

Craig Lundy

**Who Are Our Nomads Today?: Deleuze's Political Ontology
and the Revolutionary Problematic**

Deleuze Studies 7.2 (2013): 231-249.

Abstract

This paper will address the question of the revolution in Gilles Deleuze's political ontology. More specifically, it will explore what kind of person Deleuze believes is capable of bringing about genuine and practical transformation. Contrary to the belief that a Deleuzian program for change centres on the facilitation of 'absolute deterritorialisation' and pure 'lines of flight', I will demonstrate how Deleuze in fact advocates a more cautious and incremental if not conservative practice that promotes the ethic of prudence. This will be achieved in part through a critical analysis of the dualistic premises upon which much Deleuzian political philosophy is based, alongside the topological triads that can also be found in his work. In light of this critique, Deleuze's thoughts on what it is to be and become a revolutionary will be brought into relief, giving rise to the question of who really is Deleuze's nomad, his true revolutionary or figure of transformation?

Introduction

In concluding a paper titled 'Nomadic Thought' delivered to a Nietzsche conference in 1972, Gilles Deleuze sums up the problem of the revolution as follows: *[end of p. 231]*

As we know, the revolutionary problem today is to find some unity in our various struggles without falling back on the despotic and bureaucratic organization of the party or State apparatus: we want a war-machine that would not recreate a State apparatus, a nomadic unity in relation with the Outside, that would not recreate the despotic internal unity. (Deleuze 2004: 259)

It is no longer the early 1970s, and our world has changed significantly since then. But although the question of 'the revolution' that troubled the political Left of Deleuze's France has changed in tenor somewhat, the problem which Deleuze refers to in the above passage is arguably as pressing now as it has ever been. Recent revolutionary events across North Africa, the Middle East and Greece obviously spring to mind, as does the ongoing attempt of environmentalists to 'find some unity' for their movement, or more specifically, a mechanism that can successfully coordinate mass-action in a way that does not wait for or rely upon State apparatuses. Others are better placed than I am to comment on the particularities of these examples. What I would like to do in this paper, however, is not so much speak about the specifics of these struggles, as investigate what Deleuzian philosophy and politics has to say about revolutionaries in general. In short, who is,

according to Deleuze's practice of thought, a real nomad or revolutionary? Who is it that is capable of bringing about genuine and practical transformation? Contrary to the belief that a Deleuzian program for change centres on the facilitation of absolute deterritorialisation and pure lines of flight, I will demonstrate in this paper how Deleuze in fact advocates a more cautious and incremental if not conservative approach – an approach, moreover, that is revolutionary precisely because of its distancing from the absolute in favour of prudence.

It must be acknowledged from the outset that Deleuze will not exactly provide us with an explicit answer to the question in this paper's title. This is because instead of naming names and setting down step-by-step instructions, Deleuze directs his energies towards altering our understanding and approach to the question of 'who is a revolutionary' and the revolutionary problematic it is a part of. Appreciating the nature of this alteration and the ontology that underpins it will therefore form the major task of this paper. It will be pursued through a close examination of the relevant primary material.¹ To begin with, I will briefly touch on some of the abiding dualisms in Deleuze's work that are largely responsible for determining the shape and direction for much of his political philosophy. Chief among these will be the dualism mentioned in the above quote of the nomad and the State. Following *[end of p. 232]* this initial presentation, which will evidence Deleuze's transdisciplinary practice, I will demonstrate how this basic and well-formed dualism is far more complex than it might initially seem. In fact, I will show how Deleuze's political ontology contains not one but two possible nomads, thus calling into question the dualistic premises upon which much Deleuzian commentary and Deleuzian-inspired political thought is based. After distinguishing between these two nomadic figures, the question with which Deleuze closes his 'Nomadic Thought' essay will be rejoined: who really are our nomads today, our true revolutionary figures of transformation?²

Absolute Nomads

1972 was a big year for Deleuze. This year saw the publication of a number of important works, including his much discussed interview with Michel Foucault 'Intellectuals and Power', and his key essay 'How do we recognise structuralism?'. More significantly, it was in this year that *Anti-Oedipus* first appeared. But while there is a good chance that the participants at the 'Nietzsche Today' conference held in the summer of that year at Cerisy-la-salle (which included luminaries such as Klossowski, Derrida, Lyotard, Nancy, Gandillac and Lacoue-Labarthe) would have been aware of Deleuze's new philosophical direction with Guattari, it is highly unlikely that they would have had any idea what exactly he was referring to in his paper by the conceptual distinction between the nomad and the State. Indeed, when asked a question by Mieke Taat in the discussion following Deleuze's paper about the incongruity between his current work and certain positions in his last book (*The Logic of Sense*), Deleuze simply responded: 'I've undergone a change' (Deleuze 2004: 261). Four years later Deleuze would elaborate on this curt (and rather unsatisfactory) response:

Fortunately I am nearly incapable of speaking for myself, because what has happened to me since *The Logic of Sense* now depends on my having met Félix Guattari, on my work with him, on what we do together. I believe Félix and I sought out new directions simply because we felt like doing so. [...] I believe also that this change of method brings with it a change of subject matter, or, vice versa, that a certain kind of politics takes the place of psychoanalysis [the method of *The Logic of Sense*]. Such a method would also be a form of politics (micropolitics) and would propose the study of multiplicities [...]. (Deleuze 2006: 65-6) **[end of p. 233]**

Taking advantage of this collaborative material, we find ourselves in a position denied the participants at Cerisy to make sense of Deleuze's understanding and treatment of what he referred to as 'the revolutionary problem today'. What Deleuze is after, to restate his presentation of the problematic, is a way of organising a revolutionary movement, or more specifically, revolutionary *force*, that does not end up reproducing what it is fighting against in the act of resistance. Pure anarchy is one thing, and at certain times a good thing. But such disorganisation is statedly not Deleuze's objective. For him, the question is more exactly: is there a way of *organising* that is more structured than pure anarchy yet avoids the despotic State form? This is Deleuze's revolutionary problem.³ His response with Guattari is for the most part strategic, as befits the practical thrust of the problem. But it is also ontological. Let us then briefly look at the ontological basis for Deleuze's political philosophy, before specifically turning to his various statements on revolutionaries.⁴

In seeking an alternative kind of organisation to the State form, Deleuze and Guattari nominate its historical opponent: the nomad. It is most common for the term 'nomos' to be associated with the law. Deleuze and Guattari, however, contest this straight connotation by emphasising its opposition to the 'polis':

The *nomos* came to designate the law, but that was originally because it was distribution, a mode of distribution. It is a very special kind of distribution, one without division into shares, in a space without borders or enclosure. The *nomos* is the consistency of a fuzzy aggregate: it is in this sense that it stands in opposition to the law or the *polis*, as the backcountry, a mountainside, or the vague expanse around a city ('either nomos or polis'). (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 380)⁵

The nomad and the State thus form a dualism for Deleuze and Guattari, whereby the State works to 'reclaim' land by building 'walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures' whilst the nomads do not so much tame the earth as populate its expanse, inserting themselves into the continually shifting nature of the desert, tundra, etc. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 381).

As this description suggests, the distinction between the nomad and the State is largely predicated on their differing relations to space, and more precisely, their distribution *of* and *in* space. Deleuze had been playing around with this distinction for some time. As he explains in *Difference and Repetition*, there are two types of distribution, one 'which implies a dividing up of that which is distributed' and another **[end of p. 234]** which is 'a

division among those who distribute *themselves* in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits’ (Deleuze 1994: 36).⁶ Moving forward to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari discover another novel way to describe this distinction, employing terms created by the musical composer Pierre Boulez. In his musical compositions, Boulez distinguishes between a smooth space-time that ‘one occupies without counting’ and a striated space-time that ‘one counts in order to occupy’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 477). These two ways of engaging with sound involve contrasting attitudes towards and experiences of space-time. In a striated space, a ‘standard’ is imposed onto music, providing an organisational structure to which sounds then correspond. Frequencies of sound are thus distributed within various intervals respective to the breaks that separate them. In a smooth space, on the other hand, frequencies are distributed without breaks; there is no transcendent scale from which to judge the frequency, for the space-time itself continuously modulates. For this reason, smooth space has no boundaries between one interval and another – there is no inside and outside – since it is composed entirely of an alteration that continuously expands or unravels.

At base, however, all of these distinctions of smooth/striated and nomad/State can be traced back to one of the earliest and most enduring of Deleuzian dualisms: Henri Bergson’s separation between differences of nature and differences of degree. As Deleuze explains in his 1956 essay ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, differences of nature are heterogeneous while differences of degree are homogeneous (Deleuze 2004: 32-51). This means that for a difference of nature to be genuinely heterogeneous, it must not merely refer to the difference between two homogeneities, since this would reduce heterogeneity to the identity of homogeneities. Therefore, a difference of nature must differ first and foremost *from itself*: what defines a difference of nature is not merely the way it differs from other external objects, but the way it differs internally, being composed of a heterogeneity on the inside.

Another way that Bergson describes this separation of difference is by employing the theory of multiplicities as developed by the mathematician Bernhard Riemann. Following Riemann, Bergson distinguishes between metric and nonmetric multiplicities, or in other words, those multiplicities that can and cannot be divided without changing in kind. Metric multiplicities lend themselves to striation, for they can be easily sub-divided and manipulated without changing their nature, only their extensive quantity. Nonmetric multiplicities, on the other hand, are smooth, making it impossible to carry out such **[end of p. 235]** operations without changing them in kind or converting a smooth-nonmetric multiplicity into a striated-metric one.

This last remark should flag-up why Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology, and in particular the theory of multiplicities borrowed from Bergson and Riemann, is of relevance to ‘the revolutionary problem’, and more broadly, a form of political analysis that proceeds via the study of multiplicities (as the quote I mentioned above on the ‘change of method’ refers to).⁷ If there is a kind of organisation that avoids reproducing the State form, for Deleuze and Guattari it will be ontologically composed as a nonmetric or internally heterogeneous multiplicity – a smooth space or nomadic organisation that is not only

‘outside [the State’s] sovereignty and prior to its law’, but ‘of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 352).

