

# **Subjects to Nature: a comparative study of the bodily dimension in Deleuze and Guattari's Anti- Oedipus and 1905 Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality**

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## Introduction

This article examines Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*<sup>1</sup> with regard to its relation to Freud's psychoanalytic theory. At a superficial level, *Anti-Oedipus* can be seen as a manifesto of militant desire, the notorious schizoanalysis.<sup>2</sup> Such a model of thought seems to cut all links with Freudian psychoanalysis while also taking a distance—despite some attempts of mediation that are present in the text—from the powerful Lacanian interpretation of the unconscious as structured as a language.<sup>3</sup> Yet it seems to me that the polemical, anti-Freudian tone of the work disguises the possibility of another interpretation. The aim of this article is to present a reading that looks more closely at the relationship between the *Anti-Oedipus* and the work of Freud himself, with special attention paid to his early theoretical positions that culminate in the first edition of *The Three Essays on Sexuality*.<sup>4</sup> I think the advantages of such a reading are twofold: it helps us to limit as well as to broaden our understanding of the text. On the one hand, it serves to limit readings of the text that exhibit interpretative license and result in asserting conclusions that seem to contradict central features of the text and to thereby betray its explicit intentions. On the other hand, emphasizing its reference to the rich Freudian tradition helps to broaden our understanding of the text by locating it in a wider historical and theoretical context. I will focus on two aspects which might serve as a bridge between Deleuze and Guattari's theory of desire and the theory of sexuality in the early Freud: the primacy of sexuality and the particular role within it played by primary repression. I will use the primacy of sexuality as it is found in Freud's work of 1905 as a comparative model to investigate Deleuze and Guattari's notion of

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> With the term 'schizoanalysis' Deleuze and Guattari mean a kind of analysis of the forces of desire that operate in the social dimension, which they call *desiring production*. Cf. *Anti-Oedipus*, 5: "Production as process overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle. That is why desiring-production is the principal concern of a materialist psychiatry[...]" It is 'schizo' because, according to them, schizophrenia is the perspective from which it is possible to evaluate the truly social aspect of the phenomena of desire (in opposition to neurosis, which belongs more to the psychoanalytic tradition).

<sup>3</sup> For example, *Ibid.* 27, note 30.

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* trans. James Strachey (United States: Basic Books, 2000). My reading of the *Three Essays* owes its inspiration to Philippe Van Haute and Tomas Geyskens, *Confusion of Tongues: The Primacy of Sexuality in Freud, Ferenczi, and Laplanche* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

desire. My claim is that, while retaining Freud's basic structure, Deleuze and Guattari's originality lies in giving a completely new meaning and perspective to the *natural* paradigms embedded in the Freudian theory. It is possible to identify both where there is continuity and where difference arises between these two ways of conceiving desire as being embedded in nature. In Freud nature assumes a *processual* character: it does not describe states of things, but rather the passages between these states. Thus, in the first instance, the distinction that occurs between biological functions and sexuality reflects a natural process through which the organs acquire new roles. Furthermore, primary repression constitutes another natural process, this time within sexuality, through which the sexual power of the organs changes its aims and ways of expressing itself. Deleuze and Guattari maintain a biological terminology in describing the basic natural elements, the organs and they too highlight the processual aspect of nature. At the same time, however, they do not equate desire with sexuality but rather with the relation occurring between organs and social phenomena, for which the role of primary repression also changes significantly.<sup>5</sup> These conceptions of nature lead to different anthropological perspectives in which the opposition between the theories of Freud and those of Deleuze and Guattari become evident, although both sexuality and desire represent moments that enter into a critical configuration with social norms and constraints. It is precisely at this point that the two theories diverge most significantly, inasmuch as Deleuze and Guattari emphatically introduce the issue of capitalism,<sup>6</sup> whereas for Freud this issue is absent. Ultimately, although the distances can only be reduced but not overcome, I think that by taking this detour through the early Freud and by fostering a dialogue between him and the two French authors, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of some of the key features of *Anti-Oedipus* in a way that helps us move beyond the initial polemic impact of the text.

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<sup>5</sup> For Freud this is the notion of 'disgust', which is a psychic mechanism that represses certain sexual instincts; see below section 2.1. In the *Anti-Oedipus* the parallel notion is the Body without Organs, the role of which is mainly social, see section 2.2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 33-34: "Capitalism tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius in order to make it a body without organs and unleash the flows of desire on this body as a deterritorialized field. Is it correct to say that in this sense schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine[..]?" This question is answered a few lines later: "It continually draws near to its limit, which is a genuinely schizophrenic limit. It tends, with all the strength at its command, to produce the schizo as the subject of the decoded flows on the body without organs—more capitalist than the capitalist and more proletarian than the proletariat."

Before entering into the details of the issue it seems worthwhile to provide a very general account of the fundamental notion of ‘desiring production’ in *Anti-Oedipus*. With this term the authors make explicit their most basic intention in this work, that is, to create a close connection between the psychoanalytic notion of desire, in its bodily, symbolic and clinical aspects and the Marxist notion of production, in its social, economic and political framework. This theoretical operation is also reflected, as we will see, in the notion of ‘desiring machine’ which incorporates both the references to the biological terminology of organs and to the mechanical unit of production in a factory.<sup>7</sup> The best, and probably the most problematic, way to summarize the attempt to intertwine these apparently disparate dimensions is the equation presented in the text: Nature=History or Nature=Industry.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand this identity, it is important to keep in mind that Deleuze and Guattari are describing a *process*, that is, a movement which connects apparently unrelated realms. Despite some phenomena may seem to be solely natural and others exclusively cultural/historical, the idea of process allows Deleuze and Guattari to find the common elements of both, namely, the desiring machines. The organ is a machine which interrupts a material flux. The action of nurturing of the mother is natural solely inasmuch as “the breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth is a machine coupled to it”<sup>9</sup>. There are not other kinds of relations in nature than those one among machines. In fact the material flux is always the product of a machine that precedes it. To see desire as stemming from a different primary dimension—perhaps one that is more fundamental, more natural, on which only later the machines intervene—would be erroneous. This does not entail the reduction of one aspect to the other. Instead the primary dimension is that of desiring production, which gives rise, on the one hand, to *Homo Natura* and, on the other, to *Homo Historia*.<sup>10</sup> That is, desire’s destiny is always to

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Guattari immediately provide a sort of definition which runs as follows, Ibid. 1: “An organ-machine is plugged into an energy-source-machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts”.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 4: “[...]the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production or industry, just as they do within the life of man as a species. Industry is then no longer considered from the extrinsic point of view of utility, but rather from the point of view of *its fundamental identity with nature as production of man and by man*.” (Italics mine).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 1. I will return to this example of the desiring-machine as it is particularly significant for the dialogue between Freud and Deleuze and Guattari.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 33: “We can say that social production, under determinate conditions, derives primarily from desiring-production: which is to say that *Homo natura* comes first. But we must also say, *more accurately*, that desiring-production is first and foremost social in nature, and tends to free itself only *at the end*: which is to say that *Homo historia* comes first.”

produce effects in society, whereas social formations are possible only due to the support they gain through the investments of desire.<sup>11</sup> In this paper I will focus mainly on the first aspect, which requires a comparison to Freud's early theories. As regards the consideration of *Homo Historia*, a comparison with Marx would be required. Both these aspects would be necessary to have a complete picture of schizoanalysis,<sup>12</sup> although to do so has not been possible within the limits of this article. Thus, a proper analysis of the social aspect of desiring production will be the concern of future research.

## 1. The Polymorphous Force of Nature: the organs and their relation

The machine is a multileveled entity.<sup>13</sup> At its basis, it is an organ which intervenes in a material flux. From the beginning, Deleuze and Guattari try to separate their idea of organs from any reference to an organic whole.<sup>14</sup> In fact, their description follows a purely mechanical concept in which the most basic idea is that of a material flux that is interrupted and absorbed by the organ. An instance of this can be seen in the relation between the mouth of a baby and the flow of milk from the breast. Organs-machines develop in a linear sequence: thus the mouth is linked to the stomach, which is itself linked to the digestive organs,

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ibid. pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 22: "A truly materialist psychiatry can be defined, on the contrary, by the twofold task it sets itself: introducing desire into the mechanism, and introducing production into desire."

<sup>13</sup> More precisely, there are three levels of production. Ibid., pp. 36-41: "Every machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow (*hyle*) that it cuts into.[...] In the second place, every machine has a sort of code built into it, stored up inside it. This code is inseparable not only from the way in which it is recorded and transmitted to each of the different regions of the body, but also from the way in which the relations of each of the regions with all the others are recorded.[...] The third type of interruption or break characteristic of the desiring-machine is the residual break (*coupure-reste*) or residuum, which produces a subject alongside the machine, functioning as a part adjacent to the machine." Also cf. 4 and pp. 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> This, at least, is the general impression given by the authors' initial approach (cf. Ibid. 5: "Amniotic fluid spilling out of the sac and kidney stones; flowing hair; a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit, urine that are produced by partial objects and constantly cut off by other partial objects, which in turn produce other flows, interrupted by other partial objects. Every "object" presupposes the continuity of a flow; every flow, the fragmentation of the object.") and by their many references to Antonin Artaud (for instance, quoting directly him, Ibid. 9: "The body is the body/it is all by itself/and has no need of organs/the body is never an organism/ organisms are the enemies of the body."). It is however true that on one occasion Deleuze and Guattari state the opposite, ibid. 8: "Desiring-machines make us an organism; [...]". Nevertheless, it seems to me that this claim is only acknowledged insofar as it is immediately discarded and dismantled. The passage indeed continues as follows: "[...]but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all. 'An incomprehensible, absolutely rigid stasis' in the very midst of process, as a third stage: 'No mouth. No tongue. No teeth. No larynx. No esophagus. No belly. No anus.' The automata stop dead and set free the unorganized mass they once served to articulate". A few lines earlier, they already ask: "Will the machines run so badly, their component pieces fall apart to such a point that they will return to nothingness and thus allow us to return to nothingness?" This issue, that is, the Body without Organs (the anti-productive 'rigid stasis'), is one to which I will pay considerable attention to later, see below 2.2.

which are linked to the anus, each organ constituting the material source for the next one. 'Connective synthesis' is how Deleuze and Guattari refer to the material process insofar the organs are connected to one another as though in line.<sup>15</sup> We should not limit our understanding of this only to the bodily organization of human beings. It is indeed possible to imagine all sorts of combinations and sets of organs more or less coordinated with one another. Let's take an example for which Deleuze and Guattari take inspiration from Beckett's *Molloy*:

