

Queer Sites: Tools, Terrains, Theories

What this [pedagogical] institution cannot bear, is for anyone to tamper with language.... It can bear more readily the most apparently revolutionary ideological sorts of "content," if only that content does not touch the borders of language and of all the juridico-political contracts that it guarantees. (Derrida 94-95)

Foucault once wrote that theory is no longer "theoretical," that it is a perilous practice, a struggle against power, and that, in revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious, it is a struggle "to sap power, to take power" (Foucault and Deleuze 208).¹ Power, however, is emphatically deployed on the body, regulating its actions and channeling its passages and transformations. A theory that is involved in a power struggle — and one can argue that all theory is invariably linked to one side or the other in such a struggle — is hence always played out on the surface of that body; it either limits its possibilities for movement or opens them up for yet unthought of prospects.

The main concern motivating this essay is the practice of theory understood in terms of this Foucauldian notion: theory as a body, or a site, where forces are deployed and enacted; theory as a tense collectivity creating and serving its interests as well as those of others; in other words, theory as not just a stage for political struggle and contestation, but also as an active participant in the events of the historico-political moment. My focus in what follows is not so much on the political implications of a theory outside the academic situation or even on academic politics per se; rather, it is on the political aspects of the theoretical act itself.

Enter Deleuze, more accurately, enter Deleuze and Guattari in *L'Anti-Oedipe* (*Anti-Oedipus*), Deleuze and Parnet in *Dialogues*, Deleuze and Foucault in "Intellectuals and Power," and so on. Deleuze tells us,

1 I owe special thanks to Julia Creet and François Lachance for their help with an earlier draft of this essay. As well, I would like to acknowledge the indulgence and patience of my audience at the annual meeting of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature (U of Alberta, 1994) where these thoughts were first presented.

Nous sommes des déserts, mais peuplés de tribus, de faunes et de flores. Nous passons notre temps à ranger ces tribus, à les disposer autrement, à en éliminer certaines, à en faire prospérer d'autres. Et toutes ces peuplades, toutes ces foules, n'empêchent pas le désert, qui est notre ascèse même, au contraire elles l'habitent, elles passent par lui, sur lui.... Le désert, l'expérimentation sur soi-même, est notre seule identité, notre chance unique pour toutes les combinaisons qui nous habitent. (Deleuze and Parnet 18)

We are deserts, but populated by tribes, flora and fauna. We pass our time ordering these tribes, arranging them in other ways, getting rid of some and encouraging others to prosper. And all these clans, all these crowds, do not undermine the desert which is our very asceticism; on the contrary they inhabit it, they pass through it, over it.... The desert, experimentation on oneself is our only identity, our single chance for all the combinations which inhabit us. (11)

From the moment one steps into Deleuze's texts one is taken up into the swirling of multiplicities: not only clans and crowds, but proper names, histories, disciplines, concepts, styles. Much has already been said about the multiplicity embodied in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy; fragments are picked up here and there, redeployed, plugged into ever shifting flows, connecting, consuming, discharging, interrupting, producing. In one word: desiring. Deleuze and Guattari make available their own writings in the same spirit. The text is a tool box. There is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. Pick a tool up and see if it works for you. If not, leave it aside and move on to another or to something else altogether (Deleuze and Parnet 9-10/3-4).

The tools I want to pick up here are Deleuze's pronouncements on the practice of theory, on his own practice, more specifically, on his treatment of the history of philosophy, the ways in which he has pursued it and the uses he has put it to. Though taken together these pronouncements might be read or construed as a sort of metalanguage or metatheory, I am interested in them on their own terms, i.e., in their status and usefulness as tools. My point is not to judge their accuracy with reference to the philosophical texts Deleuze himself, or anyone else for that matter, has produced so far.

Another disclaimer that I want to make from the outset is that I am only interested in one of the many practices that Deleuze, or Deleuze and Guattari, deploy, and that I do not take this practice to encapsulate, confine, or determine, a Deleuzo-Guattarian style of doing the history of philosophy. To adopt a functionalist stand, to want to figure out how a particular machine works and how it connects with other machines is to insist that there is no single style of doing anything, that each context and each problem, allows, creates, or demands its own style or sometimes even set of styles.

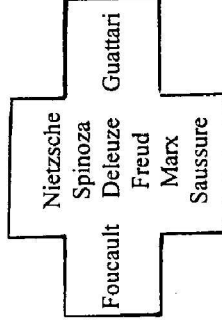
Throughout *L'Anti-Oedipe*, Deleuze and Guattari insist that we are but a multiplicity of machines; our fragmented bodies are constantly being trafficked and reconfigured by flows and intensities. Necessity, utility, and organization no longer apply. In fact, desire short-circuits the mechanisms of codification and

territorialization. Organs and machines become the interrupts and flows of production. Mouth, skin, anus, vagina, nose, and nipple no longer obey the one-dimensional and inefficient hierarchy of the organism.

