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Gilles Deleuze's 'Theology': A Liberation Theology or an Ontology for the Western Buddhist?

INTRODUCTION

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) is still gaining popularity today in all sorts of domains: apart from his fame in the field of philosophy, people who work in the domain of art, architecture, music or even politics are inspired by this 'thinker of immanence'. But the link with theology is, at first sight, not self-evident. Deleuze himself was very critical and even negative towards traditional theology. For him, theology uses the idea of transcendence to limit thought in its movements. Theology for its part has so far not been very interested in a possible contribution from a philosopher of immanence.¹

Nevertheless, this article has two aims in that direction. First, I want to *make explicit* this theological core from within Deleuze's thought by providing an analysis of his philosophy as a project of salvation. Then I will *confront* this 'redemptive thought' with an existing theological paradigm, namely that of liberation theology. As I will show, Deleuze develops a postmodern kind of (Western) liberation theology, but this project fails because of a lack of political strength. Eventually, I will thus suggest, he provides what could be called an 'ontology for the Western Buddhist'.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION IN DELEUZE'S PHILOSOPHY

There are several ways to argue for the thesis that Deleuze's thinking has a redemptive core (as Peter Hallward has already shown², though here, I want to demonstrate this by shortly elaborating on two important Deleuzian concepts: becoming and escaping. These concepts are tools for Deleuze in his struggle against representation. Indeed, the struggle *as such* already points towards a perspective of salvation: the 'field of immanence' that Deleuze puts forward as an alternative to the world of representation,

¹ However, there have been few attempts of a dialogue between Deleuze and (Christian) theology (see BRYDEN, Mary [Hg.]: *Deleuze and Religion*. London: Routledge 2001; KELLER, Catherine: *The Face of the Deep. A Theology of Becoming*. London: Routledge 2002).

² See HALLWARD, Peter: *Gilles Deleuze and the Redemption from Interest*. In: *Radical Philosophy* 81 (1997) 6–21; HALLWARD, Peter: *Deleuze and the 'World Without Others'*. In: *Philosophy Today* (Winter 1997) 530–544; HALLWARD, Peter: *Out of this World. Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. London: Verso 2006.

paradoxically 'transcends' the world of representation, thereby installing a kind of dualism. Or in the words of Peter Hallward: "This transcendence is the enabling gesture of Deleuze's entire project. It is also, perhaps, the source of its ultimate incoherence"³. For Deleuze himself, this dualism is illusionary: representation is a transcendental illusion.⁴ This structural analysis of certain features of Deleuze's philosophy (which can be said to make it a 'theology') will provide the basis for a more thorough discussion as regards the content of this theology.

SALVATION AND BECOMING

At first sight, it seems strange to associate Deleuze with a project of salvation. Indeed, the uniqueness of his philosophical programme precisely consists in the development of a universe that is *not* teleological, that has no aim, no end. Thus, salvation is not to be found in *what* you would become (becoming has nothing to do with imitating or adopting an identity⁵), but it lies in the *process* of becoming, which does not know an end.⁶ What is interesting, however, is that these processes of becoming themselves all go in a particular, specific direction. What is striking about all the becomings that Deleuze and Guattari illustrate in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is that there seems to be a *limitation* concerning the direction of the becoming. After all, the most important 'becomings' are the becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-revolutionary, becoming-minoritarian, becoming-imperceptible. The terms that accompany each becoming likewise indicate a restriction in the becoming⁷: not all becomings are equal. In

³ HALLWARD, Peter: *Gilles Deleuze and the Redemption from Interest*, 6.

⁴ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Difference and Repetition* (transl. P. Patton). London: Continuum 2004, 334: "Representation is a site of transcendental illusion".

⁵ DELEUZE, Gilles / PARNET, Claire: *Dialogues II* (transl. H. Tomlinson & B. Habberjam). London: Continuum 2006, 2: "Becomings belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries and exits. There is a woman-becoming which is not the same as women, their past and their future, and it is essential that women enter this becoming to get out of their past and their future, their history. There is a revolutionary-becoming which does not necessarily happen through the militants. [...] To become is never to imitate, nor to 'do like', nor to conform to a model, whether it's of justice or of truth. [...] The question 'What are you becoming?' is particularly stupid. For as someone becomes, what he is becoming changes as much as he does himself. Becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns".

⁶ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 323: "A line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination. [...] A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is absolute speed of movement. [...] A becoming is neither one nor two, not the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight descent running perpendicular to both".