[...] on being confronted with a complete machine made up of six stones in the right-hand pocket of my coat (the pocket that serves as the source of the stones), five stones in the right-hand pocket of my trousers, and five in the left-hand pocket (transmission pockets), with the remaining pocket of my coat receiving the stones that have already been handled, as each of the stones moves forward one pocket, how can we determine the effect of this circuit of distribution in which the mouth, too, plays a role as a stone-sucking machine?<sup>16</sup>

This can be understood in the terminology of the first lines of the *Anti-Oedipus*, the organs-machines being comprised of the hands, the mouth, and also the pockets, operating on fluxes, which are in this case pebbles. The linear chain of organs presents a variety of combinations which nonetheless do not 'speak' a human language, that is to say, they recall instead the uniform mechanical causality of an indifferent nature in which the presence of the hand or the pocket does not enable one to find a meaning in the system. And nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari in explaining this very first dimension of production refer already to *Homo Natura*. The intent is not an anthropological one at the outset. They mean with that expression the human as embedded in the natural process which is desire.<sup>17</sup> Now, it seems to me very important to mention at this point Freud, not as the target of Deleuze and Guattari's attacks, that is, not the Freud who

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 5: "Desiring-machines are binary machines, obeying a binary law or set of rules governing associations: one machine is always coupled with another. The productive synthesis, the production of production, is inherently connective in nature: 'and . . .' 'and then . . .' This is because there is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow (the breast—the mouth). And because the first machine is in turn connected to another whose flow it interrupts or partially drains off, the binary series is linear in every direction".

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pp. 4-5: "Not man as the king of creation, but rather as the being who [...] ceaselessly plugs an organ-machine into an energy-machine. [...] That is why desiring-production is the principal concern of a materialist psychiatry, which conceives of and deals with the schizo as *Homo natura*".

promotes Oedipus as the model of sexual human desire, but rather the early Freud who is still looking for the secret of neurosis and its sexual meaningfulness in premature seduction and in the perversions. I want to show that, at least for what concerns the description of desiring production as a natural process, it is possible to understand Deleuze and Guattari's work as following similar paths to those of early Freudian theory. This comparison with the early Freud, if further considered, would help the reading of *Anti-Oedipus*, the exuberant style of which might inhibit or make difficult textual analysis. This is particularly true once the facets of the organ-machine begin to accumulate, their meaning becoming thereby complex and multiple. There are various levels of production pertaining to one single organ-machine. The passage from one level to the next sometimes seems to be imperceptible, almost continuous, and leaving no rest. At other times the same passage is presented as though leaping over sharper distinctions, claiming an unlikely proximity of aspects which look far from being reconcilable. Given that this is the case, reading the *Anti-Oedipus* together with the non-Oedipal Freud can have some advantages, insofar as similar issues can be shown to be at stake in the early Freud.

### **1.1 Freud: sustenance and sexuality, the two sides of organs**

Let us begin by looking at the relation between the first and the second level of production. Whereas the first aspect of the organ-machine refers to its being in linear mechanical succession with other organ-machines, Deleuze and Guattari speak alternatively of *functions* or of *codes* in order to introduce the second level. The first case, which we will explore now in relation to Freud, suggests a basic overlapping between the first and the second level, with little space left for any distinction between the two. The function of an organ-machine is indeed nothing other than the action it performs.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the action of sucking that pertains to the mouth in its connection with the breast, which explicitly refers the reader to Freudian theory.<sup>19</sup> Freud describes as 'biological functions' those activities which are related with the

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<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 6: "Doubtless each organ-machine interprets the entire world from the perspective of its own flux, from the point of view of the energy that flows from it: the eye interprets everything—speaking, understanding, shitting, fucking—in terms of seeing."

<sup>19</sup> The example of thumb-sucking and its relation to breast-sucking serves as the model for the analysis of the erogenous zones. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 'The Manifestation of Infantile Sexuality' and 'The Sexual Aim of Infantile Sexuality', trans. J. Strachey (US, Basic Books, 2000), pp. 54-51.



sustenance of the child, activities such as feeding and the expelling of feces.<sup>20</sup> Every action which involves the connection of the child with the environment—for instance, seeing, hearing, touching and so on—can be considered part of the set of biological functions insofar as they permit the outliving and the development of the child. We notice that if there is an initial natural determinism in Freud, it takes the form of the (Darwinian) biological framework that separates the living organism from its environment. The engine of natural evolution would lie in the continuous communication between these two.

This first biological outset is surmounted in the early Freud by the distinction between biological functions and sexuality. This distinction is justified for one fundamental reason: whereas the former connect the child to the external world, sexuality is, on the contrary, an auto-erotic dimension which isolates the infant from the outside.<sup>21</sup> The difference brought about by the shift to a kind of solipsistic sexuality in infancy does not conceal the relation that sexuality maintains with the child's initial sustenance. The links are the organs and the actions performed by them, as is also the case for Deleuze and Guattari. The organs acquiring sexual importance are the same organs as those involved in the exchange between the human organism and the environment. The mouth, the anus, the skin, the eyes, the genitals, constitute the erogenous areas of the child's polymorphous sexuality; and it is worth noticing that Freud considers the skin as the erogenous area *par excellence*, given that the skin is the line of demarcation between the living organism and the environment.<sup>22</sup> The actions of these organs—namely, sucking, defecating, touching and so on—begin to function as sexual gratifications, detaching themselves from the initial biological necessity. The child begins to suck its own thumb, to touch its own ears, to regulate defecation according to its own muscular control. Namely, little by little sexuality gains primacy over the biological functions inasmuch as it depends exclusively on the repetition of those same actions by the infant on its own body.<sup>23</sup> Once we pass

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Van Haute and Geyskens, *Confusion of Tongues*, pp. 65-67. Cf. Freud, *Three Essays*, 48: "The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment [...] The child does not make use of an extraneous body for his sucking, but prefers a part of his own skin because it is more convenient, because it makes it independent from the external world, which he is not yet able to control..."

<sup>22</sup> Freud, *Three Essays*, 35: "[...] the skin, which in particular parts of the body has become differentiated into sense organs or modified into mucous membrane, and is thus the erotogenic zone *par excellence*."

<sup>23</sup> Van Haute and Geyskens, *Confusion of Tongues*, 67: "Vital functions are directed toward external world and for this reason they face with the strict and compelling achievement to be followed. Instead sexual drive is at the disposal

into the sexual realm, there appears to be all kinds of new situations which are extraneous to the biological framework. As regards to the purpose of sexuality, each organ plays its own game and strives to repeat the sexual impulse, embodying pleasure in its own way of functioning. Thus, the organs' actions are not anymore connected to the child's sustenance and survival but acquire an independent regime, which defines the inner world of the child. Whereas before the appearance of the sexual instinct the inner world was perceived only in its relation of dependence to the external one, the sexual function provides a qualitative different feeling which is based only on internal mechanisms of satisfaction. From this perspective, sexuality describes a completely new network of relations, which develop in other directions than those of the biological needs, and which go, to a certain extent, against them. More precisely, the polymorphous sexuality of the child acquires a critical valence and is posited against the Darwinian claim that conceives sexuality as being the instinct for reproduction (thereby making genital intercourse between the two sexes the model of reference for sexuality). In gaining primacy over the biological functions, sexuality makes it possible to build connections of a different type between organs. Freud's experience with neurotic patients leads him to this conclusion to the extent that their symptoms reveal sexual investments associated with organs that 'traditionally' do not seem to be related with 'reproductive' sexual intercourse.<sup>24</sup> This is a fact that becomes even more evident in pervert adults, who invest organs and practices, apparently unrelated with sex, with an intense and explicit sexual meaning.<sup>25</sup> According to Freud, neurotics and perverts are still embedded in the infantile primacy of the polymorphous sexuality as opposed to solely directing such energies to the genitals.<sup>26</sup> This fact is possible since from infancy the sexual function *appropriated* the other functions for its own *use*. With the term 'use', however, I do not mean

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everytime, since it finds on the body itself satisfaction it can *withdraw* from the outside world's demands" (italics added). Cfr. Freud, *Three Essays*, 'Masturbatory Sexual Manifestations', 51-55.

<sup>24</sup> Freud, op.cit., 31: "There is no doubt that a large part of the opposition to these views of mine is due to the fact that sexuality, to which I trace back psychoneurotic symptoms, is regarded as though it coincided with the normal sexual instinct. But psychoanalytic teaching goes further than this. It shows that it is by no means only at the cost of the so-called *normal* sexual instinct that these symptoms originate- at any rate such is not exclusively or mainly the case; they also give expression (by conversion) to instincts which would be described as *perverse* in the widest sense of the word if they could be expressed directly in phantasy or action without being diverted from consciousness. Thus symptoms are formed in part at the cost of *abnormal* sexuality; *neurosis are, so to say, the negative of perversions.*"

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 33: "In any fairly marked case of psychoneurosis it is unusual for only a single one of these perverse instincts to be developed. We usually find a considerable number and as a rule traces of them all. The degree of development of each particular instinct is, however, independent of that of the others. Here, too, the study of the 'positive' perversions provides an exact counterpart."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 38.

anything other than a common dimension, a shared quality. Neurotic symptoms have a sexual *meaning* inasmuch as they are an *expression* of that sexual quality. In the child any activity that reaches a high level of intensity can result in a sexual excitation; sexuality is always there, ready to appear behind any aspect of human life. Ultimately it provides a given aspect of human activity with a deeper and more significant sense. This is not surprising since it constituted the primordial independence of the inner world of the child. The primacy of sexuality is the first building block for constructing an anthropology based on psychoanalytic research. We will see in the second part of this paper that within sexuality another passage, another level, namely the one of primary repression, will characterize this anthropology in term of human species and of the human intellectual and cultural distinctiveness. . First, however, I wish to return to *Anti-Oedipus* in order to explain how the early Freudian perspective can help us to understand Deleuze and Guattari's approach as well as helping us to clarify the difference between their two perspectives.

### **1.2 *Anti-Oedipus*: fluxes and codes, the non-sense of organs**

In one respect, Deleuze and Guattari do something that displays a profound continuity with the early theories of Freud—that is, they make use of the general schema which belongs to sexuality in Freud. First, neither the account of desire in *Anti-Oedipus* nor that of sexuality in the *Three Essays* imply any object that stands outside waiting to be acquired. Desire and sexuality are both self-sufficient dimensions which do not depend on external objects but only on internal forces.<sup>27</sup> Second, the core of these forces is occupied by the organs, and, taken together, they constitute a common dimension within which different organic functions are connected.

