

‘But we always make love with worlds’: Deleuze (and Guattari) and love

Hannah Stark
University of Adelaide

Pierre Macherey describes critical inquiry as ‘the articulation of a silence’ (1978, p. 6). This paper argues that the concept of love in the work of Gilles Deleuze signals a moment of paradox in his articulation of subjectivity. The conflict between a mode of imperceptible subjectivity and the imperative of this subject to love is unacknowledged in English-language studies of Deleuze and as such affects one such critical silence. The existence of this absence reveals a great deal about the body of theory that has emerged in the wake of Deleuze’s work, as well as the current critical climate. I am more interested here, however, in how displaying this conflict could enable a more nuanced understanding of Deleuze’s philosophy. I also want to suggest that rather than being perceived as an inadequacy, this conflict may hold the greatest possibility for political applications.

In contemporary critical discourse work abounds on sexuality and desire but there is relatively little about love. Michael Hardt, one of the few scholars working on love as a political concept, acknowledges this hesitation, and suggests that consequently there is much to work against when theorising love (2007). When I first came to read Deleuze, love was a term that seemed inconsistent in what I thought of as a world of shifting surfaces: it appeared to require too much interiority and struck me as embarrassingly sentimental. It is perhaps not surprising that although much work on sex and sexuality is underpinned by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of desire, Deleuze’s writing on love remains largely un-theorised. This absence echoes a general postmodern hesitation with what may be considered a naïve concept. This conspicuous silence, however, is fraught with ambivalence

1



Online Proceedings of ‘Sustaining Culture’ (2008)

Annual Conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia (CSAA)

UniSA, Adelaide December 6-8, 2007

<http://unisa.edu.au/com/csaa/onlineproceedings.htm>

because what cannot be said inheres in what is. Postmodern love, according to Catherine Belsey, is

... at once endlessly perused and ceaselessly suspected. Can such a paradoxical value speak or be spoken? Desired as the ultimate good, feared as constraint, doubted as an illusion, postmodern love is both silent and garrulous. It cannot speak, and yet it seems that it never ceases to speak in late twentieth-century Western culture. (1994, p. 685)

Deleuze's use of love is an instance of such hesitation and excess, because it persists throughout his work without ever being fully interrogated. His unrelenting refusal to erase love is being eclipsed in the canonisation of his work, which is currently in process and this limits the ways in which meaning is extrapolated from his philosophy.

Recently, the silence surrounding Deleuze's scattered references to love has been ruptured by John Protevi in a brief article in which he compares Deleuze and Guattari's work on love with Derrida's. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Protevi argues, love is a central concept because it is 'anti-oedipality itself' (Protevi 2003, p. 187). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Protevi positions love as arising from the dismantling of subjectivity and the potential connections that this maximises. While I follow Protevi's analysis of both volumes, I want to extend an understanding of love to encompass Deleuze's earlier project of articulating pure difference. The benefit of doing so is to further illuminate the complex system of meaning that Deleuze establishes to examine the relationship between subjectivity and the world.

Subjectivity is necessarily reconfigured in Deleuze's work to enable its positioning within his theorisation of an infinitely unstable world. Deleuze's style, Bogue suggests, is always operating on the periphery of intelligibility (1996, p. 266). This is because he continuously articulates an unrepresentable pure difference that exists independently of other terms. In



Deleuze's address of the world he proposes a model that can encompass utter complexity while at the same time acknowledging that the articulation of this must use those problematic and limiting systems of language, meaning and representation that he is critiquing. Deleuze's recurring attempt to address the world has prompted Manuel Delanda to position him as a realist (n. p.) rather than (as is more common) a materialist. In accordance with Deleuze's own model of politics, this positioning can be seen as highly political. Politics in and of itself, is, for Deleuze, directed at transformation (Patton 2000, p. 3) because it is the potential to imagine and create the world differently. Therefore it is figured as a practical concern aimed at 'the real world'. This is grounded in his situation of his own work as practical philosophy obscuring the division between politics and praxis because Deleuze regards philosophy—the creation of concepts—as itself a political act. Deleuze and Guattari are explicit about this in *What is Philosophy?*, where they suggest,

[w]e lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present.* The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and a people that do not yet exist. (1994, p. 108, emphasis in original)

They then foreground the relation between politics and becoming in a way that makes critique inseparable from transformation.