⁷ DELEUZE / GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 320–321: "Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man? First because man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian. [...] When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian". *Ibid.*, 321: "In this

Deleuze and Guattari's words: "Only a minority is capable of serving as the active medium of becoming, but under such conditions that it ceases to be a definable aggregate in relation to the majority"⁸. The process of becoming releases a vector of force, but that vector points in a particular direction: away from and against representation, the subject, the State. So although the Deleuzian becoming 'releases' as it were the power of Being, becoming also entails a *loss* of signification, of identity.⁹ In that sense, we can conclude that becoming is not a constructive process (at least, not for the subject), but that it bears a strong resemblance to another of Deleuze's important concepts, namely the 'lines of flight', or the 'escaping'.¹⁰

SALVATION AND ESCAPING

Deleuze's dynamic 'ontology of difference' includes a continuous resistance or revolution against static and representative structures. It is therefore necessary for him to create what he calls 'lines of flight', *out* of that representational world, in order to free the plane of immanence, which is a transcendental field, to free it the hold of signification and representation. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari actually carry out this movement from a representational logic. The result of this movement is a sparkling style, an accumulation of innumerable examples, a book that is not a collection of chapters with a plot, but several 'plateaus', 'milieus' from which everything grows. Important concepts (not 'metaphors'!) that support this movement of escaping are 'lines of flight' (out of a hierarchical structure, out of an organisation), 'deterritorialisation', 'nomadology' and 'the war machine'. I isolate the concept of the war machine here because it can be considered as a part of Deleuze's political project, on which I will elaborate in the second section. Contrary to what the name suggests, a war-machine doesn't necessarily produce war: "The assemblage that draws lines of flight is of the war-machine type. Mutations spring from this machine, which in no way has war as its object, but rather the emission of quanta of deterritorialization, the passage of mutant flows (in this sense all creation is brought about by a war-machine)"¹¹.

sense women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman. It is important not to confuse 'minoritarian', as a becoming or process, with a 'minority', as an aggregate or a state".

⁸ DELEUZE / GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 321.

⁹ GOODCHILD, Philip: *Deleuze and Guattari. An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (= Theory, Culture and Society). London: Sage 1996, 171: "Unlike humans, animals do not participate in the strata of signification and subjectification". Becoming-animal does not mean: identifying with an animal. The point precisely is: depersonalisation.

¹⁰ GOODCHILD, Philip: *Deleuze and Guattari*, 170: "Becoming turns the boundaries into lines of escape insofar as it implicates intensive thresholds within the lines of representation".

¹¹ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 229–230.

Eventually, it's all about the creation of an 'outside', an absolute exteriority that cannot be captivated in the structure of the State. That is why Deleuze and Guattari write that "the war machine's relation to an outside is not another 'model'; it is an assemblage that makes thought itself nomadic"¹². They refuse to think in oppositions, in playing one model against another, though the impression yet remains that they seem to oppose a nomadic way of life to a static 'life' within the State. In a rather 'combative style', the authors write about these war machines:

"We are not saying that they [the war machines] are better, of course, only that they animate a fundamental indiscipline of the warrior, a questioning of hierarchy, perpetual blackmail by abandonment or betrayal, and a very volatile sense of honor, all of which, once again, impedes the formation of the State"¹³.

The themes of losing one's own identity or personality through a becoming, of resistance against State power and the attention and privileging of minorities, can certainly be considered as 'liberation theological' themes. In my opinion, therefore, they are signs of a redemptive vision on (the purpose of) life.

DELEUZE'S THEOLOGY. A POSTMODERN LIBERATION THEOLOGY?

Both the ideas of becoming and escaping give Deleuze's redemptive philosophy a political core. "Politics precedes being,"¹⁴ write Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. These politics clearly aim at a kind of liberation: the liberation from the subject, from oedipal structures, from the State, from the infinite debt installed by capitalism. Can we thus interpret Deleuze's project of salvation as a kind of liberation theology? From what we have seen above, we can already distinguish some common characteristics between Deleuze's thinking and certain liberation theologies. Indeed, they share an immanent approach to the world, an affinity with a Marxist analyses of society and (in the terms of traditional liberation theology) a 'preferential option for the poor': after all, is Deleuze's becoming-minoritarian not a kind of option for the poor?

More concretely, within this political and emancipatory project, I distinguish four aspects which I will elaborate on in what follows (see scheme below), though making this Deleuze-liberation theology connection is not without its drawbacks. In order to evaluate his political project in the following, we distinguish four aspects – against which four objections can be formulated. The heaviness of these objection, indeed, will eventually prompt another theological affinity within Deleuze's thinking to arise, namely the similarities it shares with Buddhism.

¹² DELEUZE / GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 27.

¹³ DELEUZE / GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 395.

¹⁴ DELEUZE / GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 225.

PRO	CONTRA
Loss of identity – ‘becoming poor’	Loss of identity = merely spiritual (self-transcendence)
Permanent Revolution / New Earth	Minor/molecular politics: No real war / becoming ‘nothing’
Liberation of debts	Critique of capitalism = superseded?
Political newness / counter-actualisation	How to act?