Nevertheless, Deleuze and Guattari distort and radically reinterpret the whole Freudian structure by removing sexuality itself from the picture. In *Anti-Oedipus* there is no split within the organ between the initial biological function and the later sexual investment. The authors see in the organ only a generic

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<sup>27</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit., 25: "To a certain degree, the traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the very outset: from the very first step that the Platonic logic of desire forces us to take, making us choose between production and acquisition. From the moment that we place desire on the side of acquisition, we make desire an idealistic (dialectical, nihilistic) conception, which causes us to look upon it as primarily a lack: a lack of an object, a lack of the real object". Cf. Freud, *Three Essays*, 14: "We thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between [sexual] instinct and object. It seems probable that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attraction".

mechanical action: the mouth cutting the flows of milk, the anus those of the feces. Such functions are not taken, in the first instance, to imply an opposition between the outer and the inner world, and, secondly, they therefore cannot qualify the latter with a sexual character. This means that Deleuze and Guattari reject the biological framework in which an organism is something that is differentiated, as an individual unity, from the external environment. If the experience of flows passing and being cut by organs is not, strictly speaking, *of* the child, belonging to him/her, but belongs rather to the anonymous natural process, then the common dimension relating organs together also does not refer to the appearance of an inner (sexual) world which detaches itself from the demanding aspect of reality (feeding, expelling, responding). The connecting dimension is rather constituted by a qualitatively *indifferent* energy which takes the neutral name of *registration*.<sup>28</sup>

The term "registration" seems to suggest some sort of ability to record the organic material process that has been thus far discussed; that is, it might account for a human subject who would be able, through cognition, language or even just perception, to order or make a selection from the chain of organic flows. In this case the evidence of the mechanical natural process would be subordinate to the rules governing ideas, symbols or perceptions. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's aim is not to wipe sexuality from the picture and to substitute some kind of human agency or human presence, be it intellectual or perceptual, for it.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, insofar as they incorporate registration into the natural dimension, they postpone the role of subjectivity to a third moment (a third level of production).<sup>30</sup> Deleuze and Guattari adopt an abstract terminology insofar as they explain the dimension of registration as the distribution of a code to the mechanical operations.<sup>31</sup> This means that functions separate themselves from the actual material performance; the action detaches from the organ-machine which has produced it and defines its code-symbol as corresponding to the generic

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze and Guattari also use another name for this level of production, Numen. I will keep referring to registration since it is used the most in the text and because the term 'Numen' would require a discussion over the 'divine' nature of the recording energy (cf. op.cit., 13), which would demand a detailed analysis that would exceed the scope of this paper.

<sup>29</sup> As Merleau-Ponty does in *Phenomenology of Perception*, for example.

<sup>30</sup> We will see that even then it will be problematic to give a human connotation to subjectivity. In this respect, Rocco Ronchi rightly emphasizes the radical anti-anthropocentrism that characterizes the concept of nature as it is deployed in *Anti-Oedipus*. Rocco Ronchi, "Psicoanalisi: L'inconscio Reale" in *Deleuze: Credere nel Reale* (Padova: Feltrinelli Editori, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit., 38: "In the second place, every machine has a sort of code built into it, stored up inside it."

and anonymous infinitive form of the verb: 'to suck'. It is because the action separates from the actual organ which corresponds to it that Deleuze and Guattari speak about the *disjunction* of functions/symbols from the material mechanics. For them, as for Freud, this leads to the emergence of an entirely new productive dimension: a surface on which a different kind of relation may take place. Symbols allow the passage of actions from one organ to another, bypassing the mechanical succession in which they were embedded.<sup>32</sup> But how does this happen? What does this idea of codes/symbols being applied to organs mean?<sup>33</sup> A simple way to understand it is to think about an interpretative instance. An organ acquires a way of interpreting the material flux it deals with from another organ.<sup>34</sup> Or, considering the body as a surface, we might think of organs as different kingdoms which struggle with each other. One organ can then be thought to 'dominate' another one temporarily and the subjugated will repeat the rule thereby imposed upon it, that is, the action, the way of interpreting matter, belonging to the dominant organ. So, for instance, the mouth may work as an anal machine in the phenomenon of anorexia.<sup>35</sup> In the case of anorexia the mouth applies to food all the functions, that is, all the actions that the anus performs on the feces; it is subjugated to the mode of action of the anus and repeats it on food. If there is still 'sense' in Deleuze and Guattari's theory of desire, it does not refer anymore to the distribution of a (sexual) quality to different areas of the body. 'Sense' might be *limited* to the idea of the capacity for feeling and, more precisely, for feeling the matter in this or that way, namely, interpreting it.<sup>36</sup> Unlike Freud, Deleuze and Guattari do not need to pass through sexuality in order to explain a phenomenon of functional exchange. Through disjunction, production elaborates a new complex field of relations: now organ-machines can be combined in many different ways, thereby acquiring more functions. This means they acquire different *uses*, which

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. "These indifferent signs follow no plan, they function at all levels and enter into any and every sort of connection; each one speaks its own language, and establishes syntheses with others that are quite direct along transverse vectors, *whereas the vectors between the basic elements [the organs] that constitute them are quite indirect.*" (italics mine)

<sup>33</sup> This terminology is probably adopted to allow them to confront at Lacan's notion of Language as the proper dimension of desire. They thus oppose the idea of multiple codes and signs to the (singular) Phallic Signifier.

<sup>34</sup> See above note 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.: "An organ may have connections that associate it with several different flows; it may waver between several functions, and even take on the regime of another organ—the anorectic mouth, for instance."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 1: "The mouth of the anorexic wavers between several functions: its possessor is uncertain as to whether it is an eating-machine, an anal machine, a talking-machine, or a breathing machine (asthma attacks)."

are borrowed from other machines.<sup>37</sup> The multiple uses that an organ is potentially able to perform can be seen against the idea of sexuality as the meaning behind symptoms or actions. So, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the recording production allows potentially infinite combinations of organs and material fluxes, and it does so in such a way that, unlike with Freud, the process of combination can proceed without recourse to sexual reference. Nevertheless, these infinite combinations do not have any other 'sense'; as the example drawn from Beckett reveals, they are free of meaning — they are just 'sensible' functions. It is becoming clear that Deleuze and Guattari are little by little diverging from Freud. The difference will become more evident with regard to the role of the repressive instances. We will now see how the character of subjectivity is influenced by the latter in Freud and why Deleuze and Guattari depart from this conception.

## **2. Subjectivity: Limits and Breaks**

### **2.1 Freud: Primary repression, the human and the animal**

In Freud the subjective dimension is largely described in terms of sexuality. We have seen that Freud maintains an organic biological framework whereby there is a separation between the outer (and intersubjective) world and the inner one, the latter acquiring in the first instance a sexual character. We have also seen the nature of this sexual character: it gains primacy over the biological functions and, due to the bodily areas involved in the latter, constitutes a polymorphous sexuality. Finally, this process already takes place in the earliest stages of infancy. Is this framework comprehensive enough to provide an account of subjectivity and subjective experience? It is evident that this schema lacks reference to 'normal' sexuality, which seems to be necessitated if subjectivity is to be properly understood. If polymorphous infantile sexuality is able to explain pathological cases such as neurosis and perversion, what is the relation between it and the 'normal' heterosexual aim? How do we arrive from the infantile sexuality to that of the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 38: "All sorts of functional questions thus arise: What flow to break? Where to interrupt it? How and by what means? What place should be left for other producers or antiproducers (the place of one's little brother, for instance)? Should one, or should one not, suffocate from what one eats, swallow air, shit with one's mouth? The data, the bits of information recorded, and their transmission form a grid of disjunctions of a type that differs from the previous connections."

parent, or, rather, to that of the 'healthy' adult? To address such issues, a new aspect of sexuality is brought forth, one which will actually appear as the most fundamental. This aspect is primary repression. This term names an instance that opposes the pleasurable feelings derived from polymorphous sexuality. Its most basic form is disgust.

Sexual disgust is not just a pathological symptom [in neurotics], but must be considered as the first genuinely *human affect* ... the affective basis of a multitude of intellectual process of development, such as morality, shame, and the like.<sup>38</sup>

There are a number of reasons why this quotation is very significant for our attempt to understand human subjectivity. First of all, it shows us that the idea of human subjectivity is not grounded in its infantile origins but rather in the attempt to negate them. Disgust stands at the root of the other human feelings (affects) and is the basis for subsequent cultural (intellectual, moral) achievements. Secondly, the quote reveals that pathology is no longer considered as a clinical case with its own etiology. This was the case for the theory of seduction, which explained pathological cases with reference to the traumatic but contingent interventions of adults. Now, however, what seemed to be a pathological symptom, that is the excessive disgust expressed by neurotics for any sexual meaning or dimension, is actually the basis for human subjectivity in general. What is decisive, however, is that disgust is *biologically inherited*, given the overlapping of the phylogenetic process with the ontogenetic one. Freud provides the explanation that in animals the olfactory stimulations provided by the mouth and anus of another animal provide a source of strong sexual excitation.<sup>39</sup> Following the phylogenic explanation, once humans began to walk upright, their olfactory powers diminish significantly and their role is taken over by an improved sense of sight. Thus, Freud's conclusion is that in humans there is an *innate* tendency to suppress the pleasurable feelings related with the nose as well as its original objects, namely the oral and the anal area. Given that in Freud phylogenesis always overlaps with ontogenesis, primary repression is a fact of the early stages of infancy as

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<sup>38</sup> In Van Haute and Geyskens, op.cit., 25: *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* ed. and trans. J. M. Masson. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985, 280.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 27, quoting Freud, *The Complete Letters*.

well. During the first months of its life, the baby remains tied to the animal world such that olfactory, oral and anal stimulations exercise the strongest impulses in its daily life. As time passes, an increasingly unpleasant sensation will start to accompany these excitations, eventually causing a complete withdrawal from any attempt to repeat them. This disgust directed toward the most primordial of sexual pleasures thus promotes the development of other impulses, related with sight and the genitals. Primary repression in the theory of sexuality as it was presented in 1905, therefore, is thoroughly embedded in the natural sphere of human, and only human, biological development. It has to be considered 'organic', that is, part of the development of certain human sensory organs. Primary repression defines an anthropological perspective in the early Freud in at least two senses. The first refers to a fundamental distinction between humanity and nature, whereas the second refers to the division between adults and children as a prerequisite of culture. Primarily, it effects the division *within* nature between humans and other species, insofar as "in contrast with human, animal development involves a continuum where, at least in principle, earlier phases are incorporated into later ones without any reminder,"<sup>40</sup> whereas the most fundamental structure of human subjectivity is internally 'cracked' or 'fragmented' due to its sexual dimension. "The conflict that characterizes human nature is not between nature and culture, but rather originates in the human sexual drive ... humans become human on the basis of a conflict constitutive of sexual life."<sup>41</sup> This conflict corresponds, secondarily, to the infantile/adult division. Disgust is connected to the memory of the animal/infantile stage of sexuality.<sup>42</sup> It can be conceived as a *reaction formation*, that is, something coming *after* the pervert sexual tendencies have already played an important role. If disgust weakens its repression, these tendencies can once again break free. This is what occurs in neurosis and in positive perversions. Thus, genital primacy in humans cannot be fully achieved since the polymorphous nature of infantile sexuality (in continuity with the animal one) does not disappear completely, although it only maintains a reactive and *negative* form, namely, that of disgust itself.