The refusal to accept the stability of the subject rests on the acknowledgment of the state of flux which, for Deleuze, is a product of the constant interaction of the actual and the virtual. The imbrication of the actual and the virtual is described by Deleuze as a circuit (2006, p. 115). This figure acknowledges their symbiosis and the way that their co-creation prompts difference through becoming. The temporal nature of Deleuze's world is underscored by this process-orientated model which acknowledges that each thing contains the potential to become other incessantly and unpredictably.



Instead of an isolated, coherent and singular subject, Deleuze proposes one that is immanent. Deleuze substitutes these prior models, which he abandons, with an idea of subjectivity that is inter-subjective and inter-connective because it is enmeshed and implicated in its surroundings. These connections are driven by desire which Deleuze and Guattari theorise as a productive force rather than as lack. In articulating desire in a way that operates contrary to much of the Western philosophical tradition of the concept, it cannot be amalgamated with love as it is positioned specifically outside, and contrary to, the psychoanalytic nexus of sexuality/desire/love. Subjectivity, then, is figured as an effect or remainder of this process because desire is evident only in assemblages; in what it causes, rather than becomes the expression of an internal essence (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, p. 285). 'This subject itself', they write,

is not at the centre, which is occupied by the machine, but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentred, *defined* by the states through which it passes. (1977, p. 20, emphasis in original)

The focus shifts here from thinking about subjectivity as a product to thinking about it in terms of processes. As a result of this emphasis on connections, in-between spaces are accorded value and entities that historically have been positioned as stable, like 'the body', can be acknowledged as open to dynamic and reciprocal interaction with the world. What this shift implies is that we do not express an internal essence when we seek out inter-connections between bodies or between the body and the world. Conversely, the interaction itself is the expression.

Deleuze speaks of the individual because he has rejected the stability required for the subject. Although I consider this to be a very problematic use of terminology, I take it that Deleuze is talking about the individual as a *singularity* rather than in a legal or political sense. The singularity of this individual is guaranteed because the interaction of the actual

and the virtual facilitates the expression of pure difference. It would be simplistic to discuss this in terms of choice because chance inheres in this interaction. Deleuze writes, '[i]ndeterminate, floating, fluid, communicative, enveloping-enveloped are so many positive characteristics affirmed by the individual' (1994, p. 258). This is part of Deleuze's project of thinking beyond identity and representation.

This abstract model of subjectivity may seem too provisional for practical and political use, however, much is relinquished by continuing to privilege an isolated and coherent subject. Elizabeth Grosz cautions us against perpetuating this stable model of subjectivity, because by doing so we fail to acknowledge the infinite ways in which things can be connected outside currently policed identities, and beyond what is both visible and articulatable within our current systems of meaning and value (2005, p. 167). Because Deleuze figures instability positively, his work is not premised on the loss of prior and more concrete ways of understanding subjectivity or the world. This would need to be rendered in terms of loss, James Williams suggests, only if the illusion of absolute certainty were sustained (2003, p. 205).

For Deleuze, the rejection of intelligibility in his insistence on becoming-imperceptible is a political imperative to slip beyond dominant systems of meaning and value. Deleuze and Guattari acclaim 'imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality' (2004, p. 309) as the three virtues and the primary reality. This refusal of intelligibility is ultimately a way to ensure the most acute engagement with reality. To engage fully with the world, Deleuze suggests, we must be able to form experimental connections that do not make sense. Through a refusal of identity and the privileging of constant change beyond what is knowable, determinism is repudiated. Deleuze's project actualises pure difference because the stability of systems and the perpetuation of the same are illusory, leaving pure difference not just as a possibility but as all that remains.