What is striking about these pronouncements is the sexual connotations they carry, connotations which Deleuze is the first to point out. The multiplicity of names and references in the texts is part of a multiplicity of "pick ups" (Deleuze and Parnet 10) as in a bar or strip joint. With Guattari, Deleuze does not just write about the multiplicity of desire, he does it. Both are the consummate intellectual sluts and their text is as much an orgy room as it is a desert. In fact, their thousand plateaus turn into the thousand orgy rooms of a queer bath-house. "Queer" because, after all, "L'homosexualité est la vérité de l'amour" ("homosexuality is the truth of love") (Deleuze 1964, 99/1972, 78): "nous sommes hétérosexuels statistiquement ou molaiement, mais homosexuels personnellement, sans le savoir ou en le sachant" ("we are statistically or molarly heterosexual but personally homosexual, without knowing it or being fully aware of it") (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 82/1977, 70). And to say that, ultimately, we are "transsexués élémentairement, moléculairement" ("transsexual in an elemental molecular sense") (82/70) is not to invoke a ubiquitous Freudian bisexuality but to insist on a homosexuality that is neither aggregate nor specific. Indeed, transsexuality, or hermaphroditic "nonhuman" sex, is a localized homosexuality operating at the level of partial objects and machines. It is a nomadic homosexuality that has escaped the binary logic of the accursed Oedipal organism. Transsexuality is homosexuality based on sexes-as-organs rather than sexes-as-persons (Deleuze 1964, 159-67/1972, 117-22).

In Deleuze and Guattari all the names of history converge onto a proliferation of penises, mouths, vaginas, and assholes. Pick-ups and chance encounters are constantly at work in the text. Deleuze describes them as nuptials against nature. The expression is a major motif in his first contribution to the dialogues with Parnet. A nuptial, however, is not a marriage between the couple man-woman. A nuptial is unnatural. The binary machines question-answer, masculine-feminine, man-animal are dismantled. The history of philosophy is redrawn and its texts re-written. The multitude of its fragments is wrested out of useless canonical organisms and plugged into projects of partiality, frenzy, irreverence. Passion is brought back into the imagination and desire back into thought. Writing turns to masturbation. This appropriation of texts is as much a crime against the repressive function of a scholastic history of Philosophy (Deleuze 1990, 14), against the necessity of precedents, lineages, truths, and causes, just as homosexuality is a crime against the nature of Oedipus.

But homosexuality in Deleuze's text is invoked in much more explicit terms than just through oblique allusions to "crimes against nature," an expression that has haunted modern homosexuality in the western world. For one thing, Deleuze seems to be totally fascinated, if not obsessed with the "behind." "Le mouvement



se fait toujours dans le dos du penseur" ("Movement always happens behind the thinker's back") (Deleuze and Parnet 71/1). "Avec Fanny, je n'ai jamais cessé de travailler de cette manière. Toujours ses idées m'ont pris à revers..." ("I always worked this way with Fanny. Her ideas always seized me from behind...") (17/10). Sartre, "c'était vraiment le courant d'air d'arrière-cour" ("was the breath of fresh air from the backyard") (18/12). Spinoza "qui m'a fait le plus d'effet d'un courant d'air qui vous pousse dans le dos chaque fois que vous le lisez, d'un balai de sorcière qu'il vous fait enfourcher" ("more than any other gave me the feeling of a gust of air from behind each time you read him, of a witch's broom which he makes you mount") (22/15). And lest we lose sight of the sexual connotation of this last quote, Deleuze is quick to insist that the history of philosophy in his text functions as a form of assfuck: "Je m'imaginai arriver dans le dos d'un auteur, et lui faire un enfant, qui serait le sien et qui serait pourtant monstrueux" (1990, 15); which is sometimes translated as "I imagined myself approaching an author from behind and giving him a child which would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous" (1977, 112), thus rendering "arriver dans le dos" as "approaching from behind" rather than "coming [cumming] in the back." Such a polite and learned translation obscures the overdetermined moment of the text and the sexual machine "Deleuze" as it takes up and manipulates theory.

Deleuze's bringing (homo)sexuality back into thought is a slap in the face of a theoretical apparatus which privileges the disembodied (heterosexual) idea. However, this seems to be only a half-hearted slap. The deterritorialization of philosophy here is in fact hastily reterritorialized, recaptured, and reordered by Deleuze's penis.