Insofar as infantile sexuality resists any definitive incorporation within adult sexuality, it simply functions as a critical moment that undermines it. This means that genital primacy cannot serve as a ground cannot

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 61.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 24. Here the precise definition: "Disgust is a reaction to the memory of a repress sexual impulse"



become normative in a substantial sense, because it is always possible for its (perverted) origins to reappear. This is the critical insight that Freud's early theory of sexuality raises against the allegedly normal and accepted scheme, that is, the heterosexual model applied to the desires and goals of adults (reproduction in first instance).

Primary repression, however, does not only work in a negative fashion, that is, with animals as the negative image of humans and infancy as the negative image of adulthood such that the former function as ruptures which cause symptoms within the organization of desire in the latter. It also opens the way for positive acquisitions in human development. Since the earliest stage of his theory, Freud makes use of the theoretical tool of sublimation,<sup>43</sup> namely the idea according to which the repression of sexual drives is the bedrock on which major cognitive, aesthetic and societal structures are built. The latency period in the child represents the withdrawal from polymorphous sexuality and the construction of character structure and intellectual abilities. We can see how on top of the notion of innate sexual disgust, Freud eventually builds all the possible developments of human nature as well as its unsurmountable limit. The repression of the multiple animal sexual instincts opens up, on the one hand, the horizon of human intellectual achievements, while, on the other hand, it represents the affective reminder of the threatening animal origins in which the proper human subjectivity would dissolve within the animal world if no primary repression were to take place.

It is at this point that Deleuze and Guattari depart from Freud. For the way in which Freud conceives primary repression removes all the revolutionary potential formerly made possible by his theory. For with this shift, Freud has renounced the polymorphous picture of the sexual appropriation of material biological

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<sup>43</sup> Freud, *Three Essays*, 44: "What is it that goes to the making of these constructions which are so important for the growth of a *civilized and normal individual*? They probably emerge at the cost of the infantile sexual impulses themselves. Thus the activity of those impulses does not cease even during this period of latency, though their energy is diverted, wholly or in great part, from their sexual use and directed to other ends [...] It is possible further to form some idea of the mechanism of this process of sublimation. On the one hand, it would seem, the sexual impulses cannot be utilized during these years of childhood, since the *reproductive functions* have been deferred" (italics mine). We can see how Freud re-inserts terms which he seemed to have abandoned before dealing with primary repression. Indeed it is not by chance that the above passage continues introducing it: "On the other hand, these impulses seem in themselves to be perverse – that is, to arise from erotogenic zones and to derive their activity from instincts which, *in view of the direction of the subject's development, can only arouse unpleasurable feelings*" (my italics). It should be noted that in this last paragraph the necessity of primary repression is derived from the developmental model Freud adopted, and not vice versa.

functions and replaced it with a linear developmental model. This is a model that resembles the kind of traditional models—ones which lead toward normal adult morality and sexual normativity—that his radical early insights sought to undermine. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is not so significant if the picture of polymorphous sexuality, namely, the uneducable child, remains hidden and can potentially undermine the foundation of the moral system. This is because the possible expressions such a latent force can take are forcefully limited to the two directions of the developmental line: they either appear as symptoms (whereby perverts and neurotic are trapped in the infantile stage) or are converted in sublimations (and therefore become the cultural acquirements of adult life). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the heterodoxy of infantile sexuality is not radical enough if it is merely a negative moment.

Ronchi provides an accurate description of Deleuze and Guattari's position in stating that "...schizoanalysis provides an alternative solution... [which] is a reformulation of Bergson's one: consciousness is an absolute surface, and it is co-extensive with any kind of biological process".<sup>44</sup> That is, desire has to be something which describes a positive experience in the subject, which returns to the subject all the complexity of the natural processes with no mediation and, in last instance, which renders subjectivity equal to this same discovery of natural powers. In other words, Deleuze and Guattari are looking for a picture of nature the expression of which is not limited to the anti-normative role of symptoms.

## **2.2 The *Anti-Oedipus*: The indifferent affectivity of nature**

It is now important to understand what Deleuze and Guattari hold to be the characteristics of subjectivity in *Anti-Oedipus*. The sense one gets from the first pages of the work is that of an overwhelming activity of every kind of organ on the various fluxes, the experimentation with different possibilities of combining the capabilities of feeling matter. Creativity is the positive aspect which seems to describe better the natural pole of desire, that is the idea of each person being a 'bricoleur' of his/her own organs.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted, however, that underlining of the productive multiplications of the natural powers in such a way

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<sup>44</sup> Ronchi, op.cit., 126 (translation mine).

<sup>45</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit., 1: "Hence we are all handymen: each with his little machines. For every organ-machine, an energy-machine: all the time, flows and interruptions. Judge Schreber has sunbeams in his ass. A solar anus. And rest assured that it works: Judge Schreber *feels* something, produces something, and is capable of explaining the process theoretically. Something is produced: the *effects* of a machine, not mere metaphors."

gains its strength only because it opposes the anthropological picture of desire derivable from the Freudian premises we have seen above. The emphasis put on the creativity of the process means that it cannot be measured with reference to human criteria, such as health for instance.<sup>46</sup> The organs-machines completely lack a regulative principle or norm to which one might compare the process. Their 'interpreting' power promises experiences which may go beyond human capabilities. Deleuze and Guattari attempt to characterize the forces at stake as though they can be judged and evaluated in themselves, without characterizing this experience of nature as a human one. Creativity therefore finds its fullest meaning only if it is viewed as involving the reduction or deletion of the anthropological elements of the Freudian theory.

<sup>47</sup> Deleuze and Guattari have 'cleansed' the Freudian natural dimension that grounds subjectivity of precisely those dimensions that help us in getting an idea of the human subject. First, they remove the biological distinction between an inner and outer world as the context of organic activity: there is no organism, just mechanical organs. Secondly, they reduce the dimension of meaning (in Freud, sexual meaning) to a practical functionality: the sense of an organ is merely the uses that it performs, namely its capability of feeling the matter, of 'interpreting' it. Thirdly, they reject the phylogenetic/ontogenetic roots of primary repression and its anthropological significance: there is no structural cut (i.e. the one occurring between children and adults) grounded in nature on which the entirety of human subjectivity is constructed.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the intense experience of states of being (the feelings) which are produced by the machine-organs' connections and disjunctions belong to a subject only if we grant that this subject has no preordained human character.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, although the subject is the carrier of intense feelings derived from the first two levels that we have already investigated, it does not precede them or stand outside of

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. notes. 51 and 53 below, which refer to Judge Schreber's condition.

<sup>47</sup> "...[T]he only answer to the collapse of measure [Homo mensura] was the passion for creation" as Antonio Negri put it in *Il Lavoro di Giobbe* (Manifestolibri, Roma 2002, 10, translation mine) .

<sup>48</sup> The way in which Freud conceives primary repression anticipates the theoretical passage to the Oedipus. Van Haute and Genskins, op.cit., pp. 107-08: "The shift [toward the Oedipus] which primarily takes places in the texts after 1915 enforces the biological tendency. After all, Freud understands the Oedipus complex just as he did organic repression earlier, as the ontogenetic repetition of phylogenesis."

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit., pp 18-19: "[...]the basic phenomenon of hallucination (*I see, I hear*) and the basic phenomenon of delirium (*I think . . .*) presuppose an *I feel* at an even deeper level, which gives hallucinations their object and thought delirium its content—an "I feel that I am becoming a woman," "that I am becoming a god," and so on, which is neither delirious nor hallucinatory, but will project the hallucination or internalize the delirium. Delirium and hallucination are secondary in relation to the really primary emotion, which in the beginning only experiences intensities, becomings, transitions." Isn't this sentence first of all a criticism of the division between inner and outer world, a division that is traditionally granted solely to humans?

the process. Instead the subject is the remainder of the process.<sup>50</sup> It is nothing else than a *residual* satisfaction momentarily concluding the process.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, I do not think such a definition says much unless we also consider another claim, one which, as Godani notes,<sup>52</sup> is less frequently identified: the organ-machines work properly only insofar as they also fall apart.<sup>53</sup> I interpret these two claims as directly connected with one another. That is, once an organ-machine breaks into pieces, what is left is the rest that characterizes the point of departure of a subjective experience. On the other hand, whenever we have an experience, this is the sign of a broken machine. The subject can be derived directly from the mutual action of connections and disjunctions of machine-organic labor, but only if this leads to the rupture of organs. The system works only on the basis of reducing the organs to pieces. How does this disintegration come about? It is said to occur *because* of the action of registration over the mechanical level. Namely, the multiplication of functions for each organ brings the latter to a point of collapse in which it eventually stops working. The exchange of functions between organs implies the intensification of the process and eventually its rupture. This aspect is the characterization that primary repression takes in the *Anti-Oedipus*. It is a moment in which the desiring production halts, that is, it becomes anti-productive. The risk of not taking this aspect into consideration, or of not recognizing the damage embedded in the way in which the process works, is to merely emphasize the positive features of subjectivity, which is the affect, the feeling.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. pp- 16-17: "[...]a subject that can situate itself only in terms of the disjunctions of a recording surface, in what is left after each division." And further: "[...]the subject is produced as a mere residuum alongside the desiring-machines,..."]".