In both *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze shows how love facilitates the instability of subjectivity because for him love is part of the guarantee and celebration of difference rather than being figured in terms of recognition, merging or sameness, which are descriptors that many other models of love utilise. Michael Hardt affirms this, suggesting that because 'we lose ourselves in love, or, in love we become different' (2007), love is an important way to think about the relationship between connection and the manifestation of difference. By situating love within the amalgamation of expression and what is expressed, Deleuze writes of love as a form of mutual expression. Following Spinoza he affirms that the world is composed of one univocal substance that manifests as difference. This occurs through *explication* and *involvement* that can be described etymologically and figuratively in terms of folding and unfolding. Difference within univocity is facilitated by *explication*, which unfolds a univocal substance so that it can express itself as a multiplicity. Reciprocally, *involvement* reveals univocity in difference through re-folding, which enables us to perceive as a unity a multiplicity of substances with infinite differences (Deleuze 1992, p. 16). Identity is made redundant by a univocal substance that continually expresses itself without pattern or the relation to an original. The implication that Hardt draws from Deleuze is that we can think of love 'as an act of creation in a field of difference or even as an act of differentiation' (2007).

In Deleuze's writing, love is a rare concept because it is described consistently throughout the entire trajectory of his work. Ultimately he accords love a constitutive function. 'There is no love', he writes, 'which does not begin with the revelation of a possible world as such, enwound in the other which expresses it' (1994, p. 261). The world is expressed in the connections between individuals because (in accordance with Leibniz's monad) the whole of the world is folded into each one of them (Deleuze 1993, p. 26). By folding and unfolding the world, an individual reveals the world's concurrent univocity and multiplicity. 'The soul is the expression of the world (actuality)', Deleuze argues, '... because the world is what the soul expresses (virtuality)' (1993, p. 26). What is encountered in the other¹, therefore, is



neither reassurance nor recognition, but a confrontation with the possible—a possible articulation of the world through how it is being explicated by another. Connections themselves also explicate the world because, according to the logic of the univocity of substance, they are part of the unfolding of the entire world that resides in each individual. This demonstrates that participation as well as observation is required. Deleuze writes, ‘I do nothing but explicate the Other, as I develop and realize the corresponding possible world’ (1990, p. 307). This mutual constitution of the subject and the world can be described as ‘worlding’. This is a creative act but one that prioritises this creation concurrently with the destruction required for an immanent embrace of the new.

To engage more fully with reality entails acknowledging the flux of the world. Williams suggests that there is an ethical imperative in this encounter: identity must be relinquished so that it is neither imposed on the other nor assumed for its benefit. Alternatively, a more complete interaction with the world could be revealed through making and unmaking the self in a way that demonstrates the illusion of its stability (Williams 2003, p. 210). Williams writes, ‘[t]he encounter with the other makes my world more strange and, hence, more intense, not more comfortable or communal or better known’ (2003, p. 209).

Love attains a cosmological pitch in *A Thousand Plateaus* where it is regarded as experimentation by being connected explicitly to the body without organs (Deleuze & Guattari 2004, p. 167). It signals the moment when governing—and thus transcendent—modes of subjectivity are abandoned in order to maximise implication and explication of the world. In this context, Protevi suggests that love is the ‘release of multiplicities from their Servitude’ (2003, p. 188), so that new configurations become possible. Because Deleuze and Guattari figure love as experimentation they position it in relation to becoming-imperceptible. While proclaiming love’s potential for utter deterritorialisation, however, they also declare the individual’s ability to ‘choose and be chosen’. Paradoxically, this implies a residue of the subjectivity that they disavow. Deleuze and Guattari write,



I no longer have any secrets, having lost my face, form, and matter. I am now no more than a line. I have become capable of loving, not with an abstract, universal love, but a love I shall choose, and that shall choose me, blindly, my double, just as selfless as I. One has been saved by and for love, by abandoning love and self. Now one is no more than an abstract line, like an arrow crossing the void, *Absolute deterritorialization* (2004, p. 220).

The hesitation that is evident here has not been incorporated into the field of Deleuze studies. Rather than being a limitation, however, this seeming inconsistency in Deleuze's work is the point at which both an ethics and a politics could arise. What this paradox reveals is that Deleuze and Guattari are reinforcing Deleuze's earlier connection between love, the expression of the world through explication and involvement, and the singularity of the individual who is constituted through this expression. Consequently, the abstraction of the subject, its deterritorialisation, does not result in its dissipation, but instead enables the further consolidation of real differences.