Notwithstanding the visceral, desirous, and pleasurable in Deleuze's language, there is something that still leaves me more than slightly uncomfortable about the way in which the analogy of assfuck is deployed. For it is not only the act of anal penetration that is important here but also the identities and positionings of the performers themselves. In fact, who gets to play which role is a function of a hierarchy of deterritorializing potentials that are henceforth reterritorialized and recoded. Deleuze gets to fuck the three-headed Repressor Marx-Freud-de Saussure but gets to fuck with, "steal" (Deleuze and Parnet 21/17), fuck, and get fucked by Félix or Michel. Nietzsche and Spinoza, on the other hand, reverse the dynamic; they are the ones doing the fucking: "des enfants dans le dos, c'est lui [Nietzsche] qui vous en fait" (1990, 15). The history of philosophy is hence reduced to an almost static daisy chain with Deleuze neatly nestled in between the penises of some and the assholes of others.

Deleuze's ass fuck remains gendered; it still posits the strong, the creative, the active, the Male, as penetrator. His homosexuality is, at least partially, Oedipalized, and not only because it invokes and consolidates the binary machines active-passive, fucker-fuckee, top-bottom. His homosexuality is reproductive. Vaginal penetration and the encounter between a sperm and an ovum are quickly replaced here with an encounter between sperm and faeces. The heteronormative regulation of sexuality in terms of reproduction is still in effect though this time, admittedly, the offspring is a monster. Still, it is important for Deleuze that this monster belong to the philosopher in question (Deleuze 1990, 15). Pedigree, debt, and cause sneak back into the Deleuzian project of undermining theory's rigid and one-dimensional model.

But what if, once it reaches into the tool box, the hand finds nothing but itself? What if ass fucking is taken over and overrun by the permeability of fisting? What if the penis is replaced by a body part that has no gender? As Guy Hocquenghem says, the ass does not discriminate (101). And neither does the fist. Both belong to man and woman and yet neither is male or female. Fisting is a sexual configuration that escapes the gender confines of statistical hetero- and homo-sex. Fisting also interrupts the restricted economy of reproduction. In it the flow of intensities is pursued for its own sake and not for that of a child, a monster, a book, or an idea.

In anal fisting, the upsetting of the heteronormative apparatus is not limited to a reversal of a long established and rigid system of behavior by one or the other of the participants. In a typical patriarchal sexual scenario man assumes the role of the active "top" who puts in motion and controls the dynamics of the encounter while woman, as the "bottom," is required to respond to man's desires and directives. Though reversed, this binary structure of top and bottom is maintained intact in the rhetoric and sexual scenarios of "statistical homosexuality." Indeed, and as far as the liberal lesbian and gay rhetoric is concerned, the various permutations allowing a flexibility in terms of the gender to be attached to a particular position (woman as top or man as bottom) does not in any serious way challenge the binary machine top-bottom and its governing rules and valuations. In anal fisting, however, the subversion can run much deeper than a mere reversal of roles or expectations. In fact, the whole structure of top and bottom can be disfigured, blurred, and dismantled.

The following two scenarios are offered as concrete examples. In 1983, and long before sex between lesbians and gay men became a symbol of the sexual

avant garde or a fashion statement, Pat Califia wrote an article for the *Advocate* entitled "Gay Men, Lesbians, and Sex: Doing It Together." In it, Califia tells us that it was through her contact with the gay S/M scene in San Francisco that she learned the art of fisting, an art which she practiced on men — and there is no indication, in the article at least, that, once she had perfected her technique, Califia decided to "graduate" to fisting women exclusively. The repertoire, etiquette, and experiences being described here are not genitally centered. The gender of the person one is having sex with, one is fisting or is being fisted by, is not necessarily the most central and defining component of the scene. Sometimes even the gender of the person in question is altogether irrelevant for that scene and its pleasures. Though taking place between a "statistical" man and a "statistical" woman, such a scene is neither therapeutic nor reproductive. In it sex is no longer orgasmically fixated. As such, it acquires a capacity to dissolve the foreplay and afterplay distinctions and the rigid linear progression that the Oedipal model forces us to follow.