<sup>51</sup> Ibid: "Returning yet again to the case of Judge Schreber, we note that he is vividly aware of this fact: the rate of cosmic sexual pleasure remains constant, so that God will find a way of taking his pleasure with Schreber, even if in order to do so Schreber must transform himself into a woman. But Schreber experiences only a residual share of this pleasure, as a recompense for his suffering or as a reward for his becoming-woman. 'On the other hand, God demands a constant state of enjoyment. . . and it is my duty to provide him with this ... in the shape of the greatest possible output of spiritual voluptuousness. And if, in this process, a little sensual pleasure falls to my share, I feel justified in accepting it as some slight compensation for the inordinate measure of suffering and privation that has been mine for so many past years'. Just as a part of the libido as energy of production was transformed into energy of recording (Numen [Registration]), a part of this energy of recording is transformed into energy of consummation (Voluptas). It is this residual energy that is the motive force behind the third synthesis of the unconscious: the conjunctive synthesis "so it's . . . , " or the production of consumption."

<sup>52</sup> Paolo Godani, 'Il Rovescio della struttura' in *Legge, Desiderio, Capitalismo: L'Anti Edipo tra Lacan e Deleuze* (Pearson Italia, Milano-Torino 2014, pp. 54-60)

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit., 8: "Desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down. Judge Schreber "lived for a long time without a stomach, without intestines, almost without lungs, with a torn oesophagus, without a bladder, and with shattered ribs; he used sometimes to swallow part of his own larynx with his food, etc." And again, ibid. 31: "Desiring-machines, on the contrary, continually break down as they run, and in fact run only when they are not functioning properly."

It may seem cynical to conceive of the anorexic as just a ‘bricoleur’ who “gets the instruction wrong, which is a matter of good health, as much as of good manners and morality”.<sup>54</sup> As it has already become clear that the natural pole in itself remains completely indifferent to humans, it is better to keep in mind the damaging aspects embedded in desiring production. This means that those affective states and feelings are rather anonymous affects. This affectivity remains to a certain extent un-human, and indeed sometimes it leads the human subject to perish (the anorexic is again an appropriate example). In this aspect we find the strongest difference with Freud’s notion of primary repression. For Freud, disgust enables one to recognize continuity between the pathological cases of neurotics and the genital organization of the normal adult. In other words, disgust provided the foundation for a picture of human subjectivity, albeit one that was internally cracked. The repressive instance in the *Anti-Oedipus* is neutral relative to human nature; it defines neither the latter’s external border with the animal realm nor its internal crack within sexuality. Godani rightly states that “it is not the one great struggle of life with death [...] but the thousands of small wounds, the thousands of small deaths, the numberless little cracks which mark life” and that the goal is “to affirm not the position of a big molar limit [the uneducable child or animal life], but the existence of a multiplicity of ruptures.”<sup>55</sup> The repressive instance, namely the Body without Organs, retains the notion of the multiplicity of organs, rather than the insurmountable division occurring between adults and children, or animals and humans. The partial drives do not encounter an all-encompassing limit which grounds Freud’s clinical anthropology, but rather a series of malfunctions which shape and produce affects and feelings. For this reason, if we only take the natural aspect of desire into consideration, we must admit that, even though it allows for the presence of affects and feelings, it does not accord the human subject any definite position within the economy of desire. Nature, with its restless and intensive procession of (broken) organs and (meaningless) functions, hauls humans through their feelings to the highest joy and fortunes and equally to the lowliest suffering and miseries.

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<sup>54</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialistic Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002, pp. 140-41)

<sup>55</sup> Godani, op.cit, 57.

Does this mean that *Anti-Oedipus* gets rid of the problem of human subjectivity by showing it to be inconsistent in light of the larger natural dimension? I am convinced that we should answer this question negatively, although to fully articulate the response it would be necessary to revisit desiring production from a historical perspective or, more precisely, from the Marxist interpretation of materialism. Deleuze and Guattari perform a series of overlapping operations, whereby the organ-machines in the historical movement are the means of social production and, at the same time, the capitalistic organization of those means becomes the surface of appropriation. The Body without Organs and the subjective dimension in this case would play a different role. The former would not describe simply the multiple breakages within natural powers, but the distinction of these from their social premises. Primary repression would then be indeed a limit, but not the limit defining human nature's structure. It should instead be seen as the limit of capitalist social organization, where resistances to it arise, thereby adding a strong political significance to the natural perspective. Consequently the experience of feelings and affects would also be invested with a social meaning. This new insight eventually makes available a new way in which to properly speak about *human* subjectivity.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it is precisely human subjectivity that can acquire the role of a bridge that facilitates the passage from the historical premises of desire (modern capitalism) to desire conceived as a revolutionary (natural) instance.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, to follow this line of thought would be to go beyond the limited scope of this paper. The investigation of the natural pole of desire has clarified the preparatory step by cleaning the notion of subjectivity from certain anthropomorphic interpretations. This operation has drawn upon the early work of Freud, where we find a stage of psychoanalysis that is not yet shaped by the Oedipus' complex and

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<sup>56</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, op.cit., 4: "[...]the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production or industry, just as they do within the life of man as a species. Industry is then no longer considered from the extrinsic point of view of utility, but rather from the point of view of *its fundamental identity with nature as production of man and by man.*" (my italics).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. pp. 29-30: "And if there is such a thing as two sorts of group fantasy, it is because two different readings of this *identity* [Identity between Nature and History, Italics mine] are possible, depending upon whether the desiring-machines are regarded from the point of view of the great gregarious masses that they form, or whether social machines are considered from the point of view of the elementary forces of desire that serve as a basis for them. Hence in group fantasy the libido may invest all of an existing social field, including the latter's most repressive forms; or on the contrary, it may launch a counterinvestment whereby revolutionary desire is plugged into the existing social field as a source of energy. (The great socialist Utopias of the nineteenth century function, for example, not as ideal models but as group fantasies—that is, as agents of the real productivity of desire, making it possible to disinvest the current social field, to "deinstitutionalize" it, to further the revolutionary institution of desire itself.)"

provides a picture of polymorphous sexual desire that is closer to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desiring production.

## Conclusions

We have investigated two different approaches to describe the natural dimension of desire, both of which are related to the psychoanalytic tradition. We began from what can be considered the cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, that is, the theory of sexuality as it is found in the early Freud, before the advent of the Oedipus complex in his theoretical framework. The theory of sexuality as it is presented in the *Three Essays* of 1905 gives us a model of sexual impulse which partly frees itself from the biological bonds of sustenance and reproduction. In doing so it revolutionized the concept of natural instinct which, I argue, might get close to the idea of nature as it is found in *Anti-Oedipus*. The similarities concern the role of organs as independent natural powers which constitute a dimension of meaning and sense. This is dimension, however, which does not refer to or express a human presence. Rather it shows the natural premises that have to be considered before any attempt is made to put forward a model of human subjectivity. Within this framework, therefore, it is right to conceive, as Freud does, the polymorphous sexual dimension of the infant as not yet human and nonetheless fully describable in terms of pleasures and affects. Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to show, through their original, three-leveled notion of the desiring machine, that it is possible to articulate subjectivity as something belonging to an indifferent nature which inhabits the human body. The affects and feelings depicted in the dense first chapter of *Anti-Oedipus* operate before any subject-object division and against any commonsensical reference to the human realm, such as health for instance. According to my understanding of it, it is quite impossible to find any place for human subjectivity in Deleuze and Guattari's idea of nature. It is in this respect that they diverge from Freud, insofar as he attempts to ground human affectivity within nature alone. Specifically, he demarcates the distinctive character of humans by deploying the idea of primary repression. This is conceived as a natural force which reacts to and overcomes the infantile sexual impulses, in favor of intellectual achievements that are typical of the human species. In doing so, however, he re-inserts a

biological developmental model which brings back into play some of the traditional aspects that he initially strove to jettison. It is hardly surprising, then, that Deleuze and Guattari put forward a completely different picture of primary repression. For them, too, it is not wrong to conceive primary repression as belonging to nature. Nevertheless, in order to derive a subjectivity that is recognizably human, it is necessary to confront primary repression with the social forces against which it struggles (rather than against nature itself). Thus, we can speak of *Homo Natura* only if we discover *Homo Historia*.

While it has not been possible to develop the latter point, I think it has become clear why all those interpretations of *Anti-Oedipus* that refer solely to natural powers in order to provide a picture of human subjectivity, no matter whether they do so in order to find a theoretical base for political claims or for the genealogical construction of human reason, are likely to fall short.



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RESEARCH PROPOSAL:  
Political Constructivism and the Kurdish Issue

Luca Tiezzi  
Research Master in Philosophy

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### *Summary*

The aim of the project is to provide a clearer picture of the nature of the political subject within a constructivist perspective. Constructivism has put forward basically two different models. It conceives the political subject as primarily described either by specific functions and operations, or by identities, representing and standing for particular social instances. Further, it is another matter of discussion whether functions and identities of the political subject have to be conceived as something fixed and unchanging or contingent and historically determined. Thus, I propose to use Deleuze's political philosophy, inasmuch as he puts forward a model of political action which admits initially an identity-based struggle, while moving however against resolutions which are limited to representation and recognition. This is because, he conceives the political subject nonetheless as having an operative and functional nature. I will combine Deleuze's theoretical insight with the Kurdish quest, which provides a unique case study. The history of the struggle for Kurdish identity shows that the political subject can embody and performs many different strategies and possibilities. Both these branches of the research wish to demonstrate that the nature of political subjectivity is not fix but historically variant.

### **Keywords**

Political constructivism, Political Subject, Identity politics, Deleuze, Kurdish Quest.

### *Proposal*

#### *Introduction*

The present research project follows two lines of studies. On the one hand, it is concerned with political philosophy, more specifically with constructivist analyses over the political subject. On the other, it looks at the theoretical work of Abdullah Ocalan and the Kurdish question, which can shed light on the constructivist debate. The underlying questions are: how is the political subject constituted and how shall we conceive its possibility of action?

