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Plateau

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PLATEAU

Tamsin Lorraine

Rather than plotting points or fixing an order, Deleuze and Guattari wrote their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a rhizome composed of ‘plateaus’. They claim that the circular form they gave it was ‘only for laughs’ (D&G 1987: 22). The plateaus are meant to be read in any order and each plateau can be related to any other plateau. Deleuze and Guattari cite Gregory Bateson’s use of the word ‘plateau’ to designate a ‘continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities’ that does not develop in terms of a point of culmination or an external goal. Plateaus are constituted when the elements of a region (for example, the microsensations of a sexual practice or the microperceptions of a manner of attending) are not subjected to an external plan of organisation. An external plan imposes the selection of some connections rather than others from the virtual relations among the elements that could be actualised, actualising varying capacities to affect and be affected in the process. A plateau emerges when the singularities of an individual or a plane that previously only ‘insisted’ in a concrete state of affairs are put into play through the actualisation of connections that defy the imposition of external constraints (for example, tantric sexual practices in which orgasm is not the goal or meditative states that deliberately avoid goal-oriented thinking).

Deleuze and Guattari deliberately avoided writing *A Thousand Plateaus* in a style that moves the reader from one argument to the next, until all the arguments can be gathered together into the culminating argument of the book as a whole. Instead they present fifteen plateaus that are meant to instigate productive connections with a world they refuse to represent. Throughout Deleuze’s work and his work with Guattari, he and Guattari create philosophical concepts that they do not want to pin down to any one meaning. Instead they let their concepts reverberate, expressing some of the variations in their sense through the shifting contexts in which they are put to use. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they characterise such concepts as fragmentary wholes that can resonate in a powerful, open Whole that includes all the concepts on one and the same plane. This plane they call a ‘plane of consistency’ or ‘the plane of immanence of concepts, the planomenon’ (D&G 1987: 35).

Deleuze and Guattari advocate constructing a Body without Organs (BwO) and ‘abstract machines’ (with a ‘diagrammatic’ function D&G 1987: cf. 189–90) that put into play forces that are not constrained by the habitual forms of a personal self or other ‘molar’ forms of existence. A BwO is a plateau constructed in terms of intensities that reverberate

in keeping with a logic immanent to their own unfolding rather than conventional boundaries of self and other. An abstract machine ‘places variables of content and expression in continuity’ (D&G 1987: 511). It (for example, the Galileo abstract machine) emerges when variables of actions and passions (the telescope, the movement of a pendulum, the desire to understand) are put into continuous variation with incorporeal events of sense (Aristotelian mechanics and cosmology, Copernican heliocentrism), creating effects that reverberate throughout the social field (D&G 1987: cf. 511). There are various ways in which an assemblage’s capacity to increase its number of connections into a plane of consistency can be impeded; creative connections can be replaced with blockages, strata, ‘black holes’, or ‘lines of death’. An assemblage that multiplies connections approaches the ‘living abstract machine’ (D&G 1987: 513).

Connectives

Actuality
Black hole
Rhizome
Whole

PLATO (C. 428–C. 348 BC)

Alison Ross

Plato’s philosophy exerts a profound influence over modern thought. Immanuel Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy was styled as an inverted Platonism in which the dependence of a finite consciousness on sensible forms to think ideas reversed the Platonic hierarchy between the intelligible and the sensible. Friedrich Nietzsche, who found Kant’s critical philosophy inadequate for such a reversal on account of the primacy in Kant of the moral idea, defined the task of the philosophy of the future as the ‘reversal of Platonism’ in which the distinction between the real and the apparent worlds would be abolished. Deleuze follows Nietzsche in this task of a reversal of Platonism, but also refines the ‘abstract’ Nietzschean formula of this task by asking about the motivation of Platonism. In his analysis of this motivation Deleuze finds in Plato, unlike Nietzsche’s ‘external’ critique, the conditions for the reversal of Platonism. For this reason, Deleuze’s reversal of Platonism is also better equipped to critique the dualist ontology of Platonism that continues to operate in Kant.

The motive of Plato’s theory of the Ideas needs to ‘be sought in a will