The dynamics of becoming with its *loss of identity* is necessary to liberate oneself from the world of representation and hierarchy, in other words, from the State. As such, Deleuze installs a ‘preferential option for the poor’: we all have to be in solidarity with poor, because the poor are those who fall out of State structures, who have no identity – they are what Deleuze calls a ‘minority’. In defining what is poor or what is ‘minoristiarstienian’, material richness is not the criterion, but *position*: a poor man or woman is dominated by a despot or a system that takes away his or her liberty. Minority, moreover, certainly does not mean a quantitative minority. Deleuze rather designates a minority in ‘significance’: the poor man or woman doesn’t have an identity in the oppressive system anymore. But as in liberation theology, Deleuze’s minority also has a positive connotation. Deleuze pleads for a becoming-minority; the Bible praises those who are ‘poor in spirit’ (Mt 5:3) because through them, not their own spirit speaks, but the Spirit of God can be heard. The evangelical poor are everyone who does not seek the centre of their existence in themselves. Liberation thus not only means political and social liberation, but also personal, spiritual liberation.

Moreover, Deleuze’s project of liberation entails a continuous resistance against the ruling norm. The resistance is endless according to Deleuze, because there will always be the tendency to ‘re-territorialize’, to rebuild a hierarchical structure like the State. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze refers to the concept of ‘*permanent revolution*’¹⁵. Permanent revolution as the

¹⁵ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Logic of Sense* (transl. M. Lester). New York: Columbia University Press 1990, 49: “The technocrat is the natural friend of the dictator – computers and dictatorship; but the revolutionary lives in the gap which separates technical progress from social totality, and inscribes there his dream of permanent revolution. This dream, therefore, is itself action, reality, and an effective menace to all established order; it renders possible what it dreams about”; DELEUZE, Gilles: *Logic of Sense*, 72–73: “How could we not feel that our freedom and strength reside, not in the divine universal nor in the human personality, but in these singularities [machinery of the unconscious which produces sense] which are more us than we ourselves are, more divine than the gods, as they animate concretely poem and aphorism, permanent revolution and partial action? What is bureaucratic in these fantastic machines which are peoples and poems? It suffices that we dissipate ourselves a little, that we be able to be at the surface, that we stretch our skin like a drum, in order that the ‘great politics’ begin. An empty square for neither man nor God; [...] Today’s task is to

becoming minoritarian of everything and everyone, is the ultimate function of the war machine. But what kind of revolution do Deleuze and Guattari envisage? They situate the functioning of the war machine at a micro-level, at the level of 'the molecular' (as opposed to the 'molar macropolitics'). In general, the function of the war machine is 'fighting', revolting against the power of the State. The war machine is, as already stated, a machine (not a logically functioning 'apparatus') that is absolutely exterior to the functioning of the State. "As for the war machine in itself, it seems to be irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere"¹⁶. This new type of revolution (a molecular revolution) is permanent because Deleuze realizes that the tendency to re-territorialize, to rebuild a hierarchical power structure like the State, will always remain. At other occasions (particularly in *Anti-Oedipus*), Deleuze prefers the more cryptic concept of a 'new earth' (*nouvelle terre*) to evoke his vision.¹⁷ The new earth is the "end of history," when there are no more oedipal relations, when "the movement of social production goes to the very extremes of its deterritorialization, and the movement of metaphysical production carries desire along with it and reproduces it in a new earth"¹⁸.

Third, a continuous deterritorialization is the only process that can *liberate* us from the infinite *debts* installed by capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari agree with Nietzsche that the primary function of money is not to facilitate trade, but to create and to pay debts and thereby to create a mechanism based on guilt (and guilt-formation is what they call: anti-production).¹⁹ That is why, although capitalism is basically a deterritorializing regime, it doesn't create the *freedom* that Deleuze and Guattari are looking for. However, Deleuze and Guattari do not consider capitalism as such responsible for the infinite debts that are created in society. Conversely, the deterritorializing forces of capitalism would liberate us from all debts. It is the remaining mechanisms of power (by the State or other institutions) that keep the relation debtor-creditor alive. So instead of increasing State control on the streams of money (as happens nowadays during a financial crisis), these streams should be liberated from any control on them. The political project of Deleuze (and Guattari) thus aims at a kind of capitalism without mechanisms of power.

make the empty square circulate and to make pre-individual and nonpersonal singularities speak – in short, to produce sense."

¹⁶ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 388.

¹⁷ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *Capitalism and Schizophrenia I. Anti-Oedipus*. London: Continuum 2004, 142; 329; 350–351; 353–354.

¹⁸ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *Anti-Oedipus*, 142. See also DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *What is Philosophy?* (transl. H. Tomlinson). New York: Columbia University Press 1994, 101: "Revolution is absolute deterritorialisation".

¹⁹ HOLLAND, Eugene: *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus. Introduction to Schizoanalysis*. New York: Routledge 1999, 9.

