. She is anxious that we see that May '68 was not just a student protest, and that those involved were anything but naïve (in the sense of being unaware of history), and perhaps most importantly that it was part of a longer chain of events that stretched far beyond Paris. To begin with, Ross argues for an enlargement of the timeframe in which the events are considered, not just beyond the month of May itself, which as she shows (and Bertolucci's film exemplifies) restricts the events to a limited series of goings-on in the Sorbonne, but back two decades to the start of the Algerian War. This, in turn, enables her to argue that May '68 "was not a great cultural reform, a push toward modernisation, or the dawning sun of a new individualism. It was above all *not* a revolt on the part of the sociological category 'youth'."²⁵ It was rather the revolt of a broad cross-section of workers and students of all ages who had grown up with and witnessed the sickening brutality of the Gaullist regime's failed attempt to deny Algeria its independence. "Algeria defined a fracture in French society, in its identity, by creating a break between the official 'humanist' discourse of that society and French practices occurring in Algeria and occasionally within France as well."²⁶ It was impossible to reconcile the ideal of a benevolent welfare state espoused by France's leaders with the truncheon-wielding reality of the hegemonic state, except perhaps in oedipal terms by casting President de Gaulle in the role of father and relegating the protestors to the rank of children. *Anti-Oedipus* is of course directed against this pseudo-psychoanalytic account of the events and indeed Deleuze and Guattari argue that it was precisely the example of Algeria that makes it clear that politics cannot be reduced to an oedipal struggle. "It is strange", they write, "that we had to wait for the dreams of the colonised peoples in order to see that, on the vertices of the pseudo triangle, mummy was dancing with the missionary, daddy was being fucked by the tax collector, while the self was being beaten by the white man" (AO, 106/??).

What Fanon's work showed us, Deleuze and Guattari go on to suggest, is that every subject is directly coupled to elements of their "historical situation - the soldier, the cop, the occupier, the collaborator, the radical, the resister, the boss, the boss's wife - who constantly break all triangulations, and who prevent the entire situation from falling back on the familial complex and becoming internalised in it" (AO, 107/??). As Belden Fields writes, the Algerian War was a crucial stimulus for the radicalisation of French Students in the 1960s because it delegitimised the structures of the state. "The

educational system for instance, came to be viewed as a conduit funnelling young people into military bureaucracies to fight imperialist wars, or into capitalist bureaucracies, whether public or private, to earn a living as a supporting cog in a system of repressive privilege."²⁷ This perceived lack of control over their own destiny, even among the relatively privileged classes to which the majority of students actually belonged, coupled with the oppressive archaism of the educational system itself, and indeed the state structure as a whole, generated among radicalised youth a powerful sense of empathy with all victims of the state. Thus the students saw themselves as being in solidarity with factory workers, despite the fact that their destiny was to be the managers who would one day have to 'manage' these selfsame workers. In other words, in spite of the fact that their class interests were different, the students and the workers were nonetheless able to find a point of common interest in their dispute with the state. The usual divide and conquer tactics the state relies on to stratify the population and ensure that precisely this type of connections between strata doesn't occur failed spectacularly. It failed because the state was unable, at least in the first instance, to present itself as something other than a huge, oppressive monolithic edifice determined to stamp out dissent with an iron fist. Unfortunately, the French Communist Party, still a very strong and widely supported institution, was tarnished by its 'pragmatic' response to the war - the party line, that the war should be ended by negotiated settlement, was strictly enforced, with the result that it too came to be seen as ossified and antiquated and of little relevance to the needs of the present generation.²⁸ Deleuze and Guattari clearly shared this view; their frequent anti-reformist remarks should be seen as directed against the French Communist Party.