Another scenario that is perhaps more detrimental to the binary Oedipal machine is wide fisting where the asshole is penetrated with not just one but two fists. In this case, the dissolution of the structure of top and bottom or active and passive is perhaps more radical. If the fister is the active top and the fistee is the passive bottom, then what exactly happens when the fister has both hands inside the fistee, when the fistee's sphincter muscle turns into an instrument of bondage? Who is the top here and who is the bottom? It seems that both share the two roles equally and simultaneously. The lines of demarcation between the categories of top and bottom are dissolved. The stability of the traditional binary structure that sets up these categories as strict and discrete and which in the process attaches different values to them is undermined. But if both fister and fistee in this case share the two roles equally, this is not meant to suggest that they are "equal." The scene is not a return to a vanilla conception of sexuality as sharing, reciprocal, and supportive. The power dynamic is not denied, it is perverted. Its lines of demarcation are blurred. Its codes are broken and reconstituted in a way that they are no longer hierarchical. And if the power dynamic is perverted, so is its outcome. Predictability is replaced with an experimentation that would not have been allowed by the machine that consolidates the distribution of preformed roles.

Back to Deleuze and to Foucault in "Intellectuals and Power," where theory, or philosophy, or the history of philosophy, is seen as a partial and localized practice belonging to "a system of relays within a larger sphere, within a multiplicity of parts that are both theoretical and practical" (206). As I see it, the problematic for those of us working in the field of queer theory becomes one of establishing such lateral relays between the two supposedly disparate domains, theory and sexuality, without grounding, justifying, or extrapolating one in,

through, or from the other.² In this context, the experimental dynamics of fisting outlined above can serve as a productive junction and filter. Indeed, many of us circulating on this terrain have insisted that queer theory is not merely a theory of the queer designed to generate a credible discourse explaining and defending perverse sexuality, we have in fact argued that queer theory must itself be queer. This, of course, is not meant simply as a reflection of our own sexual proclivities but rather as a necessary precondition for any understanding of the complex connections between the "theory" and the "queer" body.

But if queer theory is to be queer, then does this not involve it being queered? Does it not mean that, among other things, one needs to work in the gap between the perversely fluid and the institutionally static by, for instance, setting up fisting relays between the two sides? If queer theory is that area of research which aims at "rethink[ing] the sexual in new ways, elsewhere and other-wise" as Teresa de Lauretis has argued (xvi), then it must require a shift away from the customary archaeological model of knowledge as an endless pursuit of depths, precedents, fixed itineraries, and hierarchical truths to a geographical or topographical one emphasizing surfaces, movements, disguises, production, and play. Such a shift involves maintaining and furthering queer theory's methodological nomadism and experimentation that are being attested to by its participation in a radical project of redrawing the boundaries separating traditional patterns of discourse and knowledge. Through an interdisciplinarity witnessed in borrowing tools and techniques from one investigative field and applying them to a totally different one, queer theory can continue on generating experimental and fluid forms of knowledge that are to be judged by the standards of neither. This theory can thus not only allow for an encounter between the various distinct bodies of work to which its interdisciplinary nature may be traced — feminist criticism, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis, medicine, and literary and cultural studies — it can also provide a site for their mutual contestation and the repudiation of their orthodoxies by taking them in directions so far largely uninvestigated. Furthering such a nomadism would then involve an insistence on an openness and exteriority that would preclude a fixed canon or methodology. Ultimately, queering queer theory, fisting it, fostering its nomadic tendencies, is

2 One is almost tempted to argue that the title "queer theory" is a misnomer insofar as "theory," at least implicitly, suggests a field of research in which a discourse and its objects are systematic, coherent, and complete while "queer" carries with it a considerable degree of ambivalence and uncertainty. For, whereas modern "homosexuality" has been an imposed scientific category with its own clear-cut mechanisms of surveillance and control, and whereas "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" have all been self-defined terms with fairly clear political agendas and parameters, the most recent reincarnation of the term "queer" retains, or at least one hopes it retains, a perverse specificity that is antithetical to the oppositional logic of the "abnormal," the innocuously "odd," the medically "pathological," or the socially acceptable "alternative."

equivalent to transforming it into a series of dislocated and disordered propositions, of driftworks tugging and pushing in opposite directions. Much like the fools on Bosch's *Narrenschiff*, what we as queer theorists would share is the disorientation of an uncharted voyage. What we would have in common would go beyond a truth, a canon, or a method; it would be our understanding of sexuality as queer, i.e., as performative in the way Nietzsche understood performance as "the delight in simulation exploding as a power that pushes aside one's so-called 'character,' flooding it and at times extinguishing it; the inner craving for a role and a mask, for appearance" (§361). Rather than locating significance or truth, our approach would aim at generating and provoking new performances — textual, artistic, erotic, or political — presented as tools, not to be judged exclusively in terms of what they mean but also in terms of what they allow us to do.

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II. THE SUPERIOR EMPIRICISM OF THE HUMAN

"...everything which disrupts the relationship between things and puts us in touch with certain more acute states of mind..."