Finally, Deleuze makes a plea for *political newness*: he wants to avoid immediate action against the State because of the danger of re-affirming the oppositions and thereby the (representational) logic of the State. The State, in other words, re-interiorises the resistance, integrates it in its hierarchy. “Philosophy is [only] ‘worthy of the event’ when it does not simply respond to social events as they appear, but rather creates new concepts which enable us to counter-actualise the significant events and processes that define our present”²⁰. And counter-actualisation, as the abstraction of an event from states of affairs, and so as the isolating of its concept, is, writes Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, the exact meaning of ‘liberation’.²¹ The process of counter-actualisation makes us aware of the virtual potential within a state of affairs, aware of the potential for revolutionary change.²² The concept of counter-actualisation makes clear that the most concrete political changes happen on the level of micropolitics. In the preface to the English translation of *Anti-Oedipus*, Michel Foucault shares this ‘belief in the small, in the molecular’ of Deleuze and Guattari, by referring to the political message of the book: the enemy against which *Anti-Oedipus* fights, is ‘fascism’ in the broadest sense: “The major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism [...]. And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and the use of desire of the masses so effectively [*sic*] – but also the fascism in us all, in our head and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us. I would say that *Anti-Oedipus* (may its authors forgive me) is a book of ethics”²³. To ‘counter-actualise’ an event is a typically philosophical movement. It entails a detaching of an actual event from its concrete circumstances and thereby brings it onto the plane of immanence. In the movement of counter-actualisation, a possibility of revolution is created: by liberating the event from its circumstances, it is possible to let this event develop *in another direction*. Deleuze wants to liberate us from a ‘state of affairs’ – for him, an event is not an inevitable fate, but a contingent gathering, an assemblage of lines of force that can be disentangled by thought. Political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, let themselves be inspired by the concepts of political newness and counter-actualisation to develop a radical democratic project from Deleuze’s philosophy. The project is based on Deleuze’s struggle against mechanisms of State power, on the one hand, and the belief in strength of the multitude, the assemblage, on the other.

²⁰ PATTON, Paul: *Deleuze and the Political*. London: Routledge 2000, 133.

²¹ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Logic of Sense*, 161: “to the extent that the pure event is each time imprisoned forever in its actualisation, counter-actualisation liberates it, always for other times”.

²² CHOAT, Simon: *Becoming-Revolutionary. Deleuze and Marx* (Unpublished paper presented at the First International Deleuze Studies Conference, Cardiff, 11–13 August 2008), 4.

²³ FOUCAULT, Michel: *Preface*. In : DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *Anti-Oedipus*, xiv-xv.

From that perspective, Hardt and Negri develop, in their well-known books *Empire* and *Multitude*²⁴, a dynamic assessment of a democratic society that is open, non-hierarchical and collective. Counter-actualisation is thus about the possibilities for creating new concepts from an actual 'state of affairs', in order to be capable of escaping this state of affairs and to perform a deterritorialisation.

Upon first sight, at least, it seems that Deleuze stands for an anti-totalitarian, anti-dominating philosophy that chooses the side of the minority. This would be, for its part, completely compatible with liberation theology: Deleuze's philosophy is the philosophy of the *underdog* or the *outlaw*, of those people who are excluded from the 'law'. But on the other hand, Deleuze's ethics demands a giving up of the subject, which begs the question of how one can choose an option for the poor if there is no 'I' anymore to do the choosing? In this sense, don't we end up with a passive individual (an assemblage of lines of force) that can eventually, and easily, be used to *support* the logic of capitalism? Against these four elements of Deleuze's political programme, however, we can formulate serious objections, that make us call into question the value of Deleuze's liberation theology. Although the four points of critique are strongly intertwined, I present them parallel with the themes I discussed above:

A becoming as the loss of identity, of subjectivity, is more a spiritual than a political act. In Deleuze's immanent ontology, every creature has the task of self-transcendence, of liberating itself from the logic of representation in order to let God (Being) speak through itself. This is a spiritual programme that demands the giving up of the subject: the only dynamic, we also know from the mystics, that leads to a real *life*...²⁵ The concept of the 'new earth', too, belongs rather to a spiritual vision than to a political programme. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze refers for example to "a new earth and a people that *do not yet exist*"²⁶. With the giving up of the subject, Deleuze thinks the sequel of the postmodern 'decentred' subject. He wants to get rid of this 'weak' subject and he doesn't do this by returning to a 'strong' concept of subjectivity, a kind of new 'cogito', but by giving up the idea of a subject completely and by giving back word, deed and consciousness to Being itself. This implies that the becoming-poor can never lead to a new, a 'better' identity. Because the process of becoming is infinite, one eventually goes in the direction of a 'nothing': the poor, the

²⁴ HARDT, Michael / NEGRI, Antonio: *Empire*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press 2000; HARDT, Michael / NEGRI, Antonio: *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Press 2004; HARDT, Michael: *Gilles Deleuze. An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota 1993.

²⁵ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Immanence. A Life*. In: DELEUZE, Gilles: *Pure Immanence. Essays on A Life* (transl. A. Boyman). New York: Zone Books 2001, 28: "The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens".