Ross's second move is to argue for an enlargement of the geographical framework in which the events are considered, not just beyond the Latin Quarter to the outer suburbs of Paris, but beyond France altogether to still another of its former colonies, namely Vietnam, which having rid itself of its French masters in the 1950s was then in the process of expelling the American pretenders. "In its battle with the United States, with the worldwide political and cultural domination the United States had exerted since the end of World War II, Vietnam made possible a merging of the themes of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism; the theoretical justification was loosely supplied by Maoism."²⁹ In fact, the events themselves were sparked by an incident - a window of the American Express building on rue Scribe in Paris was broken - that occurred as part of a student protest against the war in Vietnam on March 20, 1968. The irruption of student protest at Nanterre two days later was in part provoked by the heavy handedness of the police

response to the anti-Vietnam march. The students at Nanterre rallied themselves under the banner of 'Mouvement du 22 mars', deliberately recalling Castro's 'July 26th Movement' commemorating the attack on Moncada fortress and the start of the insurrection against Batista. "Vietnam thus both launched the action in the streets and brought under one umbrella a number of groups - the CVN [Comité Viêt-nam national] was dominated by Trotskyists, the CVB [Comité Viêt-nam de base] by Maoists - as well as previously unaffiliated militants working together."³⁰ For the protestors, students and workers alike, Vietnam made manifest processes that were thought to be merely latent in the West. For one thing, it revealed both the inherent violence of the postmodern capitalist state and the lengths to which it is prepared to go in order to preserve its power. It demonstrated a willingness on the part of the powerful to use violence against the powerless to defend the status quo. Vietnam also revealed the vulnerability of the super state and its susceptibility to a 'revolution from below' (DI, 213/??). Sartre, for one, was convinced that the true origin of May '68 was Vietnam because the example of Vietnamese guerrillas winning a war against a vastly superior force, albeit at the cost of an enormous loss of life, extended the domain of the possible for western intellectuals who otherwise thought of themselves as powerless in the face of the state.³¹

More concretely, French workers whose livelihoods were threatened by a process we know today as globalisation, the process whereby local markets are forcibly opened to global competitors, saw themselves as victims of American imperialism too. Deleuze and Guattari were keenly aware of the high cost of structural adjustments (to use the purposefully dry language of economists):

If we look at today's [1972] situation, power necessarily has a global or total vision. What I mean is that every form of repression today, and they are multiple, is easily totalised, systematised from the point of view of power: the racist repression against immigrants, the repression in factories, the repression in schools and teaching, and the repression of youth in general. We mustn't look for the unity of these forms of repression only in reaction to May '68, but more so in a concerted preparation and organisation concerning our immediate future. Capitalism in France is dropping its liberal, paternalistic mask of full employment; it desperately needs a 'reserve' of unemployed workers. It's from this vantage point that unity can be found in the forms of repression I already mentioned: the limitation of immigration, once it's understood we're leaving the hardest and lowest paying jobs to them; the repression in factories, because now it's all

about once again giving the French a taste for hard work; the struggle against youth and the repression in schools and teaching, because police repression must be all the more active now that there is less need for young people on the job market (DI, 210/??).

On this point, Ross argues that the geographical boundary of the events of May needs to be widened to encompass Italy because the political convulsions wrought by the first stages of globalisation were nowhere in Europe felt more keenly.³² The striking Fiat workers' slogan 'Vietnam is in our factories!' made the connection to American Imperialism explicit. This is, then, Ross's third move: she argues for a redefinition of the sociological frame in which the events are considered. May '68 would not have been the event it was if the protest action had been confined to either the students or the workers or even the farmers. It was the fact that these groups, as well as many others, found it possible and necessary to link up with each other that resulted in the extraordinary event we know as May '68. But, and this is Ross's main point, none of these groups - students, workers, farmers, etc. - can be treated as pre-existing, self-contained, homogeneous entities. As for the encounters between these heterogeneous groups, they obviously cannot be treated in the same way that one might regard the actions of states agreeing by treaty to work together for the sake of a common interest. Ross suggests that the process might better be described as 'cultural contamination' and argues that it "was encounters with people different from themselves - and not the glow of shared identity - that allowed a dream of change of flourish."³³ Ross's purpose, however, is not to assert the primacy of the individual, or indeed the primacy of difference, two moves which as Jameson has shown in his various critiques of Anglo-American cultural studies lead inexorably to political paralysis. By repudiating both the collective and the same under the utterly misconceived banner of 'anti-totalisation', cultural studies has for all practical intents and purposes divested itself of two of the most basic prerequisites for politics, namely the potential for a common action and a common aim.³⁴ Well aware of the pitfalls of valorising the individual at the expense of the collective, the different at the expense of the same, Ross argues for an approach to the sociological dimension of May '68 that is perfectly attuned to Deleuze and Guattari's work.³⁵