In light of this radical alterity between the nomad and the State, it is tempting to emphasise the destructive power of the nomads and their disorganising effect – their process of ‘deterritorialisation’ – and valorise it in contrast to the oppressive power of a State apparatus. As Deleuze and Guattari express on many occasions in various registers, nomads propagate smooth space by breaking through the walls of striated space in order to ‘add desert to desert, steppe to steppe, by a series of local operations whose orientation and direction endlessly vary’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 382). Furthermore, the nomad doesn’t just differ from the State, but ‘brings a *furor* to bear against sovereignty’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 352). This furor is for the purposes of undermining and abolishing the well-ordered territories of States. Nomads are thus said to be ‘the Deterritorialized par excellence’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 381), since their onto-ethical prerogative and political aspiration is to evade being territorialised and sedentarised, whether on a reservation or through the gradual appropriation of their smooth space by State forces.

But in drawing this sharp distinction between the nomad and the State we must be careful, for although they may differ, it is not the case that nomads are *defined by their opposition* to the State or that they live to fight it. Deterritorialisation and/or destruction of the State, Deleuze and Guattari point out, is ‘neither the condition nor the object’ of their existence, but at best a ‘supplement’ or ‘synthetic relation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 471). Similarly, it would be mistaken to construe absolute deterritorialisation as the defining feature of revolutions or revolutionaries, according to Deleuze. For as was illustrated above by his concern for ‘the revolutionary problem’, what Deleuze is after is not merely a disorganising force, but more specifically an *alternative kind of organization* – what he hopes for is to *find some unity of a particular kind*. Playing up the destructive or negative aspect of the *[end of p. 236]* nomad can thus only take us so far – as far as the revolutionary problem: if we revolutionaries are opposed to the status quo, then what kind of organisation can and could we give rise to, and how will we be able to avoid certain forms that we find detestable? Once this problem is posed, it becomes clear that the deterritorialising effect of nomads will at most be a component within a larger strategy. Subsequently, what is needed is not a further rehearsal of oppositions, the constricting State on one side and the deterritorialising nomad on the other, but an attempt to move in between these two absolutes in order to determine whether there is a nomadic organisation that could satisfy our revolutionary problematic.

Real Nomads

Moving beyond the opposition of absolutes towards an analysis as to the underlying nature of nomadism is made easier through a recognition that Deleuze and Guattari themselves spend much time complexifying and overcoming their dualistic ontology of nomad/State, smooth/striated, etc. While the early sections of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘Nomadology’ plateau focuses on clearly distinguishing the pure forms of the nomad and

the State, immediately following the completion of this task Deleuze and Guattari begin to unpick and problematise this relation.⁸ For example, as it turns out, the smooth and the striated, for Boulez, are not fixed spaces, but rather undergo transformations whereby one becomes the other:

Boulez is concerned with the communication between two kinds of space, their alternations and superpositions: how ‘a strongly directed smooth space tends to meld with a striated space’; how the octave can be replaced by ‘non-octave-forming scales’ that reproduce themselves through a principle of spiralling; how ‘texture’ can be crafted in such a way as to lose fixed and homogeneous values, becoming a support for slips in tempo, displacements of intervals, and *son art* transformations comparable to the transformations of *op art*. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 478)⁹

And it gets better. Not only do the smooth and the striated meld and alternate into one another, but they even do so while remaining the same in nature. To explain this Deleuze and Guattari borrow an example from Paul Virilio: the fleet in being (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 387). The purpose of this example is to illustrate how one can spread oneself across the entirety of a smooth space, in this case a vector of sea, at once. Tactically speaking, a fleet of warships can have the effect of extending itself across an expanse of water, simultaneously occupying every crevice [*end of p. 237*] of the vector from its ability to appear at any point without prior notice. This capacity is best epitomised by the nuclear submarine, whose power to strike extends across the globe. By doing so, however, the State Navy does not convert the sea – the archetypal smooth space – into a striated space. Rather, the State harnesses the power of the smooth for the purposes of State control. In other words, the smooth is employed by the State *as smooth* for the promotion of striation. The smooth characteristics of the sea are thus maintained, but they are redirected by State powers to achieve a level of control that the State on its own would be incapable of.