²⁶ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *What is philosophy?*, 108 (my italics).

woman, etc., actually do not *exist* in Deleuze's universe of micropolitics. Only lines of forces and contingent assemblages of those lines 'are' at the level of the molecular. By considering the process of becoming as endless, we can argue in line with Luce Irigaray, Deleuze makes a big mistake: he merely *affirms* the oppression of the poor or the woman: the poor man cannot obtain an identity that would enable him to act, to revolt against his/her position.²⁷ In Deleuze's philosophy, political action seems to lie fully in the hands of Being – and the singular events that take place in the plane of immanence (that is Being), are the result of accidental assemblages of lines of force. The combination of the mystical and the political, a core element of liberation theology, thus seems to be undone. The loss of identity certainly is a mystical process. But because Deleuze rejects a transcendent God with whom the soul could unite after giving up his/her ego, the loss of identity doesn't have a 'positive' direction; it is only moving away from representation. While the divine soul is coloured by love and hope, the soul of Deleuze's Being is infinitely dispersed in all directions.

In addition to this, and concerning the permanent revolution, we must not confuse, Deleuze confirms in an interview with Negri, the future of the revolutions in history with the becoming-revolutionary of human beings: both cases don't even concern the same group of people.²⁸ The problematic of the loss of identity pops up again. The 'women' and the 'minorities' do not actually exist in Deleuze's universe: in the endless process of becoming, one gets rid of his/her identity. The subject doesn't exist anymore, but also the 'other' has vanished. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, we can read that imperceptibility, indiscernibility and impersonality are the three virtues for Deleuze and Guattari.²⁹ At first sight, then, micropolitics has the connotation of 'responsibility of the individual'. In that sense it could be promising for the 'small individual' who wants to do his part. But Deleuzian micropolitics has nothing to do with individuals. The 'responsibility' is given 'back' to Being, that is presented as a kind of natural proto-force which we can rely on and which we have to affirm, in whatever direction this force goes.

²⁷ IRIGARAY, Luce: *Ce sexe qui n'est pas un*. Paris : Editions de Minuit 1983 (especially Chapter 6: 'Cosi fan tutti').

²⁸ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Contrôle et devenir*. In : DELEUZE, Gilles: *Pourparlers. 1972–1990*. Paris : Minuit 1990, 231: "Mais on ne cesse de mélanger deux choses, l'avenir des révolutions dans l'histoire et le devenir révolutionnaire des gens. Ce ne sont même pas les mêmes gens dans les deux cas".

²⁹ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *A Thousand Plateaus*. 309: "Imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality – the three virtues. To reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait, in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator. One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody, everything, into a becoming, because one has made a necessarily communicating world, because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things".

Thirdly, the mode of capitalism analysed by Deleuze and Guattari seems to have gone 'out-of-date'. "*Anti-Oedipus* (1972) was published in the afterglow of the events of May 1968, before the first 'oil shock' of 1974 put an end to hopes for widespread social transformation in France (and elsewhere); *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) – published in the thick of the oil crisis (1974-81) – is both less engaged with pressing socio-historical events and far richer and broader in scope"³⁰. Indeed, we could ask ourselves (with Žižek) whether Deleuze has not become *the* ideologist of late capitalism? The logic of capitalist consumption nowadays precisely *is* the cultivating and liberating of all desires, the creation of a multiplicity of intensities, the anti-centralization³¹. In other words: the analysis of capitalism by Deleuze and Guattari has been overtaken by the logic of capitalism itself (at least in the Western world). The further deterritorialisation of capitalism seems only to have brought more inequality and more debt in certain parts of the world, so that we have reached the point where we need the State again to tame the capitalist monster. Political philosopher and economist Noreena Hertz, for example, pleads for more political action on the part of the State against this 'silent takeover' of the capitalist logic and against the accumulation of debts in Third World countries.³² Are Deleuze and Guattari thus fighting a capitalism that doesn't exist anymore in that form?

And in response to the fourth aspect of Deleuze's political project, that of the creation of *indirect* political newness, we can put forward the question of whether the virtualizing movement of counter-actualisation does not end up with the same problem of re-territorialisation as immediate action (namely, that it serves the logic of the State). The strength and revolutionary power of the 'multitude' can indeed be questioned. The multitude functions on the level of micropolitics, a politics that works like weeds that

³⁰ HOLLAND, Eugene: *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, ix.