In the long aftermath of May '68, an event which many French intellectuals came to think of as a 'failed revolt', the question of power - what it is, how it functions, who has it and who does not - was the principal concern of the majority of France's leading intellectuals. Along with the interrelated questions concerning the possibility of resistance and (more concretely) the possibility of political action itself, power was the uppermost concern of Louis

Althusser, Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Cornelius Castoriadis, Hélène Cixous, Régis Debray, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Henri Lefebvre, Jean-François Lyotard, Nicos Poulantzas, Jacques Rancière and Paul Virilio. Very far from homogeneous in their political and philosophical allegiances, though most would own to a Left-orientation, providing it was clear that didn't mean they were Marxists (or, in the case of Althusser and Althusserians like Balibar and Rancière, they would own to a Left-orientation providing it was understood that meant they were a very particular type of Marxist), there is a surprising degree of consistency across the quite diverse body of work produced by these writers in the decade after May '68 concerning the question of power. For instance, they all accept that power is not a simple matter of coercion or repression, the dominance of one group of people over another, that contemporary society cannot be understood in this way as the product or the expression of a powerful ruling elite exercising influence over a powerless majority. Moreover, they all agree that power resides in the ordinary, that tradition, law, language, and the way we organise our daily lives is directly and indirectly inflected by the operations of power. They also accept that power requires a degree of complicity on the part of the ruled to function, but disagree on the question of how this achieved. They all agree that the situation in which the planet finds itself is parlous, to say the least, and they more or less agree on the cause, namely capitalism; what's more, they all agree things are in desperate need of change, but they disagree - often quite vehemently - as to how this change might be achieved. The debate that raged in respect to this last question concerned power directly inasmuch that the central point of contention was whether or not change could be achieved without forcibly taking power through some kind of revolutionary action.

Anti-Oedipus was lobbed into this fray like an intellectual cluster bomb - it had multiple targets, from the primacy of the signifier in linguistics to the dependency on lack in psychoanalysis, but its primary objective was (as Michel Foucault astutely points out in his highly influential preface to the English translation) to caution us against the fascist inside, the desire to seize power for oneself. The principal thesis of *Anti-Oedipus*, around which its many conceptual inventions turn, is that revolution is not primarily or even necessarily a matter of taking power. Insofar as taking power means preserving all the old institutions and ideas in which power is invested it could even be said that revolutions of this type are actually counter-revolutionary in purpose and intent because they change nothing essential. Ultimately for Deleuze and Guattari, accounting for May '68 necessitated a complete rethinking of political concepts like power, power relations, groups, group identity, the event, and

so on, and insofar as it takes up this challenge, *Anti-Oedipus* is appropriately described as a May '68 book.