These two problematics are the core of constructivist analysis. The latter requires, first, that subjects be socially constructed; second, that those same subjects can change in their turn the social structures. In other words, social structures and subjects are mutually constitutive. While this is the very general framework of the constructivist perspective, it is nonetheless true that identities, as the midterm between subjects and social structures, play a significant role. The proposal aims at investigating the nature of the relation between the identity of a political subject, which is socially constituted, and the subject's political

action, which is constitutive of society. The present debate provides many different answers to this question. Power-focused analyses and liberal theories conceive identities as the historical, contingent aspects of the political subject, whose behaviors, however, are described more deeply by law-like invariant mechanisms ('conventional constructivism'). The more 'radical' constructivism<sup>1</sup> instead aims at showing that subjects are social products in their entirety. Identities therefore constitute the political subject, defining its variety of possible perceptions and actions, pre-organizing the way in which it 'sees' and 'interprets' the world around. Conversely, the subjective political response would be identity-related too, something considered problematic by other authors. Among these, Deleuze, whose political works (1972; 1980; 2002) are especially useful to investigate collective engaged agencies, puts forward a picture of political subjects who detach from identities' issues and focus on non-representative political expressions. Within this theoretical framework, the Kurdish issue is particularly useful, for it presents many facets that hardly can be casted into only one of the constructivist tendencies presented. The Kurdish quest has faced in the last decades different turns, waving from parliamentary attempts to armed struggle (Gunes 2010). A common feature has been of course the demand for recognition of Kurdish culture, language, and ultimately identity as a people. After his imprisonment and the abandonment of his Leninist background, Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan starts promoting the parliamentary way through Turkish representative rooms in order to match the demands of Kurdish people and find a peaceful solution in the area. At the same time, at a local level, he fosters a political model of Democratic Confederalism, or Democratic Autonomy (Ocalan 2011; 2012). This is a system of communal units with multiple assemblies, all questioning the state monopolistic power over the three constitutional branches, insofar as the communes make use of their own self-defense units, their own decision making process, and their own judging system (see for instance Tatort Kurdistan, 2013).

Can these two directions of the Kurdish quest go hand in hand? How can the parliamentary way, and its demands for changes in the constitution and in the legal system, go along with a grass-rooted democracy that works outside and often in opposition to that same system? In other words, what relations are there between the recognition by the other and the way to self-determinacy? Which subjective answers do these two positions imply?

#### *Conventional Political Constructivism*

The two conventional constructivist theories share one fundamental aspect: they consider the structure and the nature of the subject as invariant. While the identities of particular subjects may vary according to historical and social conditions, the very core of subjectivity does not.

The so-called 'power-politics study' is a branch of International Relations Theory which considers the power and its exercise 'the fact' of political dimension (Barkin 2010). Namely, that politics is all about the power to

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed genealogy of the division between 'conventional' and 'radical' constructivism, see Hynek and Teti (2010).

exercise power, through military strength, economic leverage, and all other possible means. Albeit the action undertaken by the political subject remains a pure exercise of power, this action is initially influenced by, and influences in return, the identity of the state (which is generally considered the best example of political subject in this theory, although the same may work for 'smaller' or 'bigger' entities) within its social environment. The identity of a state is constructed both outwardly by other states (i.e. what they expect that state would do in international issues) and inwardly by its citizens (for instance, whether the national image is increased or diminished, whether the people's interests have been correctly defended or not, etc.). These are indispensable parameters that political leaders follow in order to act, because the variation of identity's value in the environment can dictate the future political opportunity for exercise of power.

Liberal constructivism equals the subjective agency to rational morality (Rawls 1971; 1980). That is, the possession of a conception of the good and the rational capability to use means to achieve that good (instrumental reason). This theory however necessitates of an act of translation of the moral content once this encounters other moral perspectives (ib.; see also Roberts 2007). Given that moral content is personal and its premises may not be valuable for other subjects, the political goal is to build fair institutions which embrace universal principles encompassing all the different moral perspectives, translated appropriately in a shared reasonable language. Liberal constructivism, then, refers only to the 'translating' operation, while it does not cover the agent of this latter. What do these theories mean for the Kurdish quest? Since they give an invariant picture of the political subject, they *prescribe* a political conduct in order to solve the issue. Thus, following power-politics analyses we can affirm that struggle's success will be won by strengthening economic and military power in the area, being aware that the actions undertaken will influence the social value of Kurdish identity for both internal and external environment. Liberal constructivism would suggest the Kurdish demands be translated into shared and acceptable terms, which can implement existing legal institutions; any other 'practical' actions would indeed threaten more than help the recognition of Kurdish identity. These two theories embody the two horns of the double-truth dilemma referred to Ocalan and Kurdish activists. It is not rare, especially in Turkey and, despite with opposite denotation, in the international leftist debate, to hear that Ocalan is actually using a double-truth rhetoric. He would be using a liberal-like language based on the recognition of Kurdish identity to appeal to the internal moderate electorate in Turkey, to foreigner politicians and to the European Court for Human Rights; while be reserving for the militants and Kurdish activists another message, conveying a political idea which ultimately is not reconcilable with liberal democracy and which implies military/terrorist violence as well as separatist/illegal autonomy.

#### *Radical Political Constructivism*

The deadlock brought by the double-truth argument against the Kurdish quest is grounded/based on the idea that there are fixed patterns for a political subject to work, and that this subject can choose among

different given possibilities.. This idea seems to be too simplistic. The safeguard of certain subjective mechanisms from historical course is somehow arbitrary and is challenged by radical constructivism. This latter subsumes the allegedly invariants from more fundamental - even though less immediately recognizable - systems of construction. Gunes (2012, 25-48) thus reinterprets the history of the National Kurdish Movement through the development of the Kurdish identity, following Foucaultian and Laclauian insights. For Foucault the appearance of the subject (and consequently the limits of latter's political claim) in the social dimension has to be traced from discursive practices and disciplinary apparatuses (Foucault 1975; 1976). Discourses and disciplines define in advance the shape and contours that the subjective political action might take; and, further, they mark as inherently irrational all other possible subjective positions which do not fit within. Laclau, borrowing from psychoanalytic theory, prolongs Foucault adding that these excluded positions can combine under an empty signifier or symbolic container and constitute a new ideological paradigm against the status quo (Laclau 1985; 2005). According to Gunes, the Kurdish identity developed in the late 50's and throughout the 60's within the socialist discourse of Turkish leftists, democratically demanding both economic improvements of the South-East of the country and cultural recognition (2012, 49-80). Once these demands have been labelled as national threats by mainstream political discourses, becoming object of state repression, and also diminished within the socialist strategy itself, the Kurdish identity turned to be a negative moment, and an empty signifier, which encompassed all the neglected demands. So it came to acquire ethnic, mythological, territorial and cultural facets, constituting a new ideological paradigm with a nationalistic connotation, opening the way to violent and military struggle (ib., 81-100). This analysis points to show that the nature of political subjectivity, whether it entails institutional recognition or relies on the exercise of power, is not a given. Rather, it is thoroughly constituted by its identity's vicissitudes within discursive practices and foreclosures. The other side of the coin, however, shows that there is no real political subject amended from identity issues. That is, even when the identity of a subject is denied, answers to this will still be a quest for recognition, because identity is a constitutive part of the subject and is socially constructed. This last point is precisely what Deleuze questions, and for this reason his original constructivist approach is central to the understanding of the quest for radical democracy in the Kurdish regions.

#### *Deleuze, Direct Democracy and the Kurdish Issue*

This is not to mean that an analysis such as Gunes' is theoretically misleading. On the contrary, the identity issue remains of the utmost importance for the Kurdish quest, and surely plays a fundamental role in the KCK (Union of Communities in Kurdistan, namely the system of communes attempting at applying direct democracy). This kind of identity-focused analyses shows the primacy of discourses and foreclosures over the exercise of power and liberal moral reasonability, *without relinquishing them*. However, the Deleuzian approach might be more apt to give an account of the communes that avoid entirely relying on that sort of power and reasonability. For instance, in his works on Spinoza (1968; 1981; 2007), Deleuze challenges the



notion of power, conceived as ruling and directing the social body from a privileged position, proposing instead a model of power that enhances the social body from a bottom-up perspective. In his two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972; 1980), furthermore, Deleuze gives a picture of the political subject as self-sufficient and non-moral; namely, neither acting according to a good or an end which stands outside of itself nor translating his experience into a shared common reason. So, rather than a struggle for its own recognition by society, the political subject in Deleuze is involved in the so-called ‘becoming-minor’ which stays for the multiplication of minorities’ struggles. The account thus sketched already resonates with some of Ocalan’s claims about Democratic Confederalism, the political model of local communal units: “[...] democratic solution does not deal with power sharing –in fact, it keeps itself away from power. The more intense power gets, the further away one gets from democracy” (Ocalan 2012, 30). Whereas the state can operate only through the imposition of rules on society, ‘democratic theory affirms the importance of society’s own initiative as well as its right to determine and construct itself’ (Ib., 23) and ‘[since] problems belong to society and not to the state, [...] it follows that the solution must come from the relevant social unit’ (Ib., 22). These statements can be seen as corresponding to the first three directions, which according to Nail (2012) belong to a Deleuzian constructivist analysis: first, understanding the existing power relations so that a revolution is desirable. Second, the possibility of transforming those power relations from passive to active. Third, the kinds of institutions embodying these transformations. There is a fourth and last requirement, somewhat in tension with the previous ones: the individuation of those *who* belong and participate to the struggle. Does not this recall the idea of a common front of all those instances which are repressed? Do not the pluralities of ‘becoming minor’ actually join within the empty signifier that is ‘becoming revolutionary’? This is an open point for any research within Deleuzian theory,<sup>2</sup> while fitting straightforwardly the struggles the Kurdish quest, which encompass as well the demands of other repressed political subjects in that region: women, LGBT community, and religious minorities. Each of them can have its own assembly within the commune and participate actively to its self-determination. If this plurality constitutes the ‘internal’ ideological framework, Democratic Confederalism aims at being recognized by the state too, entertaining a relation of competition as well as of symbiosis with it.

### *Research Plan*

Insofar as the project aims at contributing to the constructivist debate over the political subject, most of the work will be exegetical, focusing on texts of this tradition. Although ‘conventional’ constructivism will deserve attention, especially for the liberal tradition (Rawls’s constructivism and his interpretation of Kant), the majority of the study will concern ‘radical’ constructivism, for the ontological perspective it implies. For the reasons outlined so far, the theme of identity’s constitution will find considerable space; research in this domain will span from Laclau to authors such as Gramsci, who is in the background both of Laclau and

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<sup>2</sup> See, with opposite positions on the issue, on the one hand Braidotti (2002) and Patton (2000); Hughes (2008) and Žižek (2004) on the other.

Ocalan, and to detours in the psychoanalytic debate when necessary. As for Deleuze, both primary sources and secondary literature will be extensively studied. The latter will concentrate on the interpretation of his political views in general (Patton, Jameson), and more particularly on those authors involved in autonomist political tradition: Nail, Hardt and Negri, and 'Bifo' Berardi for instance.