³¹ ŽIŽEK, Slavoj: *Organs Without Bodies. On Deleuze and Consequences*. London: Routledge 2004, 183–184: "There are, effectively, features that justify calling Deleuze the ideologist of late capitalism. Is the much celebrated Spinozan *imitatio affecti*, the impersonal circulation of affects bypassing persons, not the very logic of publicity, of video clips, and so forth in which what matters is not the message about the product but the intensity of the transmitted affects and perceptions? [...] Is this logic in which we are no longer dealing with persons interacting but just with the multiplicity of intensities, of places of enjoyment, plus bodies as a collective/impersonal desiring machine not eminently Deleuzian?"; *Ibid.*, 184: "And is the ultimate irony not that, for Deleuze, the sport was surfing, a Californian sport par excellence it there ever was one: no longer a sport of self-control and domination directed toward some goal but just a practice of inserting oneself into a wave and letting oneself be carried by it"; *Ibid.*, 185: "So, when Naomi Klein writes that 'neo-liberal economics is biased at every level towards centralization, consolidation, homogenisation. It is a war waged on diversity,' is she not focusing on a figure of capitalism whose days are numbered? [...] Is not the latest trend in corporate management itself 'diversify, devolve power, try to mobilize local creativity and self-organization? Is not anticentralization *the* topic of the 'new' digitalized capitalism?"

³² HERTZ, Noreena: *The Silent Takeover. Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy*. London: Arrow Books 2002; HERTZ, Noreena: *I.O.U. The Debt Threat and Why We Must Defuse It*. London: Fourth Estate 2005.

overgrow the institutions of the State, but cannot be captivated in the State's logic because it is not dialectically opposed to it. Still history has proved that, on a macro-level, a multitude was always, one way or another, homogenized, heaped together and brought onto a molar plane: "There is, hence, always a nonmultiple excess over multitudes"³³. Money, for example, brings a multitude of desires together. Or, in another way: in practice, a multitude often consigns itself to one charismatic leader who suddenly acquires power over that multitude (as we see in the case of some guerrilla movements). And even if we look at the multitude on a molecular level, we have to admit that the very concept of a 'multitude' is an impersonal, a-historical concept. Deleuze's multitude "is not the plural, but the internal consequence of univocity"³⁴. The multitude is nothing more than a consequence of the One Being that differentiates itself. It is thus not totally clear whether the concept of the multitude can function properly or if something like a micropolitics is possible at all (if a multitude has the tendency to surrender to a unity).

How can we then bring this becoming-revolutionary into practice? How can we *act* if it is Deleuze's aim to become imperceptible, to re-tire from the State against which we react? The task of the rather spiritual resistance Deleuze proposes, is, in Žižek's words, "to resist state power by withdrawing from its terrain [deterritorializing] and creating new spaces outside its control [nomadology]"³⁵. Against this position, Žižek formulates two important critiques: (1) first, why would we not act *within* the state itself, if it is impossible to destroy it, if it will exist forever, so to speak. And second (2), Žižek states that the state and the ones who withdraw from it, are in a relationship of "mutual parasitism": "Anarchic agents do the ethical thinking, and the state does the work of running and regulating society"³⁶. The only way in which resistance can be effective according to Žižek, is in fighting the state with its own means, or to formulate it in a Deleuzian vocabulary: to fight the State, not with a war machine, but with a military power – an army.

³³ ŽIŽEK, Slavoj: *Organs Without Bodies*, 197: "Hardt and Negri's slogan – multitude as the site of resistance against the Empire – opens up a further series of problems, the primary one among them being the level at which a multitude functions – what a given field of multitudes excludes, what it *has* to exclude to function. There is, hence, always a nonmultiple excess over multitudes".

³⁴ HALLWARD, Peter: *Gilles Deleuze and the Redemption From Interest*, 18: "If most of Deleuze's commentators look to his work for tools in the building of a 'radical democracy', to advance the deconstruction of 'Major' narratives and hierarchies, to support the assertion of 'Minor identities' and differences, they seldom consider the terms upon which this apparent pluralism rests. Invariably, 'multiplicity' with Deleuze is the predicate of a radical, self-differing singularity. His multiple is not the plural, but the internal consequence of univocity".

³⁵ ŽIŽEK, Slavoj: *Resistance is Surrender* (London Review of Books). http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n22/zize01_.html (29.06.2009), 2–3.

³⁶ ŽIŽEK, Slavoj: *Resistance is Surrender*, 2–3.

Has not, then, Deleuze's liberation theological project failed? Isn't there a danger for Deleuze's philosophy to become precisely that which he was fighting against, namely an ideology of sorts? The thought of pure immanence seems to bring a new form of domestication with it: everything is being absorbed in this holistic plane of forces, in this new, dynamic order. Deleuze has taken the standpoint of the absolute Exteriority and thereby made it into a new Interiority.

The consequences of Deleuze's (and Guattari's) indirect political programme might imply that we need to alter, or at least adjust, our idea of Deleuze as a liberation theologian. Indeed, I wonder whether, because of this ambiguous political outcome, Deleuze eventually doesn't offer us an ontology for what I would call the 'Buddhist consumer' or the 'Western Buddhist' – the liberal capitalist trying to develop a spiritual life? By way of conclusion, I will shortly elaborate on that suggestion.

DELEUZE'S THEOLOGY: AN ONTOLOGY FOR THE WESTERN BUDDHIST?