ENDNOTES

- 1 - Nadaud 2006:12.
- 2 - Negri 2004: 46.
- 3 - For an excellent discussion of this apparent contradiction in Deleuze's approach to 'praxis' see Thoburn 2003: 35-7.
- 4 - He was involved in GIP for instance and spoke out against the treatment of Palestinians, the first Gulf War etc.
- 5 - It is now available on DVD.
- 6 - Of those students, Deleuze said: "I never told that audience what they meant to me, what they gave me. [...] It was like an echo chamber, a feedback loop, in which an idea reappeared after going, as it were, through various filters. It was there I realised how much philosophy needs not only a philosophical understanding, through concepts, but a nonphilosophical understanding, rooted in percepts and affects. You need both" (D, 139/191).
- 7 - Pinhas also used Deleuze's voice in other ways, combining it with music to produce Deleuze-inspired electronica of a peculiarly haunting variety.
- 8 - Interestingly enough, Guattari described himself as being heavily influenced by Sartre, even going so far as to admit that certain concepts like deterritorialisation are simply Sartre's in disguise.
- 9 - Tournier 1988: 128.
- 10 - Negri 2004: 46. As Negri records here, it was Guattari who arranged for Negri's relocation from Italy to France in the early 1980s with the help of Amnesty International. They collaborated on a variety of political projects, including an ultimately forlorn but important attempt to forge an alliance between the Reds and the Greens, and produced a manifesto, *Communists Like Us: New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of Alliance* (1985), which foreshadows many of themes Negri would take up in his collaborative work with Michael Hardt, especially *Empire* (2000).
- 11 - Reflecting on the meeting with Lacan to discuss *Anti-Oedipus*, Guattari wrote in his diary that he felt something had broken between them. (AOP, 344).
- 12 - Nadaud 2006.
- 13 - Genosko 2002: 16.
- 14 - "May '68 was the largest mass movement in French history, the biggest strike in the history of the French workers' movement [involving some 9 million workers], and the only 'general' insurrection the overdeveloped world has known since World War II. It was the first general strike that extended beyond the traditional centres of industrial production to include workers in the service industries, the communication and culture industries - the whole sphere of social reproduction. No professional sector, no category of worker was unaffected by the strike; no region, city, or village in France was untouched" Ross 2002: 4.
- 15 - Ross 2002: 6.

- 16 - "May '68 came as a shock to Gilles and me, as to many others: we didn't know each other, but this book, now, is nevertheless a result of May." (N, 15/??).
- 17 - Ross 2002: 106; 116.
- 18 - Similarly they rejected as pointless the shrill demand for self-criticism the Maoists made, arguing that it did nothing to engage power as it actually functions. As Deleuze put it, "in May 1968 the leftists lost a lot of time insisting that professors engage in public self-criticism as agents of bourgeois ideology. It's stupid, and it simply fuels the masochistic impulses of academics." (CY, 56).
- 19 - They certainly didn't share the view of commentators like Raymond Aron and (much more recently) Pierre Nora who declared that nothing happened that May. Nor would they go along with the New Philosophers' attempt a decade later to bury the memory of May '68 altogether. See Ross 2002: 67; 171.
- 20 - Thus, I have to disagree with Peter Hallward (2006: 7) when he argues rather that Deleuze's work has little to offer politically speaking because Deleuze fails to live up to Marx's dictum that philosophy should not simply try to understand society, it should try to change it as well. In my view, he caricatures Deleuze as a contemplative philosopher whose thought somehow resists doing what needs to be done. For Deleuze, theoretical work is in itself a political act because it creates new conditions for thought and there is no more potent formula for change than the changing of ideas and attitudes. In this regard, Deleuze's political thought is compatible with the positions outlined by Holloway (2005) and George (2004).
- 21 - As Ronald Bogue (1989: 6) observes the renown of *Anti-Oedipus* was something of a double-edged sword. Deleuze and Guattari "became symbols of anti-psychiatry and the spirit of May, and as a result the broader concerns that informed *Anti-Oedipus* were often ignored."
- 22 - Jameson 1990: 5.
- 23 - Ross 2002: 95.
- 24 - Ross 2002: 95.
- 25 - Ross 2002: 26.
- 26 - Ross 2002: 38.
- 27 - Fields 1984: 149.
- 28 - Fields 1984: 151.
- 29 - Ross 2002: 80.
- 30 - Ross 2002: 91.
- 31 - Ross 2002: 91. On a practical level, too, it was the anti-Vietnam groups, like the CVN and CVB, both of which formed in 1967, which provided the organisational nuclei that helped escalate May '68 from a localised student protest to nationwide strike.
- 32 - As Nicholas Thoburn (2003) has demonstrated, the workers' movements in Italy were very important to Deleuze and Guattari.
- 33 - Ross 2002: 130.
- 34 - Jameson 1994.
- 35 - Ross 2002: 170.

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