Here we have an excellent reason for why Deleuze and Guattari would say: ‘Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 500). As we can see, in some cases it clearly won’t, and might even aid in the repression of nomadic tendencies, even when its nature remains unchanged. Nomadism and smooth space are thus not always easy bedfellows – a fact rarely commented on within Deleuze studies. For the point Deleuze and Guattari are trying to make here is not only that reality is constantly undergoing processes of striation and smoothing, but furthermore that it is not always so easy to tell which is which. If the sea can be striated *as smooth*, then so too can the very concrete of cities be smoothed out, to cite another example:

[I]t is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad (for example, a stroll taken by Henry Miller in Clichy or Brooklyn is a nomadic transit in smooth space; he makes the city disgorge a patchwork, differentials of speed, delays and accelerations, changes in orientation, continuous variations ... The beatniks owe much to Miller, but they changed direction again, they put the space outside the cities to new use). Fitzgerald said it long ago: it is not a question of taking off for the South Seas, that is not what determines a voyage. There are not only strange voyages in the city but voyages in place: we are not thinking of

drug users, whose experience is too ambiguous, but of true nomads. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 482)

The earlier suggestion that a space was *either* smooth-nomos *or* striated-polis was therefore somewhat misleading: it is both, as one becomes the other. In one direction, striated spaces are undone from within as urban nomads redeploy the very constructs of the city to a smoothing. And in the other direction, the power of smooth spaces are harnessed for the purposes of control. Articulating the pure and fixed dualisms of nomad/State and smooth/striated is thus only the beginning. While it might be initially convenient to abstract the two apart, this is **[end of p. 238]** only of use insofar as one goes on to complexify these abstractions. As Deleuze and Guattari say in the conclusion of *A Thousand Plateaus*:

It is not enough, however, to replace the opposition between the One and the multiple, with a distinction between types of multiplicities. For the distinction between the two types does not preclude their immanence to each other, each 'issuing' from the other after its fashion. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 506)

Things are, however, even more complicated. Aside from the various tricky relations between the two types, it turns out that there are more than two types after all. If the nomad and the State are rendered 'immanent to each other', it is by virtue of a third element: the phylum. As Deleuze and Guattari understand it, the phylum is a 'phylogenetic lineage, a single machinic phylum, ideally continuous [and] in continuous variation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 406), that 'simultaneously has two different modes of liaison: it is always *connected* to nomad space, whereas it *conjugates* with sedentary space' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 415). For this reason, the phylum, when conceptualised spatially, is neither smooth nor striated but *holey* – the Swiss cheese of space – since it is expressed in some instances as smoothly spread and in others as contracted into a polis (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 413-415).

All of this is a bit abstract, but there is a political point. When Deleuze and Guattari set out their version of politics as 'micropolitics', they will do so by employing a further topological triad that will be related to this spatial setup. As Deleuze remarks in an interview on *A Thousand Plateaus*:

We think lines are the basic components of things and events. So everything has its geography, its cartography, its diagram. What's interesting, even in a person, are the lines that make them up, or they make up, or take, or create. Why make lines more fundamental than planes or volumes? We don't, though. There are various spaces correlated with different lines, and vice versa [...]. Different sorts of line involve different configurations of space and volume. (Deleuze 1995: 33)¹⁰

The primacy of lines is another idea that Deleuze had been working on in his days before Guattari.¹¹ It is, however, not until the intermediary years between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* that Deleuze sets out clearly his analysis of lines in an essay written with Claire Parinet, titled 'Many Politics'. Put briefly, Deleuze claims that all things and events are composed of three types of lines. The first line is the line of rigid segmentarity.

These are the great segments of rich-poor, young-old, health-sickness, and so on, which dominate the easily visible and communicable aspects of our social lives (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: *[end of p. 239]* 126). In contrast to this line of rigid segmentation, the second line is supple. These second lines are the cracks which split through the lines of great segmentary cuts: 'rather than molar lines with segments, they are molecular fluxes with thresholds or quanta' (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 124). There is then a third kind of line, a line of flight or rupture. On this line, it is 'as if something carried us away, across our segments, but also across our thresholds, towards a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not pre-existent' (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 125).

So far so good – what we have here is a spatialisation of three different aspects and/or processes of existence: one that consists of our acquiescence to clearly identifiable oppositions, a second that reveals cracks in this façade and various accumulations of exceptions to the binary rule, and a third aspect and/or process of life by which we become something completely new. But now we reach a problem: how do the various spaces we have looked at correlate with these three lines? And more pertinently: *which line is the nomadic line?* Presuming that the molar line of rigid segmentarity aligns with the State and the striated, which of the latter two lines belongs to the nomad: the second line of 'mobile and fluent thresholds' (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 127) upon which 'the most secret mutations' occur (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 203), or the third line, the line of abstract detachment and absolute becoming? Adequately responding to this question, I believe, is of critical importance if we are to make sense of Deleuze's revolutionary politics. To do so, however, is by no means straightforward. Let me demonstrate.