Deleuze himself explicitly stated his affinity with Zen Buddhism and Buddhism in general at certain occasions in his writings. In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze claims that he wants to sketch an image of philosophy that is "1/3th zen"; in *The Fold*, Deleuze refers to the Japanese origin of the concept event.³⁷ The many references to China in connection with the becoming-imperceptible in *A Thousand Plateaus* too are not negligible. In relation to his own style of thinking, Deleuze often refers to the East or the 'eastern logic'.

Very 'Zen' indeed would be the giving up of the subject, the renouncement of the world of representation (which is an illusion both for Buddhists and for Deleuze), the immanent world view (there is no such thing as a transcendent cause or God), and the construction of his philosophy as a practice³⁸. Precisely the total lack of a reference to transcendence is the point of divergence between Deleuze (and Buddhism in general) on the one hand, and Christian mysticism on the other. That is the reason why we make the link with Buddhism instead of other strands in the Christian tradition, although there are also many correspondences between the ontology of Deleuze and, say, Meister Eckhart. Another argument for the choice of Buddhism at this point, is the difference between 'insight' (Deleuze and Buddhism) and 'belief' (Christianity). 'Insight', however, does not refer to

³⁷ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Logic of Sense*, 248; DELEUZE, Gilles: *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit 1988, 14.

³⁸ HARDT, Michael: *Gilles Deleuze. An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, xiii-xiv and 95–111. An objection to the connection of Deleuze with Buddhism could be the argument that Buddhists tend to reject desire, whereas Deleuze celebrates it; to this objection, we must stress that (1) some strands in Buddhist (e.g. Tibetan Buddhism) embrace desire and (2) that Deleuze's desire is not the desire of a subject or an individual, but eventually the impersonal desire of Being. This position would fit with Buddhism: not the desires have disappeared, but the attachment of the subject to those desires.

rationality. Whereas western philosophy mostly uses human reason to acquire knowledge of reality, ‘thinking’ for Deleuze has little or nothing to do with rational argumentation. Thinking for him is a matter of ‘intuition’ and ‘creation’. It comes forth from a kind of ‘empiricism’ that could also be ascribed to Buddhism: based on experience, thinking requires a kind of openness that is also envisaged within the Buddhist practice of meditation (neither Deleuze, nor a Buddhist, however, would call this sensible and spiritual openness an aim or a result of meditation; it is rather an effect of it). This ‘mindfulness’ is the first step in the direction of the ‘dissolving’ of the subject: “focused awareness is difficult not because we are inept at some spiritual technology but because it threatens our sense of who we are”³⁹. Meditating enables our senses to perceive a continuous stream, a stream of colours, shapes, tastes, ideas.⁴⁰ Neither Deleuzian concepts, nor the Buddhist *dharma* offer ready-made answers to the questions and the problems of life. True philosophy, according to Deleuze, is about the creation of problems. The only thing a philosopher has to do, is to create problems and experiment with them. *Dharma* too, is not a belief or a whole of consistent answers: “It is a method to be investigated and tried out”⁴¹. In that sense both ways of thinking are an experimental practice, a way of living, rather than a collection of abstract theories.

Although this connection can be contested, Deleuze is much inspired by Spinoza in these ‘Buddhist’ core elements of his philosophy⁴². Spinoza’s ‘second religion’, which is “no longer a religion of imagination, but one of understanding,” where “the expression of Nature replaces signs, [where] love replaces obedience...,”⁴³ and where the knowledge of God is called ‘beatitude’, can also be found in Deleuze’s philosophy of life. Deleuze might not believe in a transcendent creator God, but he does transform divinity into a power of creativity, immanent to life itself.⁴⁴ Life, for Deleuze, is not merely an idea, a matter of theory: it is a way of being.⁴⁵ As in Buddhism, it is also an *impersonal* way of being, for thought surpasses the consciousness we have of it.⁴⁶ Thought is not a characteristic of subjects anymore. Consciousness, Deleuze says in his book on Spinoza, is consti-

³⁹ BATCHELOR, Stephen: *Buddhism Without Beliefs. A Contemporary Guide to Awakening*. New York: Riverhead Books 1997, 62.

⁴⁰ BATCHELOR, Stephen: *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, 70. “Notice how your senses are flooded by a ceaseless stream of colors, shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and ideas. The moving world flies toward this sensitive instrument from all directions”.

⁴¹ BATCHELOR, Stephen: *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, 18.

⁴² Indeed, Spinoza has also been connected to Judaism (Kabbala), Christianity, atheism, rationalism, etc. Moreover, not only Spinoza, but also Leibniz can be considered having been a source of inspiration for Deleuze in what we call here his ‘Buddhist’ tendencies.

⁴³ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Expressionism in Philosophy. Spinoza*, 291.

⁴⁴ GOODCHILD, Philip: *Deleuze and Philosophy of Religion*.

⁴⁵ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy* (transl. R. Hurley). San Francisco: City Lights 1988, 13.