Concerning the Kurdish quest, Ocalan's work will be of great importance, together with Bookchin's, the social anarchist author who built a fruitful debate with Ocalan and inspired the latter's model of communal unit. The literature over the radical democratic turn of the Kurdish quest is increasing. Apart from Cengiz Gunes himself, for instance, also Welat Zeydanlioglu and Stefano Torelli have recently published on the topic. Also more general studies from an historical (Martin Van Bruinessen) and ethnological (Joost Jorgenden) perspective will be taken into account. Within this field of study I will be open also to acquiring and applying qualitative research methods of sociology, if the research will require collecting some data over some particular issue of relevance. The learning of Turkish (surely) and Kurdish (possibly) language will be an integrant part of the PhD project, in order to access original material after its third year.

Words: 2454

### *Timetable*

	2017		2018	2019	2020
Conventional and Liberal Constructivism					
Radical Constructivism, Laclau					
Deleuze's political works and main interpretations of it					
Literature over the Kurdish Quest and Ocalan's works					
Publishing articles					
Final Thesis					

### *Summary for non- specialists / Society relevance*

The last years have brought in the political realm many examples of new 'popular' leaders, whose argument has been often the failure of democratic politics in face of global capitalism and migration. They therefore promise the re-establishment of an old order, returning to the people their role of political subject within their own countries, role now occupied by mysterious lobbies, greedy politicians or politically correct ones. Through the rhetoric tool which claims the people back in the buttons' room, these leaders have been indeed successful in winning the electoral preference in many western democracies. All the more, the urgency to understand and investigate what is, or what does it imply to be a political subject, needs an answer. Whereby the populist wave recalls a dystopic identity of the native people and propose indeed very well-known recipes of political solutions, like walls, isolationism and 'iron fists' policies, it is duty of political philosophy to inquire what constitute a political subject, which role identities play in it, and whether its means of action repeat themselves in history with few or no variation. My research will look into constructivism, which is a branch of political philosophy investigating the political dimension of the co-constitution of subjects and society. And more specifically it will focus on Deleuze, whose political works aim at differentiating the issue of 'minor' identities, as the signs of political processes of liberation, from reactionary and paranoid identities, as delusional recovering of the mythological origins. His works also help for conceiving the opportunities given for political actions which are detached from the state as the center of politics. Namely he debunks the idea that what is need to be politically active is the possession of the state, or, that is the same, the call for a 'good' paternal leader capable of using properly state means against the 'usurpers'. Further, I will accompany the theoretical analysis with the case study of the Kurdish quest. This is a very unique political example because it overcame the danger of defining its struggle as for the recognition of a 'mythological' identity (the Kurdish race). It instead opened itself to a plurality of regional quests, related with class, gender and minorities' issues. It also corroborated the traditional political tools, namely the military and the parliamentary way with strategies and techniques which are exemplary of the new attempts of creating the political subject within a grass-rooted democracy. Deleuze and the Kurdish quest ultimately will give me the possibility to elaborate a notion of political subject which does not merely repeats itself during history, as a prescription, nor strive to be restored from a lost past glory, but that rather is historically identifiable but not pre-determinable.

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## PERSONAL INFORMATION

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## Major: Research Master in Philosophy (RMA)

Radboud Universiteit, Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, Nijmegen (Netherlands)

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Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano (Italy)

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Mother tongue(s)

Italian

Other language(s)

	UNDERSTANDING		SPEAKING		WRITING
	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	
English	C1	C1	C1	C1	C1
Dutch	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2
French	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2

Levels: A1 and A2: Basic user - B1 and B2: Independent user - C1 and C2: Proficient user  
Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Projects

- Thesis with Prof. Dr. Philippe Van Haute , Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, The Netherlands (from December, 2014 to June, 2016) (still ongoing)  
Title of the Project: Subjects to Nature: a comparative study of the bodily dimension in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and 1905 Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality  
Areas of interest: Psychoanalysis, Post-Modernism, Capitalism, Critical Theory
- Thesis with Prof. Marialuisa Baldi in Università degli Studi di Milano (from January to June 2009)  
Title of the Project: Spinoza: Body and Politics  
Areas of interest: Naturalism, Modern Political Theory

## Conferences

Theme: Challenging Capitalist Modernity II: Dissecting Capitalist Modernity- Building Democratic Confederation. Held in Hamburg (April 2015)  
Theme: Personal Identity. Held by Dutch Research School of Philosophy (OZSW) (December 2013)  
Theme: Risk Society and Cosmopolitanism. Held by University of Utrecht (January 2012)

## Talks

Title: Deleuze, a militant anthropology. Exploring the notion of revolutionary agency. Talk presented at the *Deleuze Studies Conference*, Lisbon, Portugal (August 2013)

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### *Summary*

The aim of the project is to provide a clearer picture of the nature of the political subject within a constructivist perspective. Constructivism has put forward basically two different models. It conceives the political subject as primarily described either by specific functions and operations, or by identities, representing and standing for particular social instances. Further, it is another matter of discussion whether functions and identities of the political subject have to be conceived as something fixed and unchanging or contingent and historically determined. Thus, I propose to use Deleuze's political philosophy, inasmuch as he puts forward a model of political action which admits initially an identity-based struggle, while moving however against resolutions which are limited to representation and recognition. This is because, he conceives the political subject nonetheless as having an operative and functional nature. I will combine Deleuze's theoretical insight with the Kurdish quest, which provides a unique case study. The history of the struggle for Kurdish identity shows that the political subject can embody and perform many different strategies and possibilities. Both these branches of the research wish to demonstrate that the nature of political subjectivity is not fixed but historically variant.

### **Keywords**

Political constructivism, Political Subject, Identity politics, Deleuze, Kurdish Quest.

### *Proposal*

#### *Introduction*

The present research project follows two lines of studies. On the one hand, it is concerned with political philosophy, more specifically with the philosophical framework of constructivist analyses in International Relations Theory. On the other, it looks at the theoretical work of Abdullah Ocalan and the Kurdish question as a case study. The underlying questions are: how is the political subject constituted and how shall we conceive its possibility of action?

The constitution of the subject is the core of the broad philosophical movement known as constructivism. It may be understood as the subject of (scientific) knowledge (Kuhn), or the biological subject (Varela and Marturana), to mention just a few among the most acknowledged versions of it. Similarly we can ask how the political subject develops within society and vice versa how the political subject shapes society. More specifically constructivist analyses appeared within IR theory as the third way to overcome the binary opposition between realists and idealists, otherwise known as materialists and institutionalists. Whilst

accepting as a common general assumption the circular relation between subject and society, agency and structure, namely the co-constitution of them the constructivist perspective differentiated in many internal contrasting positions. These concern the role of identity as the midterm of the relation. Power-focused analyses and liberal theories conceive identities as the historical, contingent aspects of the political subject, whose behaviors, however, are described more deeply by law-like invariant mechanisms ('conventional constructivism'). The more 'radical' constructivism instead aims at showing that identities constitute the political subject in its entirety, defining latter's variety of possible perceptions and actions, pre-organizing the way in which it 'sees' and 'interprets' the world around. My research aim, while taking side with the more radical understanding of constructivism, at investigating whether and to which extent the subjective political response would be identity-related too. For this purpose I think that Deleuze can be especially useful. His political works (1972; 1980; 2002) engage with collective agencies and put forward a picture of political subjects whose relation with identity issues is complex: he surely detaches from institutionalized identity politics, but it is more disputable whether his idea of revolutionary subject gets rid completely of identities' quests or rather if it provides identities with a dimension that goes beyond the dialectic of recognition and provides useful insights about radical democratic projects. Within this theoretical framework, the Kurdish issue may work as a very telling case study. This is because, in first instance, it is an identity-based struggle with abundance of material and analyses from various theoretical perspectives; and still developing and looking forward a resolution. Second, once we limit ourselves to the political development we can see that it passed through many different phases, waving from parliamentary attempts to armed struggle, till today's attempted system of Democratic Confederalism or Democratic Autonomy, as it has been named by the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan (2011; 2012). This is a network of communes in a large regional scale which apply a grass-rooted democratic system, not forcefully entertaining a mere relation of opposition with the state central system- when allowed.

So, the study of Deleuzian constructivism applied to IR theory on the one hand, and the Kurdish on going political project of liberation on the other, can help us to understand why some political practices were embedded within specific social frameworks, maybe belonging now to the past. And furthermore, given today's political practices, which kind of society might wait us in the future. More specifically I think the research will contribute by inserting within the IR constructivist debate the perspective on identity issues provided by Deleuze and exemplified by the Kurdish quest to answer questions as the following: can a grass-rooted democracy that works outside to state central system go along with the parliamentary way and its demands for changes in the constitution and in the legal system? In other words, what relations are there between the recognition by the other and the way to self-determinacy? Which subjective answers do these two positions imply?

### *Conventional Political Constructivism*

Constructivist realism and liberal constructivism are the two conventional constructivist theories which attempted at inserting the co-constitution of the political subject and society within previous theories of IR's philosophical debate, namely materialism and institutionalism. They however inherit the problems of their predecessors, resulting in an incomplete or anyway unbalanced co-constitutive relation of society and subjects.

Constructivist realism accepts that the subjective identity is something constructed in the social framework, but it does not allow this fact to really change the core fundamental subjective mechanism, that is power-focused. The identity of a state is constructed both outwardly by other states (i.e. what they expect that state would do in international issues) and inwardly by its citizens (for instance, whether the national image is increased or diminished, whether the people's interests have been correctly defended or not, etc.). While these are indispensable parameters for leaders in order to evaluate political action, they do not change the fact that what political agency is really about is 'just' the power to exercise power and the increasing of it through military strength, economic leverage, and all other possible means (Barkin 2010).

Liberal constructivism, given its relational perspective over politics inherited by institutionalist theory, is much more ready to put identity's recognition at the center of political analysis, but in doing so it does not really explore the effects of this on the subject, which remain basically a rational moral agent. Liberal constructivism's political goal is to build fair institutions which embrace universal principles encompassing all the different moral perspectives, translated appropriately in a shared reasonable language. It then refers mostly to the 'translating' operation, while it does not cover the agent of this latter, who is presupposed constantly having a conception of the good and the rational capability to use means to achieve that good (Rawls 1971; 1980; Roberts 2007).