In some instances the answer is obvious. For example, Deleuze and Guattari described the three lines at one point as (1) the rigid Roman State, (2) the line of the advancing Huns, with their war machine fully directed towards destroying the Roman peace (*pax romana*), and (3) the barbarians caught between the two, who pass from one to the other (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 222-3). The order of presentation has changed here, but the nomads are clearly placed on the pure abstract line that comes 'from the east' (Deleuze 1990: 129). But on other occasions, the matter is more confused. For example, from pages 130-4 of Deleuze and Parnet's 'Many Politics' essay, the molecular line and the line of flight (crack and rupture) appear to be read together, to the extent that Deleuze and Parnet even feel the need to defend the apparent dualism that 'rigid and binary segmentarity' forms with 'molecular lines, or lines of border, of flight or slope'. And for the remainder of this essay, Deleuze and Parnet will often slip between an analysis of three to one of two (see Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 130-4 and 141-2). These confusions persist throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*. In one location, for instance, Deleuze *[end of p. 240]* and Guattari state that 'From the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 216). Elsewhere, however, Deleuze and Guattari clearly describe the second line as a rhizomatic line in distinction to the line of flight, where it is the rhizome that 'belongs to a smooth space' and constitutes 'anomalous and nomadic multiplicities', 'multiplicities of becoming, or transformational multiplicities' – in short, Bergson's heterogeneous or non-metric multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 505-6). Which line is it, then, that is truly nomadic, that belongs to a smooth space? Which of these two lines is the line of

becoming, and on which line does creativity occur? The crack or the rupture, the molecular line or the line of flight, the rhizomatic line or the pure abstract line?

There is another problem of significance closely related to this question. When Deleuzians speak of the dualisms major/minor, molar/molecular, State/nomad and others like them, it is common to associate the ‘major’ term in each set with consolidation, stasis, identity and being, while the ‘minor’ term is grouped with dispersion, flow, difference and becoming (to name but a few).¹² But as we have seen above, the molar and molecular are themselves only two of three lines, the third of which – the line of flight – is also commonly equated with these same ‘minor’ terms. How then are we to reconcile the three lines with Deleuze’s great dualisms? How does three fit into two, and vice versa? This problem is often glossed over and/or inadequately explained in the secondary literature. There are numerous examples, but let us briefly consider two. In his glossary of Deleuzian vocabulary, Francois Zourabichvili explains for us most capably the contrast between a line of flight and the process of striation, which proceeds via binary couples. He has rather less to say, however, on how lines of flight differ from and relate to molecular lines; indeed, Zourabichvili barely admits the existence of these other lines, and when he does so he is careful to omit their molecular name, preferring to call them by their other moniker – supple (Zourabichvili 2012: 179). Given that Zourabichvili will elsewhere directly relate the molecular to the nomadic and the smooth (Zourabichvili 2012: 182), this omission is certainly most convenient, as it would patently jar with the link he also wants to claim between the line of flight and smooth space (Zourabichvili 2012: 179).

In her essay “Politics as the Orientation of Every Assemblage”, Véronique Bergen goes farther than Zourabichvili in explicating Deleuze’s political topology. Bergen, however, does not take note of the slippages in Deleuze’s own treatment of the three lines that I revealed above; on the contrary, she reproduces them. After *[end of p. 241]* noting that a Deleuzian political ontology is composed of, on the one hand, the molar/molecular schema, and on the other, the three lines, Bergen proceeds to predictably align the molar/molecular schema with various other Deleuzian dualisms, such as actual/virtual, macroscopic/infinitesimal and history/becoming. But when it comes to discussing the three lines, subtle shifts occur in explication that make it difficult to understand how these two topologies relate. For example, while we are initially told that it is with molecular lines that ‘becomings emerge, occurring in a non-chronological time’, Bergen subsequently reveals that it is lines of flight ‘that are characterised by a primacy that is ontological and not chronological’ (Bergen 2009: 36-37). And as her analysis continues, lines of flight are described using the terms ‘micropolitics’, ‘evental effluences’ and ‘becoming’, in direct opposition to ‘macropolitics’, ‘the state of things’ and ‘history’ (Bergen 2009: 37). It is thus not surprising that when Bergen attempts to juxtapose the two topologies, she fails to refer to all three lines. As she says: ‘Mixing the types of lines - the molar being equivalent to hard segmentary lines, the molecular to quantum lines - the “molar” and the “molecular” compose a double mode of being, in immanence, which, in every assemblage, signals the existence of a virtual which insists as pure reserve and an actual without resemblance to the transcendental forge from which it emanates’ (Bergen 2009: 36). As we can see here, the dualistic molar/molecular schema is

accounted for, but where are all three lines? If the molar term in the dualistic molar/molecular schema is equivalent to molar lines (rigid segmentary lines), then which line is equivalent to the molecular half? Bergen evades this question somewhat by referring to ‘quantum lines’, but which of the three lines are these? Molecular lines or lines of flight? To the best of my knowledge, the phrase ‘quantum lines’ never appears in Deleuze’s work – he instead refers to lines ‘marked by quanta’ or ‘with quanta’. But to be fair to Bergen, Deleuze is himself confused on this very question. Depending where you look, it can be either the second or third line that is ‘marked by quanta’ (compare Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 124 and Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 195 with Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 222). The same problem can be found when tracking the respective dangers of the three lines. While falling/reverting into a black hole is at times said to be danger of the second molecular line, at others times this is the danger of lines of flight (compare Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 138 with Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 205). Thus while it is clear that molar lines hold up one half of the dualism, we are left to wonder by Bergen and [end of p. 242] Deleuze alike as to how the second and third lines conspire to form the other half, whether one takes the place of the other, and/or which one of them is ‘becoming’ if it is the molar that is ‘history’.¹³