⁴⁶ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, 18.

tuted by the illusion of freedom.⁴⁷ And precisely this giving up of the subject, the 'ego-self', is a presupposition of any form of Buddhism. In Deleuze's thinking, it proved an obstacle to the interpretation of his project as a liberation theology.

From the perspective of Buddhism, and also according to Deleuze, I should formulate this problem in a different way. The problem rather concerns the 'discovery' that *there never was a subject or a 'self'*. It's about the (re)discovery of the way reality is, the insight (the Buddhist 'Nirvana', the Deleuzian 'liberation') that the subject is an illusion. Through meditation and our experiences we become aware that everything is connected to everything else and that everything is likewise affected to change. Those experiences are best explained by giving up the concept of the 'self' or the 'subject'. Western thinking, on the other hand, is centred around the essence of a self, a constant 'I' that persists in the middle of all the changes that time and space bring along. In spite of the deconstruction of the 'I' in postmodern times, most philosophies in the West still depart from a constant structure, a kind of core, that is the subject (even though this subject might be 'split' as in psychoanalytical theory). A central characteristic of that subject is its self-consciousness, a feature with which we are able to discern ourselves from all other creatures.⁴⁸ Both, Deleuze and Buddhism, reject the primacy of consciousness. Experience and perception are, for Deleuze and in Buddhism, not experiences and perceptions of a consciousness, but of a stream that is not bound by a consciousness and thus can also be unconscious. What we call 'ourselves', is no more than a temporary aggregate that undergoes sensations.⁴⁹

If the logic of Deleuze and that of Buddhism are so far removed from western logic, then why do we speak of the 'western Buddhist'? By using this term, I would like to reconnect what has been said here, with Deleuze's economic-political ideas from *Anti-Oedipus* which I elaborated on before. I concluded that eventually, Deleuze serves the logic of capitalism, rather than providing us with a strong critique on it. And if I calculate the sum of Buddhism and capitalism, I almost inevitably end up with a contemporary phenomenon that could be the perfect actualisation of Deleuze's thinking today: the western consumer who discovers (a simplified form of) Buddhism on his or her way to find 'meaning' in life, to escape from his or her stressful existence.⁵⁰ In the West, Buddhist spirituality seems to have

⁴⁷ DELEUZE, Gilles: *Spinoza. Practical Philosophy*, 20.

⁴⁸ KANT, Immanuel: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (transl. V.L. Dowdell). Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press 1978, 9: "The fact that man is aware of an ego-concept raises him infinitely above all other creatures living on earth".

⁴⁹ GOWANS, Christopher W.: *Philosophy of the Buddha*. London: Routledge 2003, 81: "He [the Buddha] maintains that, if we carefully observe what we call 'ourselves', we will realize that all we ever actually observe are particular impermanent aggregates such as a red sensation".

⁵⁰ ŽIŽEK, Slavoj: *From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism*. In: *Cabinet Magazine* 2 (Spring 2001). <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php> (29.06.2009):

evolved into a commodity: the huge amount of popular publications on eastern spirituality goes without saying; the upcoming wellness-industry uses Buddhist ‘oneliners’ as a lure and offers eastern massages; the popularity of yoga and meditation groups is still increasing. Even Deleuze shows himself concerned with this evolution: “What can be done to prevent the oriental pole from becoming a phantasy [*sic*] that reactivates all the fascisms in a different way, and also all the folklores, yoga, Zen, and karate?”⁵¹. It is possible that the reason why this is happening is intrinsically connected to the logic of Buddhism itself. An argument for this thesis is the speed and efficiency with which capitalism rules over society in Japan and more and more also in China. The individual, who is, as a Buddhist or a follower of eastern religion, not an independent subject, becomes employable for any logic; he or she becomes a ‘slave of the system’. Or in Žižek’s words: “The ‘Western Buddhist’ meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity. If Max Weber were alive today, he would definitely write a second, supplementary, volume to his *Protestant Ethic*, entitled *The Taoist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism*”⁵².

An ontology of the stream of Being and of becoming, like that of Deleuze, fits into the capitalist logic and into a Buddhist world view: the ideal combination for the western entrepreneur – and the ideal of Deleuze.

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Abstract

The interpretation of Deleuze’s philosophy as a redemptive project makes him a suitable candidate for a theological evaluation. In order to lay bare the potential relevance of Deleuze for theology, I first focus (from the inside of Deleuze’s philosophy) on the characteristics of this project of salvation. In the second part of this article, I confront Deleuze’s ideas with the project of Liberation Theology. However, I will evaluate his political aspirations as ambiguous: it is not sure whether they will liberate us from the oppressing structures of capitalism. Eventually, Deleuze’s philosophy seems more to fit the vision of a ‘Western Buddhist’ than of a Liberation Theological project.

“Although ‘Western Buddhism’ presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit*, it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement”.

⁵¹ DELEUZE, Gilles / GUATTARI, Félix: *A Thousand Plateaus*, 418.

⁵² ŽIŽEK, Slavoj: *From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism*.
<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php> (29.06.2009).