What do these theories mean for the Kurdish quest? They *prescribe* a political conduct in order to solve the issue. Thus, following power-politics analyses we can affirm that struggle's success will be gained by strengthening economic and military power in the area, being aware that the actions undertaken will influence the social value of Kurdish identity for both internal and external environment. Liberal constructivism would suggest the Kurdish demands be translated into shared and acceptable terms, which can implement existing legal institutions; any other 'practical' actions would indeed threaten more than help the recognition of Kurdish identity. These two theories embody the two horns of the double-truth dilemma referred to Ocalan and Kurdish activists. It is not rare, especially in Turkey and, despite with opposite denotation, in the international leftist debate, to hear that Ocalan and the Kurdish activist are actually using double-truth rhetoric. They would be using a liberal-like language based on the recognition of Kurdish identity to appeal to the internal moderate electorate in Turkey, to foreigner politicians and to the European Court for Human Rights; while be reserving for the militants and the internal front another

message, conveying a political idea which ultimately is not reconcilable with liberal democracy and which implies military/terrorist violence as well as separatist/illegal autonomy.

### *Radical Political Constructivism*

The deadlock brought by the double-truth argument against the Kurdish quest is grounded on the flawed applications of the principle of co-constitution of subject and society. Realist/materialist constructivism conceives the social interplay of identities as a superficial attribute of the 'real' essence of the political subject, namely power. Idealist/liberal constructivism focuses on identities' recognition and equals this latter with the political dimension, but it leaves almost no space for changes in the subject as consequence of politics.

Gunes (2012, 25-48) instead reinterprets the history of the National Kurdish Movement through the Kurdish identity, but understood in the strong and radical sense of a constructivism. He indeed shows how on the one hand the identity appears with peculiar characteristics as an outcome of specific political processes; and, on the other hand, how that same identity shapes and opens the way to entirely new political and societal stages. In other words, he conceives the historical development of the Kurdish identity as the expression of the constituted/constitutive subject. Gunes uses mainly Foucaultian analyses of discursive practices and disciplinary apparatuses in order to give an account of the appearance of the subject and the consequent limits of its political claim in the social dimension. While he relies on Laclau and latter's borrowings from psychoanalytic theory to give an account of the way in which the Kurdish identity has acted in turn on the public political sphere in Turkey. According to Laclau, an identity can either play a *differential* role, trying to inserting in an already existing system; or it can built an *equal* and *competing* system, which combines all the unheard demands under an empty signifier or symbolic container (Laclau 1985; 2005). Thanks to this theoretical framework Gunes is able to show how the Kurdish identity developed in the late 50's and throughout the 60's within the socialist discourse of Turkish leftists, democratically demanding both economic improvements of the South-East of the country and cultural recognition (2012, 49-80). Once these demands have been labelled as national threats by mainstream political discourses, becoming object of state repression, while being diminished within the socialist strategy as well, the Kurdish identity turned to be a negative moment, and an empty signifier, which encompassed all the neglected demands. So it came to acquire ethnic, mythological, territorial and separatist facets, constituting a new ideological paradigm with a nationalistic connotation, opening the way to violent and military struggle (Ib., 81-100). This analysis points to show that the nature of political subjectivity, even in those cases in which it covers the same paths of institutional recognition (the socialist discourse of the 50's and 60's) or of the exercise of power (the military struggle of the 70's and 80's), it does so only inasmuch as the social and historical construction of identity leads to this.

However, all a number of theoretical questions arises around the nature of identity itself. How does an identity appear at the very beginning in the historical and social process? To which extent are we able to

speak of one single identity throughout the temporal continuum? How exactly can the multiplicity of neglected demands merge and constitute one single front? I argue that Deleuze's theory is better equipped to answer these questions.

*Deleuze, Direct Democracy and the Kurdish Issue*

Within the Deleuzian studies is generally accepted the idea that Deleuze's political insights are unfitting with politics which are identity-based (Braidotti 2002; Patton 2000). As though it is not necessary entering into the questions I just made if the problem is to get rid of static pictures of subjectivity and social processes. For instance, in his works on Spinoza (1968; 1981; 2007), Deleuze challenges the notion of power, conceived as the *potestas* of ruling and directing the social body from a privileged position, proposing instead a model of power as *potentia*, that enhances the social body from a bottom-up perspective (Braidotti 2002). In his two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972; 1980), furthermore, Deleuze draws on a self-sufficient and non-moral political subject, neither acting according to an end standing outside nor translating subjective experience into a shared common reason. In fact, these statements are sufficient to draw the first three directions, which according to Nail (2012) belong to a Deleuzian constructivist analysis: first, understanding the existing power relations so that a revolution is desirable. Second, the possibility of transforming those power relations from passive to active. Third, the kinds of institutions embodying these transformations. Therefore Nail agrees on the non-identity nature of Deleuze's political theory. However Nail himself ends with a fourth and last requirement: the individuation of *those who* belong and participate to the struggle. This last point according to me opens the possibility of speaking about identities also within the Deleuzian framework, providing identity issues with quite a different perspective. The Deleuzian theory allows accounting for a plural conception of identity, and it does so insofar as the political subject in Deleuze is involved in the so-called 'becoming-minor' which stays for the multiplication of minorities' struggles. That is, the notion of 'revolutionary desire', which is fundamental in Deleuze's account on politics, according to me is meant to provide a solution to the apparent opposition arising between the One and the many. It attempts an answer to the question of how the many demands (of gender, class, race and so on) can actually constitute one single front (a revolutionary one indeed).

These possible lines of work are especially useful to understand the new paradigm in which the Kurdish struggle is embedded nowadays, which is a struggle for radical democracy. This latter is embodied by Democratic Confederalism, a political model of local communal units, which tries to apply direct democracy in the regions of Kurdistan. As sketched by Ocalan, this ultimate form of the Kurdish quest has to encompass the demands of all the repressed political subjects in that region: women, LGBT community, and religious minorities. Each of them can have, at least ideally, its own assembly within the commune and participate actively to its self-determination.

### *Research Plan*

Insofar as the project aims at contributing to the constructivist debate over the political subject, most of the work will be exegetical, focusing on texts of this tradition. Although 'conventional' constructivism will deserve attention, especially for the liberal tradition (Rawls's constructivism and his interpretation of Kant), the majority of the study will concern 'radical' constructivism. For the reasons outlined so far, the theme of identity's constitution will find considerable space; research in this domain will span from Laclau to authors such as Gramsci, who is in the background both of Laclau and Ocalan, and to detours in the psychoanalytic debate when necessary. As for Deleuze, both primary sources and secondary literature will be extensively studied. The latter will concentrate on the interpretation of his political views in general (Patton, Jameson), and more particularly on those authors involved in autonomist political tradition: Nail, Hardt and Negri, and 'Bifo' Berardi for instance.

Concerning the Kurdish quest, Ocalan's work will be of great importance, together with Bookchin's, the social anarchist author who built a fruitful debate with Ocalan and inspired the latter's model of communal unit. The literature over the radical democratic turn of the Kurdish quest is increasing. Apart from C. Gunes himself, for instance, also Welat Zeydanlioglu and Stefano Torelli have recently published on the topic. Also more general studies from an historical (Martin Van Bruinessen) and ethnological (Joost Jorgenden) perspective will be taken into account. Within this field of study I will be open also to acquiring and applying qualitative research methods of sociology, if the research will require collecting some data over some particular issue of relevance. The learning of Turkish (surely) and Kurdish (possibly) language will be an integrant part of the PhD project, in order to access original material after its third year.

Words: 2482

### *Timetable*

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Conventional and Liberal Constructivism				
Radical Constructivism, Laclau				
Deleuze's political				

works and main interpretations of it				
Literature over the Kurdish Quest and Ocalan's works				
Publishing articles				
Final Thesis				

### *Summary for non- specialists / Society relevance*

The last years have brought in the political realm many examples of new 'popular' leaders, whose argument has been often the failure of democratic politics in face of global capitalism and migration. They therefore promise the re-establishment of an old order, returning to the people their role of political subject within their own countries, role now occupied by mysterious lobbies, greedy politicians or politically correct ones. Through the rhetoric tool which claims the people back in the buttons' room, these leaders have been indeed successful in winning the electoral preference in many western democracies. All the more, the urgency to understand and investigate what is, or what does it imply to be a political subject, needs an answer. Whereby the populist wave recalls a dystopic identity of the native people and propose indeed very well-known recipes of political solutions, like walls, isolationism and 'iron fists' policies, it is duty of political philosophy to inquire what constitute a political subject, which role identities play in it, and whether its means of action repeat themselves in history with few or no variation. My research will look into constructivism, which is a branch of political philosophy investigating the political dimension of the co-constitution of subjects and society. And more specifically it will focus on Deleuze, whose political works aim at differentiating the issue of 'minor' identities, as the signs of political processes of liberation, from reactionary and paranoid identities, as delusional recovering of the mythological origins. His works also help for conceiving the opportunities given for political actions which are detached from the state as the center of politics. Namely he debunks the idea that what is need to be politically active is the possession of the state, or, that is the same, the call for a 'good' paternal leader capable of using properly state means against the 'usurpers'. Further, I will accompany the theoretical analysis with the case study of the Kurdish quest. This is a very unique political example because it overcame the danger of defining its struggle as for the recognition of a 'mythological' identity (the Kurdish race). It instead opened itself to a plurality of regional quests, related with class, gender and minorities' issues. It also corroborated the traditional political tools, namely the military and the parliamentary way with strategies and techniques which are exemplary of the new attempts of creating the political subject within a grass-rooted democracy. Deleuze and the Kurdish quest ultimately will give me the possibility to elaborate a notion of political subject which does not merely repeats itself during history, as a prescription, nor strive to be restored from a lost past glory, but that rather is historically identifiable but not pre-determinable.

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## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Projects

- Thesis with Prof. Dr. Philippe Van Haute , Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen, The Netherland (from December,2014 to June,2016) (still ongoing)  
Title of the Project: Subjects to Nature: a comparative study of the bodily dimension in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and 1905 Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality  
Areas of interest: Psychoanalysis, Post-Modernism, Capitalism, Critical Theory
- Thesis with Prof. Marialuisa Baldi in Università degli Studi di Milano (from January to June 2009)  
Title of the Project: Spinoza: Body and Politics  
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Conferences

Theme: Challenging Capitalist Modernity II: Dissecting Capitalist Modernity- Building Democratic Confederalism. Held in Hamburg (April 2015)  
Theme: Personal Identity. Held by Dutch Research School of Philosophy (OZSW) (December 2013)  
Theme: Risk Society and Cosmopolitanism. Held by University of Utrecht (January 2012)

Talks

Title: Deleuze, a militant anthropology. Exploring the notion of revolutionary agency. Talk presented at the *Deleuze Studies Conference*, Lisbon, Portugal (August 2013)

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