What, then, are we to make of all this confusion? Are nomads molecular, or do they instead pursue a line of flight distinct from molecular lines? In light of the shifting and/or confused presentation of the material that I have highlighted – itself exacerbated by the fact that the texts we are drawing from here were written by three people, two of which never collaborated and could very well have penned the passages in question – we as Deleuzians are somewhat liberated to make of this political ontology-topology what we will (within limits, of course). Granted this licence, and contrary to the previous stated evidence that names the nomad as ‘the Deterritorialized par excellence’ and the ‘man of deterritorialization’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 134), I would suggest that if the nomad is to be the figure of transformation, then it might in fact be more appropriate to place him or her in the continually shifting and amorphous space *in between* the Romans and the advancing Huns. For is it not the barbarians who come closest to the ontology and ethic of transformation? The Huns are sure of their task – destruction of the State – but the barbarians, by contrast, have mastered the art of disguise and metamorphosis, continually going *between* the Romans and the Huns, becoming one, passing off as another, and then taking up arms against either or both. It is the barbarians, in other words, that are truly between known and immutable identities. As Deleuze and Guattari note at one point: ‘It is odd how supple segmentarity is caught between the two other lines, ready to tip to one side or the other; such is its ambiguity’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 205). But is not this ‘oddity’ precisely the essence of metamorphosis and transmutation? Is not this ‘ambiguity’, as opposed to pure being or pure becoming, precisely what is so ‘Interesting, Remarkable, and Important’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 82)? Such, in my opinion, is the virtue of this other transformative figure, or second force of nomadism, who moves between purities – the molecular barbarians, or what we might possibly think of as the *real* (but not absolute) nomads of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology.¹⁴

The majority of Deleuze’s pragmatic and prescriptive moments support this reading. Invariably, every call made by Deleuze for ‘revolutionary becoming’ is tempered with a

precautionary reminder. To demonstrate, witness the conclusion to the ‘Many Politics’ essay (which is then replicated and developed further in the ‘Micropolitics’ plateau). Firstly, dissolution of the State and the line of rigid segmentarity is not the point in itself. As Deleuze says: *[end of p. 243]*

Even if we had the power to blow it up, could we succeed in doing so without destroying ourselves, since it is so much a part of the conditions of life, including our organism and our very reason? The prudence with which we must manipulate that line, the precautions we must take to soften it, to suspend it, to divert it, to undermine it, testify to a long labour which is not merely aimed against the State and the powers that be, but directly at ourselves. (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 138)

Secondly, to those who are too sure of their calling, Deleuze has the following to say: ‘You have not taken enough precautions’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 138). ‘Precaution’, ‘prudence’ – not exactly the words that would support a Deleuzian politics founded on the celebration of absolute deterritorialisation. In fact, in a direct response to those readers who would overly glorify (or attack) his analysis of becoming and deterritorialisation, Deleuze remarks:

Some have said that we see the schizophrenic as the true revolutionary. We believe, rather, that schizophrenia is the descent of a molecular process into a black hole. Marginals have always inspired fear in us, and a slight horror. They are not clandestine enough. (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 139).

Such ‘marginals’, in other words, are a bit too obvious. One should not be able to identify a nomad from their haircut. If it were that easy then genuine creation wouldn’t need encouraging or protecting. This is why the question of the revolution is so problematic:

The question of a revolution has never been utopian spontaneity versus State organization. When we challenge the model of the State apparatus or of the party organization which is modelled on the conquest of that apparatus, we do not, however, fall into the grotesque alternatives: either that of appealing to a state of nature, to a spontaneous dynamic, or that of becoming the self-styled lucid thinker of an impossible revolution, whose very impossibility is such a source of pleasure. (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 145)

We can thus see from these passages precisely who is *not* a true revolutionary for Deleuze: both acolytes of pure flux and ‘marginals’ will be incapable of thinking, let alone bringing about, a ‘new type of revolution’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 147)?¹⁵ This new type of revolution is not entirely sure of the way forward; it is not even always sure where the impediments are or who are the nomads. But it could not be otherwise, since

we can’t be sure in advance how things will go. We can define different kinds of line, but that won’t tell us one’s good and another bad. We *[end of p. 244]* can’t assume that lines of flight are necessarily creative, that smooth spaces are always better than segmented or striated ones. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 33)

A tempered position marked by prudence is therefore the most appealing. It is also the most difficult, and in a certain sense the most radical: as the molecular barbarians know, there is arguably nothing harder than charting one's own path between a binary of oppositional lines. It is no doubt true that Deleuze often partakes in dualistic decisions, especially when it comes to the ontologies of becoming and being. But in the end, Deleuze always hopes to go beyond these, to itinerate between so that he can both become and defend against its dangers at the same time. This is why it is important to remember that what Deleuze calls 'the crack' (originally taken from F. Scott Fitzgerald's autobiographical essay *The Crack-Up*¹⁶) in fact refers to the molecular or rhizomatic line *in between* the lines of rigid segmentary that 'proceed by oversignificant *breaks*' and the line of rupture: '*Break line, crack line, rupture line*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 200). Only then can we understand the following guideline:

Well then, are we to speak always about Bousquet's wound, about Fitzgerald's and Lowry's alcoholism, Nietzsche's and Artaud's madness while remaining on the shore? [...] Or should we go a short way further to see for ourselves, be a little alcoholic, a little crazy, a little suicidal, a little of a guerrilla – just enough to extend the crack, but not enough to deepen it irremediably? (Deleuze 1990: 157-8)

Become a little bit, but not too much. Leave the shore, certainly, but do so in order that you may find a new land – do not hope to become irrevocably lost at sea. In other words, extend the crack and connect the rhizome, but do not become the rupture. When you do so, a line will be drawn that is distinguishable from both the inexpressive and the expressions of State segmentarity: a nomadic line that is *invested with* abstraction and *connects with* a matter-flow (that moves through it); a *developmental* line of becoming that is not enslaved to the incorporeal surface or corporeal depth, but is the progressive movement between them. That this line is distinct from the line of flight, yet also distinct from the striae that express and organise in an entirely different way (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 498), once again reaffirms the middle status of the nomad that I have re-emphasised in this paper. *[end of p. 245]*

Conclusion

What, then, does it mean to be a real nomad or true revolutionary according to Deleuze's political ontology? As we can now see, it is questionable whether an absolute nomad placed in binary opposition to the State is capable of living up to the real nature of Deleuze's nomadism. This is because bringing down a State apparatus is insufficient on its own in responding to 'the revolutionary problem', since there is every chance (as history well shows us) that a revolutionary force will become despotic. Revolutionary forces and becomings thus cannot be simply ascribed to those who call for the Revolution and devote their waking lives to its fulfilment, for not only is it difficult to determine who is a nomad or what is a smooth space by appearance, but the nomad and the smooth are themselves susceptible to appropriation by the State and the striated. These appropriations can occur, furthermore, not simply through the transformation of what was once nomadic-smooth into something statist-striated, but even more worryingly through a maintenance of its nature redirected towards other ends. As Deleuze and Guattari warn:

‘We say this as a reminder that smooth space and the form of exteriority do not have an irresistible revolutionary calling but change meaning drastically depending on the interactions they are part of and the concrete conditions of their exercise of establishment’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 387).

As for who are our nomads today, our true revolutionaries...? Ultimately, this is a question to which Deleuze’s practice of thought brings us rather than answers – or perhaps more specifically, rephrases and reapproaches as follows: where are your lines, your breaks, cracks and ruptures? Do you recognise these lines in yourself or the various organisations you are a part of?¹⁷ Chances are you will – if Deleuze is correct, then there is a little bit of each in all of us. And chances are that this evaluation can aid in avoiding formations that slide dangerously to one side. If we are thus unable to name names in our search for nomads and revolutionaries, what I think we can safely say is that to be a real nomad or revolutionary in the Deleuzian sense, one must be attuned to the different lines that we are composed of, maintain an appropriate respect for each of them (without collapsing one onto the other), and pursue any engagement and experimentation between them with a healthy dose of ‘prudence’ and ‘precaution’. For it is only through such a practice that creativity and transformation can not only *[end of p. 246]* be embarked upon, but concretely realised in a strata of organisation that facilitates life.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive survey of the field of Deleuze and politics, see Gilbert 2009.

² Nicholas Thoburn poses a similar question to this in his excellent piece “What is a Militant?” (Thoburn 2008). Thoburn’s pursuit of this question takes the form of a critique of militant groups (in particular the Weatherman group) through the use of Deleuzian philosophy. My paper, in contrast, will provide a description of this philosophy, followed by a critical analysis of it, for the purposes of addressing a Deleuzian problematic. Thoburn’s paper, furthermore, does not really complicate the notion of the militant, but on the contrary specifies and clarifies the figure of the militant, before going on to suggest an a-militant alternative. In distinction to this, my paper will demonstrate the complexities involved in determining the figure of the nomad, and will suggest that there might be more than one alternative. For these reasons and more, I would consider our papers to be both distinct and complementary.

I would furthermore consider my paper to be distinct from and complementary to that of Véronique Bergen’s “Politics as the Orientation of Every Assemblage” (2009). As with Bergen’s analysis, my paper will emphasise the significance of topology to Deleuze’s political ontology. This analysis, however, will subsequently proceed to a critique of this political ontology that reveals insights absent in Bergen’s paper.

³ Deleuze is of course not the first or last person to identify this revolutionary problem. The purpose of this paper, however, is not so much to integrate Deleuze with other literature on the topic, but rather to articulate more specifically the nature of Deleuze’s response to this problematic, and by doing so complicate the dualistic tropes upon which much Deleuzian political philosophy rests, whether normative or descriptive.

⁴ While much of what I will describe in the first section of the paper is no doubt familiar to learned Deleuzians, I would point out that it nevertheless remains necessary to state the basic concepts and standard positions of Deleuzian thought that this paper will subsequently attempt to complexify and challenge.