If love, with all its paradoxes and contradictions, were to be incorporated into the ways in which Deleuze is read, a more nuanced understanding of the forms of subjectivity that he articulates could be realised. Love straddles the juncture between abstraction and stability, not only consolidating differences but also dissolving recognisable forms of subjectivity. Ultimately, Deleuze's concept of love acknowledges the impossibility of containment and coherence. In allowing for indeterminacy, contradiction and heterogeneity, it does so not as a possibility but as all there can be. This subject is beyond representation, because the eternal return of difference makes this redundant, but it does not mean that it is endlessly everywhere, proliferating in all directions. Although it is finite and particular, it cannot be encapsulated within a totalising definition, because it is neither fixed nor infinite. Love and this model of ever-changing subjectivity inhere in and facilitate one another in reciprocal interaction. Love, then, is evidence of the continual negotiation by which subjectivity



refuses containment within systems of meaning and value but is always involved in the construction and rejection of these systems. As such, subjectivity is reinscribed as a site of constant struggle without the possibility of an end.

In conclusion I want to signal the political direction that this analysis moves toward. An emerging body of work on Deleuzian ethics proposes an immanent ethics and is occupied with an application of Deleuze to 'the real world'. Adrian Parr describes the potential for a Deleuzian ethics whose 'task ... is to place us in a situation where the ground beneath our feet begins to shift' (2003, p. 310). John Marks suggests that because such an ethics should 'expand the possibilities of life' (Marks 2005), it needs not only to be directed at an open and unpredictable future but also to facilitate this level of flux. Rather than using an ethical framework, with all the historical and institutional baggage that this incurs, I will situate this as a discussion of politics, arguably a more speculative activity. A Deleuzian politics is rooted in critique, as what gives rise to imagining and creating the world differently, and is therefore explicitly tied to becoming and valuing difference positively. Positioned as the articulation, or even the creation of difference, love can be seen to facilitate this process-orientated politics. It does so because love and the expression of the world relate to one another through explication and involvement. Love, then, is constitutive and productive of both the subject and the world. For Deleuze, love is emphatically both creation and 'worlding'.

References

Belsey, C 1994, Postmodern Love: Questioning the metaphysics of desire, *New Literary History*, vol. 25, pp. 683-705.

Bogue, R 1996, 'Deleuze's Style', *Man and World*, vol. 29, pp. 251-268.

Delanda, M, Protevi, J & Thanem, T 2005, *Deleuzian Interrogations: A Conversation with Manuel DeLanda, John Protevi and Torkild Thanem*, Difference, viewed 8 September 2008, <<http://www.dif-ferance.org/Delanda-Protevi.pdf>>.



- Deleuze, G 1990, *The Logic of Sense*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Deleuze, G 1992, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Zone Books, New York.
- Deleuze, G 1993, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis.
- Deleuze, G 1994, *Difference and Repetition*, Columbia University Press, Columbia.
- Deleuze, G 2006, 'The Actual and the Virtual', in *Dialogues 2* Continuum, London and New York, pp. 112-122.
- Deleuze, G & Guattari, F 1977, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Viking, New York.
- Deleuze, G & Guattari, F 1994, *What is Philosophy?*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Deleuze, G & Guattari, F 2004, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Continuum, London.
- Grosz, E 2005, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*, Allen and Unwin, NSW.
- Hardt, M 2007, *About Love*, European Graduate School, viewed 7 September 2008, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iopkoppabl>>.
- Macherey, P 1978, *A Theory of Literary Production*, Routledge and Kegan, London.
- Marks, J 2005, 'Ethics', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. A Parr, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, pp. 85-87.
- Parr, A 2003, 'Review Essay: Between Deleuze and Derrida', *Critical Horizons*, vol. 4, pp. 305-314.
- Patton, P 2000, *Deleuze and the Political*, Routledge, London, NY.
- Protevi, J 2003, 'Love', in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, eds P Patton & J Protevi, Continuum, London, pp. 182-194.
- Williams, J 2003, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: a Critical Introduction and Guide*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.



Note

1. Deleuze appears to use the terminology Other/other interchangeably although it is probable that this is a difference between translations. For consistency I have preserved Deleuze's original spelling in quotations and used "other" in my own reference to the concept in order to separate it from specific historical and philosophical frameworks.