⁵ See also Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 369, where *nomos* is opposed to *logos*: ‘there is an opposition between the *logos* and the *nomos*, the law and the *nomos*’.

⁶ See also Deleuze 1990: 75, where nomadic distribution is explained as ‘distributing in an open space instead of distributing a closed space’.

⁷ For further evidence of how Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the nomad/State and smooth/striated is derived from Bergson’s theory of multiplicities, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 477, 479 and 488.

⁸ For a fuller analysis of the Nomadology that chronicles the plateau’s movements (from dualism to a triad to monism and pluralism) see chapter 3 of Lundy 2012.

⁹ For the Boulez reference, see Boulez 1971: 87 (translation modified). For more on the dissymmetrical passages between and transmutations of the smooth and the striated, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 474, 480, 482, 486, 493 and 500.

¹⁰ See also Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 202: ‘Individual or group, we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics, and zones marching to different beats and differing in nature.’

¹¹ See Deleuze 1990: 154-161.

¹² For one amongst numerous examples of this, see Buchanan 2008: 16-17. [*end of p. 247*]

¹³ For one further example, see Gilbert 2009: 18. As we find here, the major/minor schema is invoked, molar lines are affiliated with the ‘major’, lines of flight with the ‘minor’, and there is no mention of molecular lines. Gilbert, it must be said, is only referring to these issues in passing, as opposed to Zourabichvili and Bergen’s more direct/extensive treatments. But it is for this reason that I would bring attention to this example – for if the reconciliation of the two topological schemas is perennially passed over as a problem within the literature on Deleuze and politics, it is for the most part due to such pervasive casual references to and uses of the relevant terms.

¹⁴ I am willing to concede that this advocacy of the molecular barbarian over the nomadic rupture is, to a certain extent, rhetorical. However, given the paucity of coverage within the secondary literature of this middle figure, in between the nomad and State, I would argue that this polemical treatment is justified. One could note, for instance, that it is far more common to find within the secondary literature on Deleuze a defence of the State and the virtues of molarity than it is to find any discussion of molecular barbarians – their positive features and their distinction from both the nomad and State.

¹⁵ Thoburn’s investigation into ‘what is a militant’ also arrives at this point (Thoburn 2008: 114). I would point out, however, that Thoburn’s route to this conclusion is quite distinct from mine.

¹⁶ See Fitzgerald, 1945.

¹⁷ As Deleuze puts it: ‘This is why the questions of schizoanalysis or pragmatics, micro-politics itself, never consists in interpreting, but merely in asking what are your lines, individual or group, and what are the dangers on each’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002: 143). In drawing attention to this feature, it must be noted that I do not mean to suggest that the question of ‘who’ is a bad one or needs replacing with the question of ‘where’. While I would not disagree with commentators who suggest that the question of ‘where’ is of the utmost importance to a Deleuzian politics (Bergen 2009: 34-5), what my analysis has endeavoured to demonstrate is no more or less than the manner in which the questions of ‘who’, ‘where’ and ‘what’ are intertwined in Deleuze’s thought – a feature that is perhaps most evident in Deleuze’s final book with Guattari, in which all of these questions are posed and shown to inform one another. At any rate, the question of ‘who are our nomads today?’ is Deleuze’s own question (Deleuze 2004: 260), and thus one that is presumably worth pursuing within Deleuzian thought, even if or when this pursuit involves forays into topology.

References

- Bergen, V. (2009) 'Politics as the Orientation of Every Assemblage', trans. J. Gilbert, in *New Formations*, No. 68.
- Boulez, P. (1971) *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. S. Bradshaw and R. Bennett. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buchanan, I. (2008) 'Power, Theory and Praxis', in *Deleuze and Politics*, eds. I. Buchanan and N. Thoburn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1990) *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester with C. Stivale, ed. C. V. Boundas. London: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. (1994) *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton. London: Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1995) *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. M. Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press. **[end of p. 248]**
- Deleuze, G. (2004) *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*, ed. D. Lapoujade, trans. M. Taormina. Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. (2006) *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews: 1975-1995*, ed. D. Lapoujade, trans. A. Hodges and M. Taormina. Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1984) *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. R. Lane. London and New York: Continuum.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?*, trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. and C. Parnet (2002) *Dialogues*, trans. B. Habberjam and H. Tomlinson. London and New York: Continuum.
- Fitzgerald, F.S. (1945) *The Crack-Up*. New York, NY: New Directions.
- Gilbert, J. (2009) 'Deleuzian Politics? A Survey and Some Suggestions', in *New Formations*, No. 68.
- Lundy, C. (2012) *History and Becoming: Deleuze's Philosophy of Creativity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Thoburn, N. (2008) 'What is a Militant?', in *Deleuze and Politics*, eds. I. Buchanan and N. Thoburn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Zourabichvili, F. (2012) *Deleuze: A Philosophy of the Event, together with The Vocabulary of Deleuze*, trans. K. Aarons, eds. G Lambert and D. W. Smith. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. **[end of p. 249]**